

Relationships Australia[®]

Supporting Respectful
Relationships for over 70 years





Acknowledgment of Country

Relationships Australia acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional owners and custodians of the land and waters on which we live and work, and we pay our respect to elders, past, present and emerging. Relationships Australia acknowledges the importance of relationships and family in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

The supports and services offered by Relationships Australia are situated across many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations.

This report was created at the national office of Relationships Australia, which is on Ngunnawal Country.

Funding Acknowledgement

Relationships Australia acknowledges the funding provided by federal, state and local governments across Australia which underpins the services we deliver.

We thank the Commonwealth Department of Social Services and Attorney-General's Department in particular for the ongoing trust they place in the Relationships Australia Federation to deliver crucial services in support of families and communities across Australia.



Chair's Message

As Chair of the Board of Relationships Australia Inc, I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Australia and the Torres Strait Islands, on whose countries we live and operate. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and pay tribute to their enduring stewardship of this country and the generosity with which they continue to share their wisdom about caring for these lands.

The 2021-22 Financial Year has been an important one for the Relationships Australia Federation and I celebrate the passion and commitment of our workforce across the country.

This third year of the pandemic has been a period of ongoing disruption, uncertainty, and increased financial stress for many families. Consequently, there has been an increased demand for Relationships Australia services and programs. Our teams are committed to addressing this demand through delivering evidence-based, community-focused services that support people, families and communities to build and maintain supportive, respectful relationships.

Relationships Australia continues to deliver a range of services encompassing counselling and support services, family dispute resolution, education and training, specialised family violence services, and a range of separated parenting programs. Our clients are often affected by trauma, abuse, family violence, mental health concerns, and various addictive behaviours (including gambling, drug and alcohol problems) and the relationships lens that underpins our services offers an effective and sustainable foundation for preventing and restoring wellbeing.

This year, the Federation has made significant progress strengthening collaboration and information sharing across our 100+ service delivery locations nationwide. In November 2021, Relationships Australia established a National Council as a forum designed to enable increased strategic cooperation and facilitate opportunities for innovation and service developments across our federation. In addition, the Federation continues to benefit from the many Communities of Practice and national Networks that bring together practitioners, managers, and other team members from across the country to share learnings, and identify opportunities for service improvement.

This strong practice foundation is further enhanced by our commitment to research, data collection and evaluation. Analysis of our work and review of current research evidence ensures Relationships Australia services are informed by the most up-to-date knowledge. It also enables our national office to provide reliable industry intelligence to government decision makers as they seek to adapt during these uncertain times. We enjoy positive working relationships with stakeholders at both State and Federal levels, and our national office provides highly regarded

policy comment about reforms and legislation that impact the quality of relationships, families and communities in Australia.

We were sad this year to farewell two long-serving and respected members of the Relationships Australia family: Alison Brook served as our National Executive Officer for a decade and then a further three years as CEO of Relationships Australia Canberra & Region, and Terri Reilly was CEO of Relationships Australia Western Australia for over twenty years. We thank both Alison and Terri for their commitment, passion and contributions over the years; both to our Federation and to the lives of Australians more broadly. We wish them both well for the future.

Over the following pages, we explore some of the key themes and highlights from our work as a Federation in 2021-22. The many achievements reflected in this report confirm our commitment to relationship wellbeing and community resilience.



Dr Claire Ralfs
Chair

National Executive Officer

Nick Tebbey



Year in Review

People across Australia continue to grapple with a range of challenges arising from the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic, cost-of-living pressures and uncertainty about what the future holds. Relationships Australia witnesses first-hand the impacts this has on our mental well-being and our relationships – and as a result, the increasing need for supports and services that help people to navigate and thrive in these uncertain times.

Throughout this period, the protective nature of respectful relationships has become abundantly clear. The strength and resilience we can all draw from those around us: our families, friends and communities, cannot be understated.

This knowledge underpins the work of Relationships Australia across the country, and informs the services we deliver and the advocacy we engage in.



Services supporting diverse Australians

With the above in mind, the mission of the Relationships Australia federation remains critical and our work across the 2021-22 financial year has been directed at supporting all people in Australia to maintain safe and respectful relationships: with themselves, their families and their broader communities.

Relationships Australia members provide services for all members of the community, regardless of religious belief, age, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle choice, cultural background or economic circumstances. We acknowledge and respect the rights of all people, in all their diversities, to live life fully within their families and communities with dignity and safety.

This year we welcomed the Government's decision to extend funding for its Elder Abuse Service Trials through to 2026, confirming these much-needed services as programs beyond their initial pilot phase. Under the Pilot, Relationships Australia has been the only Australian provider of Case Management and Mediation services for older Australians impacted by elder abuse, and we look forward to working with government and exploring options to expand the reach of these services, in order to ensure any older person across Australia, irrespective of where they are located, can access dedicated, tailored and free services when they are most needed.

In 2022, we also welcomed the announcement of additional funding in the Commonwealth Budget for services and interventions designed to address the scourge of family violence in society. Our work with families, victims and perpetrators of family violence demonstrates that through a combination of early intervention, therapeutic support and crisis services, Australian families can be better protected, and family violence can be addressed.

Throughout the year, Relationships Australia has remained focused on delivering evidence-based, trauma informed services to clients across the country. In addition to providing individual and family counselling, our programs across the country have included:



Providing Children's Contact Services in over 20 locations nationwide



Supporting Australians with disability through our counselling services connected with the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability



Delivering a range of family law counselling, mediation and dispute resolution services



Providing counselling and related supports through the Intercountry Adoptee Family Support Service



Delivering dedicated services to Forgotten Australians, including Forced Adoption Support Services and Redress Support Services



Managing eight headspace locations across Western Australia, Victoria and South-eastern NSW, supporting the mental health and well-being of young people across Australia



Delivering tailored mental health support to families through dedicated Family Mental Health Support Services funded by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services



Providing a range of counselling and related services to meet the needs of Australia's diverse business community, including as a leading provider of Employee Assistance Programs across Australia



Working to protect the rights of Older People in Australia

We are proud of our work across the country to support older people to have and maintain healthy, safe and respectful relationships. In addition to delivering tailored services to prevent and eradicate elder abuse, the rights of older people in Australia has been a significant focus of our advocacy efforts in 2021-22. This has included crucial work with our colleagues, Elder Abuse Action Australia, the Elder Mediation International Network (EMIN), Elder Mediation Australasian Network and Every Age Counts, among others, to raise awareness of the impacts of ageism and promote interventions at both the systems and service levels.

Relationships Australia is a strong supporter of calls for an international convention protecting the rights of older people and will continue our work to advocate for this over the coming year.

Activities we have undertaken throughout the year include:

- Presentations at, and sponsorship of, the National Elder Abuse Conference in Hobart in February 2022;
- Participating as a standing member of the Advisory Board of Elder Abuse Action Australia (EAAA);
- Contribution to the next National Action Plan to end abuse and neglect of older people;
- Participation in a webinar on grandparent alienation hosted by EAAA's COMPASS;
- Presenting at the EMIN international summit;
- Presenting on issues affecting older people across Australia at the Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference in Melbourne in June 2022;
- Working with the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department in relation to its successful Elder Abuse Service Trials pilot;
- Marking World Elder Abuse Awareness Day nationally on 15 June, with a range of promotional materials, interviews and presentations.

Advocacy

During 2021-22, Relationships Australia engaged with a range of Parliamentary Inquiries, Royal Commissions and government consultations. Drawing on the expertise and experience of practitioners across the country, and building on evidence collected over almost 75 years of delivering services to vulnerable Australians, we were proud to make contributions to the following:

- Development of the next National Plan to end violence against women and children;
- The Disability Royal Commission;
- Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs inquiry regarding proposed amendments of Family Law Act 1975 to create Federal Family Violence Orders;
- ACT Government development of draft legislation to protect human rights of people with variations in sex characteristics;
- ACT government inquiry into raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility;
- QLD Government inquiry into social isolation and loneliness;
- Australian Communications and Media Authority consultations on vulnerable clients, family violence and digital inclusion;
- Queensland Commission of Inquiry into police perpetrators of domestic and family violence;
- National Disability Insurance Scheme consultation on supported decision making;
- National Mental Health Workforce Strategy;
- Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights inquiry into the Religious Discrimination Bill 2021.

We look forward to further opportunities to engage with policymakers in the design of services and systems that put the well-being of the individual at the core, and promote safe and respectful relationships as a crucial foundation of Australian society.

Key stakeholder engagements

Over the past year, we participated in a range of consultations in the Attorney-General's and Social Services departments and with stakeholders in our traditional areas of work. These have included consultations on program design and redesign as well as outcome measurement, and increasing access to services for specific and / or vulnerable groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, culturally and linguistically diverse clients, clients with disability and those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key consultation engagements include:

- Department of Social Services consultations regarding the design and implementation of successor plans to the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children and the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children;
- Attorney-General's Department consultations on Children's Contact Services, including accreditation, guiding principles and the establishment of new service locations;
- Attorney-General's Department consultations on information sharing in family law, Family Report Writers and reform to the property/finance provisions of the Family Law Act 1975 (Cth);
- Family Relationship Services Australia supporting ongoing advocacy regarding the delivery of crucial services to families and children across Australia;
- Mental Health Australia;
- Suicide Prevention Australia;
- Australian Council of Social Services.

On issues impacting the work of Relationships Australia and the broader sector, Relationships Australia has engaged in ongoing advocacy with relevant departments and politicians both in the lead up to, and following the May 2022 Federal Election. We look forward to further engagement in the coming year with our newly appointed Ministers and their representatives.

National Collaboration Informing Local Service Delivery

Relationships Australia has long been committed to harnessing the collective wisdom and experience of our team across the country. A key mechanism for achieving this has been through a range of Networks, Working Groups and Communities of Practice which have been established over the years as a mechanism for sharing, collaboration and mutual support among members of the Relationships Australia Federation.

In 2022, almost twenty such networks exist, focusing on key areas of service delivery (such as our Dispute Resolution Network and Children's Contact Services Working Group) through to operations (such as our National Research Network and National Communications Network). Importantly, the Federation also benefits from a number of vibrant networks whose focus is on improving the work of the Members with key members of the community, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culturally and linguistically diverse clients.

In 2022, our Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Community of Practice has been working on building capacity across the Federation for working with interpreters, while the Relationships Australia Indigenous Network (RAIN) met in June of 2022 to workshop approaches to cultural fitness and cultural supervision.

Relationships Australia team members across all levels of our Member Organisations come together in these important forums on a regular basis to share their insights and experiences, problem solve approaches and to learn from each other.

Through our networks, working groups and communities of practice, Relationships Australia lives out its commitment to delivering evidence-based services that are tailored to the needs of the community, and informed by national best practice.

Promoting the resilience & well-being of children across Australia

In November 2021, Relationships Australia was proud to take ownership of the popular Family Connect program, an online resource aimed at increasing emotional wellbeing and encouraging families to connect in practical and meaningful ways.

The Program, created by Uplifting Australia, is a four-step process which incorporates easy-to-use techniques designed to assist families in how they interact.

Speaking about the Program, CEO of Uplifting Australia, Garry Thomson said: **“Family Connect provides families with a healthy emotional system to implement at home which supports listening, appreciation, emotional literacy and self-responsibility for the family. Uniquely, the whole family learns these skills together to support great relationships and good mental health outcomes.”**

In transferring custodianship of the program to Relationships Australia, Uplifting Australia identified a close synergy between the Program and Relationships Australia’s long history as a leading provider of family and relationship support services.

“We hope that through Relationships Australia, Family Connect will be able to reach many more families and make emotional resilience a skill something that is learned by all” said Mr Thomson.

Relationships Australia is grateful to Uplifting Australia for the trust it has placed in us to continue building the important legacy of Family Connect.

At a time when relationships have been under great pressure, the importance of meaningful connection within families has never been more apparent. Through open, honest communication, respectful and sustainable relationships can be built and nurtured.

Relationships Australia encourages all Australians to make use of this Program, and to discover these practical tools for emotional wellbeing and resilience.

Find out more and visit:
www.familyconnect.org.au



Online from
15 November 2022

Relationship Indicators

National survey
of the state of
Australia’s relationships

Proudly Supporting
Respectful
Relationships for
75 years in 2023



National Statistics

2,333

Staff

167,909+

Clients

109

Locations

126

Outreach Locations

340+

Unique Programs Offered

825+

Media Participations

34+

Submissions

35+

Research Projects

60+

Rural/Remote
Locations

120+

Engagement
Campaigns
and Activities

30+

New initiatives and
programs launched

Connecting Communities for 20 years



For more information, and to join Relationships Australia in our 21st year of Neighbour Day in 2023, visit www.neighbourday.org



Community



Ending Loneliness



Respect



Shelter



Meeting Place



Creative



Strength



Together



Wellbeing



Welcoming



Connections



Inclusive



Support



Relationships



Participation



Reflect



Communicate



Resilience



Belonging



Celebrate

Loneliness and social isolation continue to impact the health and well-being of Australians, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing physical restrictions necessitated as part of the response. Social isolation and loneliness are major risk factors for poor mental health and suicide. Disconnect within community is a driving factor behind all of these issues and as such, any solution requires a multi-dimensional approach. A key element of any campaign to end loneliness and to improve the mental health of all Australians must include community awareness raising and capacity building.

Relationships Australia's social connection campaign, Neighbour Day (ND), celebrated its 20th year in 2022. The campaign remains one of the few proven options for raising community awareness and building capacity for growing and maintaining respectful relationships. This is due to its consistent approach to evaluation and a concerted effort to link it with research which demonstrates its impact on loneliness, mental health and wellbeing.

From its origins in 2003, through RA taking stewardship in 2014, and noting the significant impact of COVID in 2020, the Neighbour Day campaign has evolved significantly over its 20 year history. It has brought together the issues of loneliness, social isolation, mental health and suicide prevention by championing the preventative power and protective nature of community connections and respectful relationships. Today, the campaign focuses on building the capacity of all people across Australia to reach out, connect with, and support those in their communities who need it most.

In 2022, our Neighbour Day 2022 campaign focused on "20 years of connecting communities". This commenced with a launch event in Canberra, where then co-chairs of the Parliamentary Friends of Ending Loneliness, Mr Andrew Giles MP and Dr Fiona Martin MP joined fellow political representatives including Dr Andrew Leigh MP, some of our wonderful Ambassadors, including Costa Georgiadis, Natalie Ahmat and Mitch McPherson, and Neighbour Day Founder Andrew Heslop to mark the achievements of Neighbour Day over the past 20 years. We were honoured to be joined by representatives of some of our Very Neighbourly Organisations, key stakeholders and members of the Relationships Australia Federation for this special event.

Following the launch event, the campaign linked a range of community organisations, local councils, and businesses and a growing social media community with the Relationships Australia

mission of promoting sustainable and respectful relationships. It provided a range of capacity building resources aimed at empowering all people across Australia to build connected communities, and shared research findings about the protective nature of good social connections.

As Neighbour Day itself approached, we saw increased media attention across national radio and television. Our new television community service announcement highlighted the importance of social connection in combatting Australia's loneliness epidemic, and called on all Australians to come together to create connections. Neighbour Day Ambassadors joined the campaign in March 2022, promoting the Neighbour Day vision of a connected Australia on radio, television and in the press.

Our ongoing research partnership with the ANU has demonstrated that Neighbour Day has a direct impact on participants and their communities. In particular, 2021 research demonstrated the significance of strong social connection on all relationships, demonstrating a tangible link between the Neighbour Day campaign and sustainable and respectful relationships. This research, now published in a peer reviewed journal, demonstrates the significant benefits for Australian communities arising directly from participation in Neighbour Day.

As we look to the future, we welcome further interest and engagement with this social connection campaign. Through Neighbour Day, we hope to empower every person in Australia to build respectful relationships, and create communities where we can all belong.



Neighbour Day Ambassadors; Costa Georgiadis, Natalie Ahmat and Mitch McPherson

1. Productivity Commission Inquiry Report into Mental Health (2020). Social Isolation and Loneliness. p.380-5.
2. See for example Fong, P., Cruwys, T., Robinson, S., Haslam, A., Mance, & Fisher, C. (2021). Evidence that loneliness can be reduced by a whole-of-community intervention to increase neighbourhood identification. *Social Science and Medicine*. Vol 27. www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277953621002410?dgcid=coauthor

Canberra and Region

9

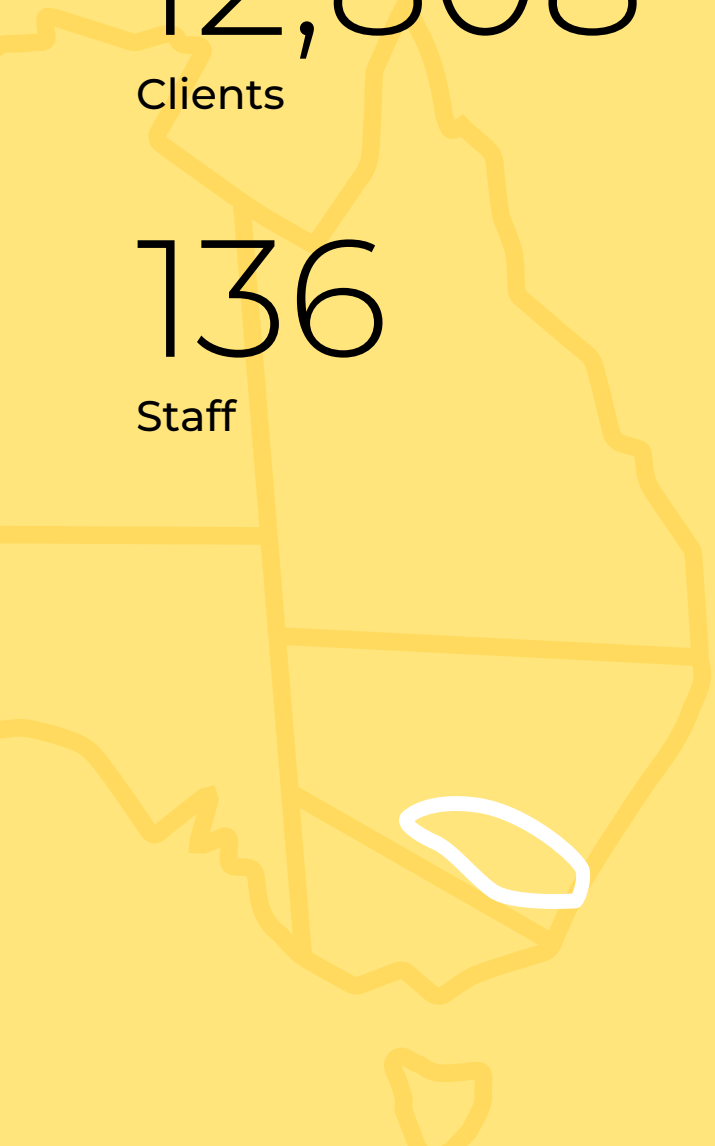
Locations

12,808

Clients

136

Staff



Working with people living with disability and their family, carers and friends

Relationships Australia Canberra & Region (RACR) are undertaking significant and innovative work supporting people living with disability, as well as their families, friends and carers.

We believe that people with disability have the right to have a voice and be heard. Our disability support programs are co-designed with those with lived experience to provide a safe and nurturing space so they can strive to achieve their common goal – to work and study, enjoy their citizenship and responsibility and be able to engage and contribute to their communities to the best of their abilities and enjoy the social diversity that this right brings.

An example of one of our innovative co-designed programs is the work we did with This Is My Brave Australia Inc. (TIMBA), through our Disability Royal Commission Counselling & Support program, funded by Department of Social Services.

RACR first met with Purple Chicken, a café based in Albury that trains young people with disability. While there we met a social work student who subsequently undertook a clinical placement with RACR. Her passion and knowledge was the catalyst for a more creative approach in developing a submission for individuals impacted by the Royal Commission.

Through our connection with the café RACR partnered with This is my Brave Australia to develop a program to support people wishing to provide information to the Royal Commission. The project faced significant challenges due to COVID. On a cold and rainy Sunday evening in May, eight participants provided their information to the Royal Commission via a performance, which was of great significance for each participant and

provided a humbling and confronting experience for the many people that attended. RACR was proud to be part of this wonderful and ground shifting event. Around 70 people attended, including the local MPs and media.

Individual and group submissions were prepared for the Royal Commission that will form part of their final report to government.

The common theme was Awareness, Inclusion and Equity. Participants highlighted the need for community education to challenge the stigma people living with disabilities experience daily. Workers observed participants' shift in confidence for group participation. Participants that were passive became active and shared their stories and experience.

RACR is also working with young women living with autism who often share frustrating tales of how difficult it was to get a proper diagnosis, while many women are not recognised as having autism until adulthood. For these women to thrive, it is important they have access to great peer support networks and practitioners who understand their challenges. The need for a safe and supportive network became even more important during the darkest days of COVID-related lockdowns.

We connected people who identify as female and autistic in a safe space and used creative expression to discuss aspects of identity and trauma. An online group provided a platform for individual and group submissions to the Royal Commission. This group has continued to provide a social and advocacy space and as such promotes RACR'S commitment to community capacity building.

New South Wales

13

Locations

18,879

Clients

492

Staff



Support for older people across Australia

The past year has seen the continued impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable older people. Many have had to deal with restricted movement and limited access to care provisions which protect their health and wellbeing. Those unable to use technology or connect socially online, found themselves further isolated. In many homes, pandemic-related financial blows caused shifts in living arrangements – in some cases family members moved into the home of elderly parents, in others, couples faced lengthy confinement together without relief or support. In this environment, we saw a worrying escalation in reports of elder abuse – be it financial, psychological, physical, social or sexual abuse – or the neglect of older Australians.

Our Let's Talk Elder Mediation and Support Service provided an opportunity throughout the year for older people and their families/carers to come together in a safe, respectful and confidential environment. Supported by practitioners trained in Elder Mediation and Counselling, this targeted and effective intervention supports them to have mediated conversations on issues ranging from intergenerational relationship challenges and safety concerns, to future care, living arrangements and end of life planning.

Since its launch in June 2019, we have supported over 400 families across 10 regions throughout NSW, with generous funding from the NSW Department of Communities and Justice - Domestic and Family Violence Innovation Fund.

Reconnect was another program which supported our older Australians throughout the year. A one-year initiative funded by the Central and Eastern Sydney PHN, it was designed to support older people who were isolated from social activities and supports as a result of the pandemic. The service delivered individualised and targeted case management using a person-centred multidisciplinary approach. Working in collaboration with the Older Persons Mental Health Hospital and Outreach Teams, Allied Health Professionals, GPs and other services, Reconnect offered client-focused, high-quality and personalised support and service referrals to help older Australians feel more connected and empowered following the impacts of lockdown and the pandemic.

Throughout the year, we worked closely with the NSW Ageing & Disability Commission (ADC). Referral pathways with Seniors Rights and the Legal Aid Elder Abuse Project in Gosford developed strongly. A collaborative pilot between RANSW and Carers NSW, Exsitu and Autonomy First is working to develop a best practice model for supported decision-making for older people. As key contributors and members of Elder Abuse Collaboratives in both Sydney and the Bathurst region, we also assisted the creation of Elder Abuse awareness videos and information collateral in multiple languages thanks to regional grants from the ADC.

Our work continues to raise awareness of the challenges faced by older Australians and those who love and care for them.

Northern Territory

3

Locations

3,251

Clients

70

Staff



Re-building connections in NT communities

The 2021/22 year was a period of transition for many of our services, as the Northern Territory Government gradually eased pandemic restrictions. Particularly effected were the targeted programs our Aboriginal and Islander Cultural Advisors (AICA) deliver. This includes an internally developed group program 'Straight Talk' and 'Aboriginal Building Connections' (ABC), a parenting education program developed by Interrelate. Both education programs support Aboriginal people in remote parts of the Northern Territory to connect with their family, culture, and traditions.

Valarie Tambling, Senior Aboriginal and Islander Cultural Advisor, developed Straight Talk as a prequel to Aboriginal Building Connections (ABC).

"ABC is focused on children and family. We do Straight Talk before ABC to help people first reconnect and understand who they are." Valarie explained.

"Aboriginal people are navigating two worlds, with Straight Talk, we help them connect with their traditional side. Then we talk about how they can find their way in the western system"

The program uses a strengths-based approach that explores the complexity and depth of culture, traditional lore, family roles and kinship structures. It also provides language and understanding of the impacts of colonisation and intergenerational trauma.

Straight Talk is a stepping stone to the Aboriginal Building Connections program, which our staff have been trained in facilitation. It focuses on the needs of children and provides parents with practical solutions for setting aside conflict. There is an emphasis on the importance of self-care and the wider

impact of grief and family breakdown. It also provides tools and motivation for improving communication and setting goals for healthy parenting.

Since the start of the pandemic, staff have been restricted from travelling regularly to remote communities, due to enhanced restrictions put in place to protect remote communities from COVID-19. As these restrictions were lifted in 2022, Valarie and the team were able to resume regular face-to-face delivery of their programs.

"It was a difficult period for us and our clients" Valarie said.

"Zoom sessions aren't always appropriate for our clients culturally, especially when talking about sensitive topics and family. We are glad to be back out there in-person again."

The AICA team are relieved to be back out delivering their programs in remote areas of Alice Springs, Katherine, Darwin, and Tennant Creek with the support of local Aboriginal organisations. The support and relationships with local Aboriginal organisations have been an important part of sustaining the service over the pandemic period.



Queensland

19

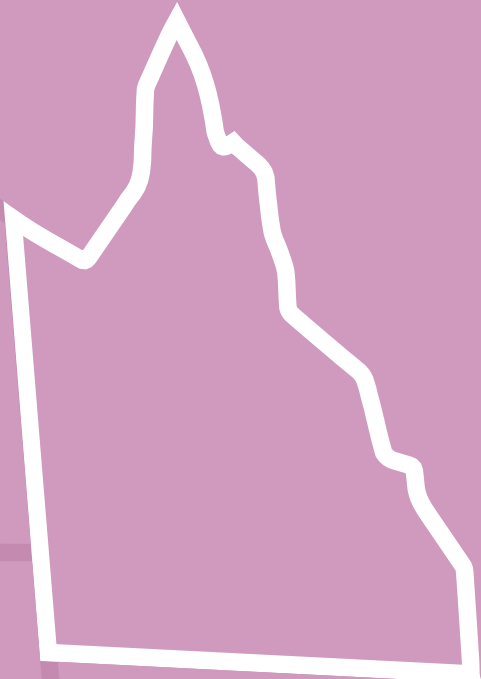
Locations

61,335

Clients

423

Staff



New research-driven assessment tool empowers clients to take control of their gambling

Gambling is one of the biggest problems facing Australians today, and Relationships Australia Queensland (RAQ) is at the forefront of efforts to help those affected by problem gambling to access support.

Up to five million Australians are potentially affected by problem gambling each year, and that number is expected to increase in coming years.

It was clear to Relationships Australia Queensland that our clients needed a more dynamic form of service delivery specific to the complex context of problem gambling.

Enlisting the help of several other organisations, RAQ set out to create the Gambling Recovery Star, a research-informed assessment tool that would act as the foundation for this new kind of service.

Drawing on a participatory action research framework and the existing Outcomes Star created by Triangle UK, the RAQ Gambling Recovery Star helps practitioners empower people struggling with problem gambling.

It encourages the gambler to be the agent for change by helping them work with the practitioner to develop case plans and goals that focus on outcomes.

The prototype of the Recovery Star was tested in 2020 after a year of co-design workshops driven and run by an inter-agency working group.

Despite the added challenges of COVID-19, the tool was piloted on 100 Gambling Help Service clients, and the analysis of the data during this pilot strongly supported the effectiveness of the Recovery Star.

That's why, after over a year of development, RAQ launched the Recovery Star in 2021 as part of its intake process for the Gambling Help Service.

The new approach is clearly making a difference for clients like Jonathan.

Jonathan came to RAQ asking for support after struggling with a gambling problem for over twenty years, first with horse racing and more recently with online poker machines.

He wanted to take control of his gambling to ease the pressure on his family.

In his initial counselling session, his practitioner used the Gambling Star with him to set goals and find what motivated him. Above all else, he wanted to be a better father and partner.

He set the goals of rebuilding trust in his relationship and controlling his gambling, but in the process of counselling realised it would be better if he stopped gambling altogether.

Jonathan finally left RAQ after he had stopped gambling entirely for over six weeks, feeling confident he could handle the problem on his own.

Relationships Australia Queensland is proud of the work they and all of their partners have done during the creation of the Recovery Star.

They hope that gambling help services around the world can now benefit from using the tool to support their clients, empower them to take control of their gambling and move towards the future they want.

South Australia

9

Locations

24,965

Clients

383

Staff



Ask PEACE

A virtual mental health service to support culturally and linguistically diverse peoples affected by COVID-19

Relationships Australia South Australia (RASA) commenced our Ask PEACE service in early 2020 to support culturally and linguistically diverse peoples (CALD) negatively impacted by COVID-19. RASA's team of trained bilingual practitioners working with diverse multicultural communities in SA, combined with our established organisation infrastructure, enabled rapid development of a co-designed service to meet emerging community needs.

Ask PEACE aimed to effectively respond to arising mental health needs resulting from the pandemic, providing access to services, individual counselling and education designed to reduce transmission and allay any unfounded fears associated with COVID and its impact on families. The service mobilised bilingual mental health peer supporters to help reduce the level of stigma associated with mental health issues in CALD communities and offered community-based services to help build resilience and a supportive environment via community education, group therapy and healing-related projects focusing on specific cohorts.

The service prioritised communities heavily affected by COVID-19 including recently arrived refugees, others working in the gig economy, international students, and people in isolation or quarantine with little social support. Through a dedicated Ask PEACE phone line, people in need were offered direct access to highly qualified and experienced bilingual practitioners. The service adopted a "no closed doors" policy in recognition of the effort it takes for CALD people to seek help. In addition, services were delivered in collaboration

with the client, significant others, and the service provider(s) to help address cultural barriers. To date, 450 CALD individuals have accessed the service and reported improvement with the issue(s) for which they sought help.

Ask PEACE has engaged 18 community consultant volunteers from diverse language and cultural groups. The consultants meet monthly to discuss COVID-19 issues in their communities and have been instrumental in designing culturally appropriate mental health related resources such as an educational animated video, "Ask PEACE". The video is available in 18 languages and focuses on COVID symptoms rather than medical terminology in consideration of community context and health literacy levels.

Ask PEACE has also supported clients of the service to attend a foundation course developed in collaboration with RASA and the Australian Institute of Social Relations to develop skills as peer support workers. The therapeutic course provided participants opportunity to understand their lived experience and explore their identity. The success of the course is evident with 11 of 15 participants now deeply involved in community work addressing stigma and discrimination associated with their diagnosis and 7 engaging in further community services courses.

Through the provision of multiple interventions, Ask PEACE has achieved optimal results for CALD people during the pandemic.

Tasmania

5

Locations

7,074

Clients

153

Staff



MENS (Men Engaging New Strategies)

Men's behaviour change programs are an important aspect of reducing violence against women and children in our community. The delivery of the Men Engaging New Strategies (known as, Men's Behaviour Change Portal, from October 2022) at Relationships Australia Tasmania (RA Tas) is offered to low-moderate offenders of family violence who are accepting some responsibility for their own behaviours. Typically, men who engage with the program have identified that they need assistance with their mental health and strategies to work towards respectful relationships rather than abusive ones. The 19-week program consists of four pre sessions where practitioners assess the suitability and eligibility of the participant to continue into the group work component. If deemed suitable, participants are enrolled in the 10-week group work program based on a feminist framework of family violence using CBT practice principles to increase understanding around why their behaviours are unacceptable and strategies to increase their ability to make different choices.

The group uses the voice of the women and children in the participants lives to ensure that participants' can personally identify with the material based on their own family circumstances. Once the group has finished, participants are then provided with four post group sessions that are aimed to consolidate the learnings and to move into an action phase of change. This is then followed with a group reunion three months later to determine if change has been sustained.

The program is clearly outlined to participants as a step towards their behaviour change and is not a one-time commitment, as change only occurs when behaviour change is ongoing and consistent. They can then move into respectful relationships and keep the women and children in their lives safe from their abuse. The program also incorporates partner contact with current or ex-partners to assess their safety and to provide referrals to other specialist family violence services if needed.

In addition to the MENS program, an online facility has been developed to increase opportunities to solidify learnings and to really focus on how to make positive changes outside of sessions. Participants are provided a log in at the point of intake and asked to work through the program content. Participants' entries in the program are made available to practitioners for further exploration during sessions. The online facility has further use outside of the program, public users can access the resource and complete a limited version of the program where information about what family violence looks like, strategies to manage emotions and behaviour and how to work towards respectful relationships is available.



Victoria

26

Locations

20,191

Clients

354

Staff

Mental health support for children and young people

Remote and regional communities often face barriers to accessing services because of distance, service availability and other social issues. COVID-19 has further exacerbated this and has disproportionately affected young Victorians, including in regional Gippsland, where Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) operates 3 headspace sites, and delivers its unique i-Connect and Connect Me programs.

There is substantial service demand in these areas as community members face significant challenges including a high prevalence of family violence and disadvantage, and above-average levels of psychological distress.

Despite the impact of the pandemic and related restrictions in Victoria this year, RAV provided continuity of care and ongoing service delivery.

i-Connect

RAV's i-Connect Family Mental Health Support Service supports children aged 0-18 in East Gippsland who are at risk of developing mental health issues. It works to address social, mental health, social connection and self-esteem issues by providing innovative face-to-face groups and telehealth services tailored to individuals' needs.

This year, a new Caring-Go-Round program assisted primary school-aged children impacted by the East Gippsland bushfires to understand and manage their feelings. Using a whole-of-school approach, the 6-week therapeutic and strengths-based program incorporated mindfulness, relaxation, movement, and exercises to encourage self-esteem and peer connection.

headspace services in Gippsland, Victoria

RAV's headspace sites in Bairnsdale, Sale and Wonthaggi support 12-25 year-olds through mental and physical health, alcohol and other drug, and work and study services. As most young people who are eligible to access these services live some distance from the sites, support options include telephone, telehealth and outreach.

RAV's services keep young people at the front and centre of all that they do, with active Youth Advisory Groups providing vital feedback on the establishment and operation of each headspace.

The sites are committed to removing barriers to accessing services, particularly for priority groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culturally and linguistically diverse people, and LGBTIQ+ young people, and young people with disability.

Highlights of the year:

- Awareness and engagement initiatives, including a 'pop-up' mental health stall in Wonthaggi to encourage help-seeking and enhance health literacy, and a health promotion stall and youth space at a festival in Sale;
- Focusing on increasing support, and health promotion, psychoeducation and engagement activities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families. headspace Bairnsdale consulted with Aboriginal school staff to develop and deliver positive physical and mental health presentations to young Aboriginal men in years 7 to 9;
- Operating our 3 LGBTIQ+ social groups, with our Wonthaggi group obtaining a grant to fund youth-led social events to showcase community resilience;
- Continuing our Bairnsdale social connection-focused games group for neurodiverse young people;
- A new Enhanced Mental Health Support in Schools program provides counselling for secondary school students with mild to moderate mental health concerns.

Connect Me

RAV introduced Connect Me, a free counselling and case management program supporting children aged 4-11 in the Bass Coast, South Gippsland and Wellington areas.

The service works collaboratively with schools, maternal and child health services, kindergartens and GP clinics to support children at risk of low to medium mental health issues, including as a result of the recent bushfires or COVID-19.

The primarily outreach-based service provides multimodal counselling and case management to connect children with education, personal, physical or community services.



RAV acknowledges the funding and support received to run these important programs; including the Australian Government Department of Social Services and Department of Health, and Gippsland Primary Health Network.

Western Australia

24
Locations

19,425
Clients

314
Staff



Trauma-informed work for people engaging with the Disability Royal Commission

Relationships Australia WA provides a free independent counselling and support service for people with disability or their carers who have been affected by the Disability Royal Commission.

When people first approach this service, they are often in a state of high stress and may have reached a crisis point. They are seeking safety. A place for their voice to be heard. Listening to each person's experiences and building a supportive relationship where trust and a sense of control and choice are felt, is the cornerstone of our trauma-informed work.

Working this way means we don't focus on the problems faced, but rather recognise the coping mechanisms used to survive. We work through the physiological impacts of trauma and increase their awareness of it. The strength of our work is in the therapeutic relationship where skills are practiced to overcome trauma responses.

Our small team of highly skilled and knowledgeable counsellors gently unpack the various barriers, ableism or other discrimination experienced. They support self-agency and provide information to assist self-advocacy. A large part of the work is also to link individuals with other appropriate services and community supports.

Case Study: Jodie

Jodie was incarcerated following numerous stints with Mental Health Services where inaccurate diagnosis resulted in mistreatment, over medication, inappropriate use of restraints and a missed diagnosis of Autism. A person that Jodie met in prison helped her to understand Autism and a journey of discovery began. Building on these insights our trauma-informed counselling supported Jodie to further manage anxiety. Autism burnout is very real for Jodie, mitigating the overload from stimulation and the demand from deciphering the meaning of communication has been a focus during counselling. Trauma-informed counselling that is paced according to her needs has provided the space for Jodie to develop strategies, build her self-esteem and exercise self-compassion. Post-traumatic growth is due to Jodie's resourcefulness and motivation to live a meaningful life, but also greatly enhanced by the trust and safety experienced with her counsellor.



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