

# EDEN HEALTH SERVICES SURVEY: SUMMARY

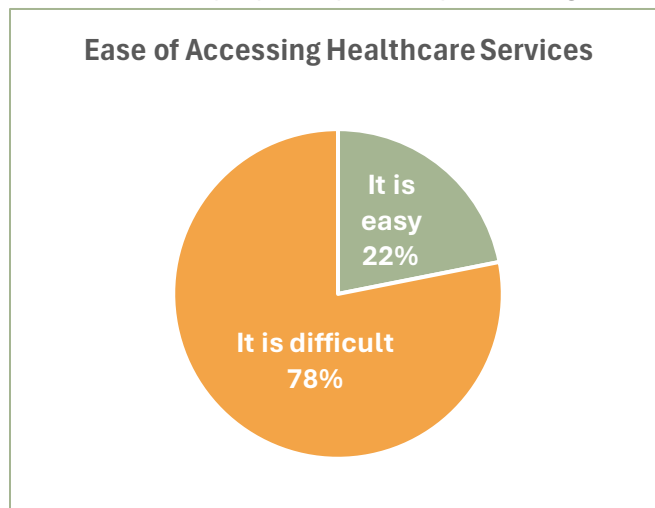
## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A health services survey was carried out in the Eden region of New South Wales from 1<sup>st</sup> September to 28<sup>th</sup> September 2025. The survey contained a mix of single choice and multiple-choice questions, as well as open-ended questions to collect detailed feedback and comments from participants.

A total of 267 survey responses were received from community members. This report presents the analysis of the responses received. The number of respondents represents 7.8% of the 3,425 residents of Eden. The majority of respondents were female (3 in every 4 respondents) and most resided in Eden (8 in 10 respondents). Only 6 respondents (2.2%) of respondents identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander which is lower than the 8.0% reported in the 2021 census.

## ACCESSING HEALTH SERVICES OVERALL

A large proportion of participants report difficulties with accessing health services in the region. Around 3 in every 4 participants report having difficulties. Younger people aged 45 years and



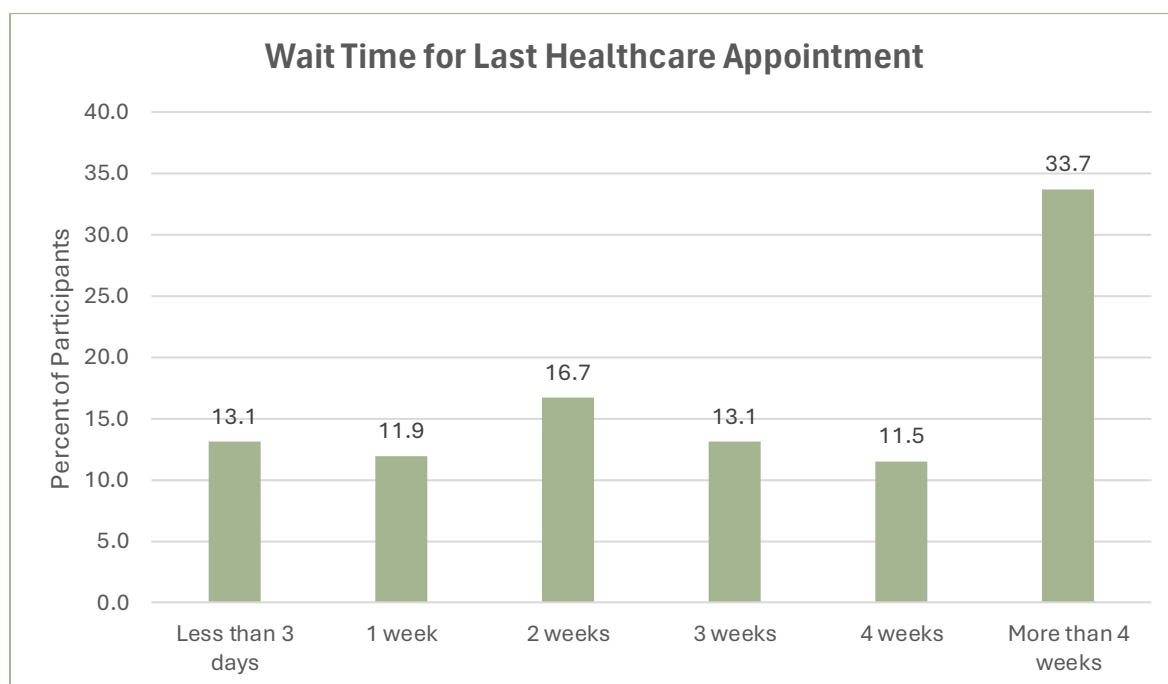
under are significantly more likely to report difficulty accessing healthcare services generally than adults aged over 45 years.

When asked about the barriers to accessing health services in the Eden region, the two most commonly reported barriers were 'not being able to get an appointment in time' (6 in 10 participants) and 'couldn't afford to pay' (3 in 10 participants). Younger people (aged 45 years or under) are significantly more

likely to report both cost and lack of a timely appointment as barriers than older persons aged over 45 years. In addition, females are more likely to report lack of a timely appointment as a barrier to accessing care than males.

When asked specifically about the wait time for their last healthcare appointment, a large proportion of participants report waiting more than 4 weeks. Overall, half of participants report having to wait 3 weeks or more for an appointment. Females are more likely to report a longer wait time to access an appointment than males, and those who reported it is difficult to access

healthcare services generally in Eden are also significantly more likely to report a longer wait time here (3 weeks or more).



GPs and Specialist Doctors were the most commonly reported health professionals who are difficult to access. Around 2 in every 5 respondents reported barriers impacting their GP access while just over 1 in every 5 participants reported challenges with accessing specialists. A further 1 in ten participants reported all health services and doctors as being difficult to access in Eden.

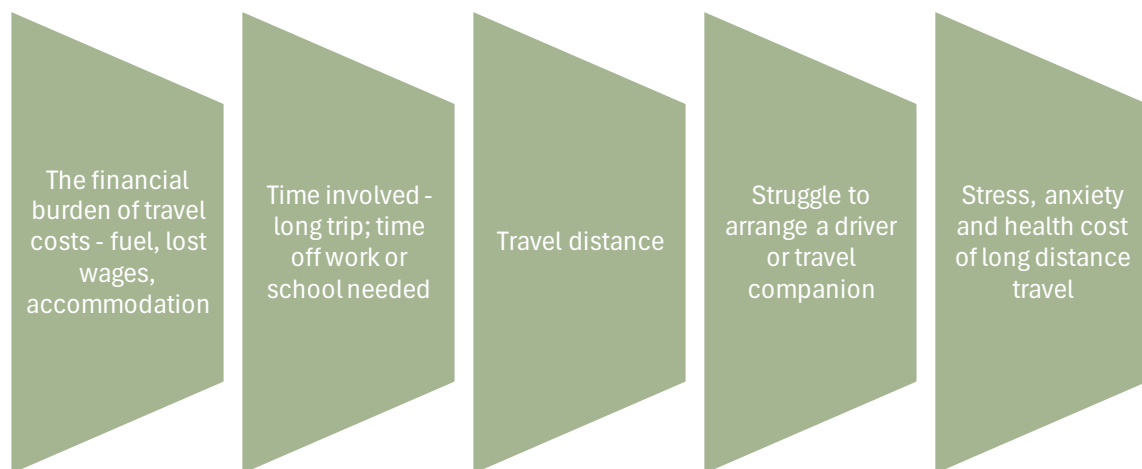
## TRAVEL TO ACCESS HEALTH SERVICES

Travel is often required to other regions of the state to access health services. In fact, 1 in every 2 respondents reported that they have travelled outside of the Bega Valley in the previous 12 months to attend a health-related appointment. The same proportion (1 in 2 people) report travelling within Bega Valley to attend a health-related appointment in the previous 12 months. Medical specialists, followed by GPs then medical imaging were the top three most common health services participants travelled for. Travel to Canberra was most common, followed by Bega then Merimbula.

Needing to travel to access healthcare services poses a number of challenges to residents. Indeed, 15 participants (5.6%) reported that they sometimes cancel healthcare appointments due to not being able to get transport. More than half of all participants (61%) report that travelling outside of Eden to access healthcare services poses a challenge to them. The specific challenges they report relate both directly and indirectly to the travel itself. The time involved to travel those long distances is a factor, this leads to many needing to take significant time off work (one or more days). Travel comes with direct costs such as fuel, parking fees and public transport fees, while indirect costs can be felt via lost wages when leave is not available to them. In addition, an overnight stay is often needed, therefore incurring accommodation costs. While participants acknowledge that there are funding schemes to support such travel, where

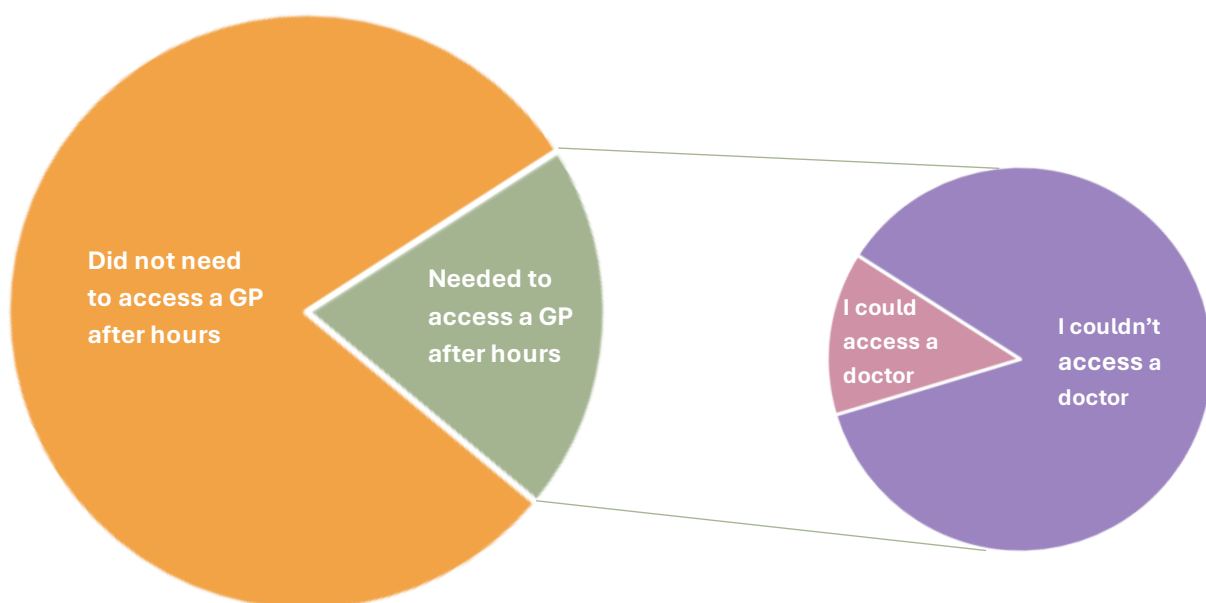
they are eligible, however they are still required to cover the costs initially and wait to be reimbursed.

### The Top 5 Challenges Encountered with Travelling to Access Health Services



### AFTER HOURS ACCESS AND URGENT CARE

Accessing a GP outside of routine business hours is a challenge in the region. Two in every 10 participants reported that they tried to access a GP outside of business hours in the previous 12 months. Three-quarters of these were not able to access a doctor. For those who reported that they were able to access a doctor, attendance at South East Regional Hospital or another ED was the main way that they were able to access services. Those who couldn't access a doctor were not asked what they did as a result, but it can be assumed that they did not receive healthcare at that time.

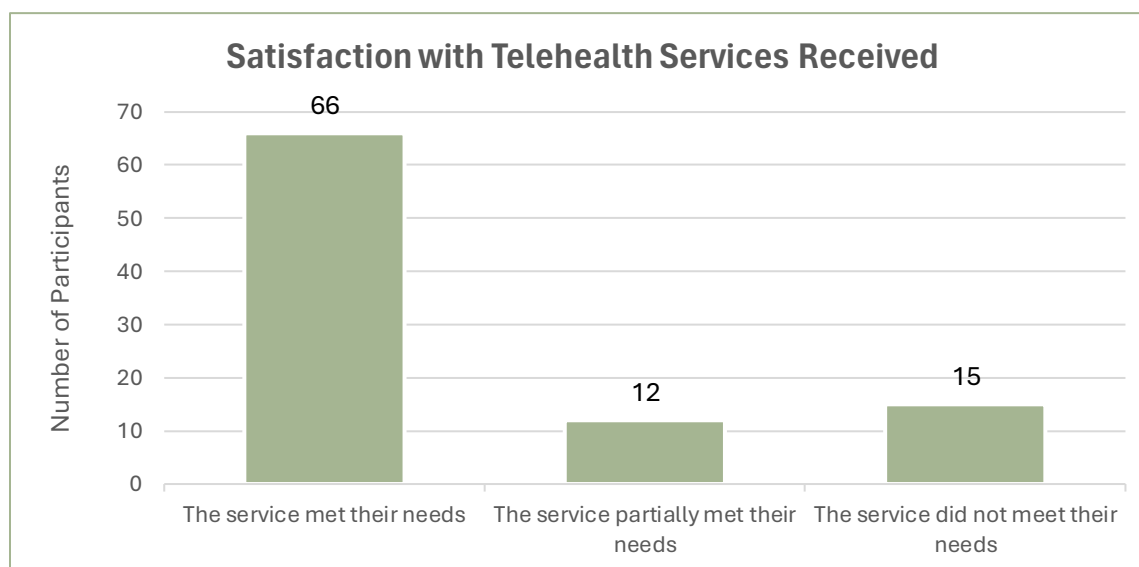


The ED at South East Regional Hospital was the most commonly accessed facility for urgent care needs. Overall, satisfaction with urgent care services was high. Around 6 in 10 participants reported that the service met their needs. Similarly, 4 in 5 participants who had used an

ambulance in the previous 12 months also reported a highly positive experience. The long wait time for an ambulance to arrive was the chief concern with this service.

## ACCESSING TELEHEALTH SERVICES

Telehealth services were accessed by almost 2 in every 5 respondents in the previous 12 months. Almost all of these consults were with a GP, primarily a private virtual GP service and not their regular GP. Satisfaction with telehealth was high, with 8 in 10 respondents reporting that it wholly met, or partially met, their needs. For those who reported that it did not meet their needs, the primary issues were a telehealth appointment being inappropriate for their care needs in that instance, and a preference for a face-to-face consultation.



## HEALTH INFORMATION SOURCES

Overall, participants report their GP practice as their most frequently used source of health information (7 in 10 participants). This was followed by internet searching (6 in 10 participants) and asking family and friends (3 in 10 participants). There was no association between age group and use of the internet or social media to access health information.

One in five participants report that they would like more information on how to get help for a particular health issue. The most common topics that participants specified that they would like further information on were:

- Available services in the community, including current waiting times; further promotion of local services
- Ageing support services; preventative ageing exercises and activities
- Skin health/checks

## PARTICIPANTS' OVERALL VIEWS ON HEALTH SERVICES IN THE REGION

From a community-level perspective, participants most commonly expressed concern about what they perceive to be the limited availability and accessibility of healthcare services locally, particularly GP services. The driver is workforce shortages leading to local services that are insufficient to community need. With the limited availability of services locally, many residents

need to travel to other areas to access the health services they need. There is a time cost to this, with many needing to take time off work to attend appointments due to the travel distance and timing of the appointment. The travel also places an additional financial burden on them for the direct costs related to the travel (e.g. fuel) and indirect costs such as lost wages when unpaid time off work is the only option for them. The implication of these challenges is that it can be a deterrent to accessing services for those patients who struggle to overcome these travel and travel-related barriers. The primary cost of accessing services was also identified by some participants as an access issue. For patients who need to access services frequently, or who have to incur lost wages from needing to take time off work, these costs can be a barrier.

To enhance healthcare services locally, the highest priority to survey participants was to increase the availability and accessibility of local GP services. An increase to this workforce is seen as needed, both to increase the number of appointments available and to improve the wait time for appointments, and also to open up local GP access to those who currently do not have a local GP due to existing practices having closed books. In addition to enhancing primary care services, participants also recommended enhancements to local hospital services to minimise travel required to other regions of the state.

Along with increasing overall availability and accessibility, supporting patients to cover the costs of healthcare is another important recommendation provided by participants. For those on low incomes, or who require frequent healthcare access due to having a chronic condition, the cost is a significant barrier to them. As noted earlier, it was the younger participants and not the older participants who most frequently reported cost as a barrier. When the direct and indirect costs of travel are added on top of the actual appointment fee, this becomes an even greater challenge. Several participants report cancelling or delaying appointments due to costs. Finally, another key recommendation identified by participants for improving health services in the Eden region was to enhance care coordination and discharge communication between service providers. This was particularly noted for discharge communication between the hospital and their GP, or for care coordination between their specialist and their GP.

### **Selected Participant Recommendations for Health Service Enhancement in Eden**



Increase the health workforce to enhance service availability and accessibility

Increase the availability of hospital services and after hours services in the region

Improve care coordination and discharge communication

Provide affordable care options for those who need it

Enhance patient-centred care