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## Yea leads the way in rural health, after 120 skin checks at the saleyards



By [Rachel Simmonds](#)  
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📷 Hailey Docking, Yea District Memorial Hospital, Yea optometrist Kelly Wilshire and Yea & District Memorial Hospital cardiac nurse Shona Miljkovic at Yea saleyards. Picture by Rachel Simmonds

One in six farmers have had skin procedures during their health checks at Yea, as one local hospital has conducted more than 200 health checks at monthly store sales.

Yea & District Memorial Hospital could roll out its mobile health checks to store sales across Victoria, after farmers were part of more



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The hospital started visiting farmers and the broader community at [Yea Saleyards in November](#), with on-the-spot cardiovascular health checks, heat, health and skin checks, hearing and optometry checks.

The staff's visits have led to 120 skin checks and 20 procedures including freezing and removal, about 50 cardiovascular assessments, and 26 audiology and optometry assessments.

Yea & District Memorial Hospital operations director Tara Heard said they planned to do flu vaccinations in May, followed by focusing on alcohol and other drugs, diabetes monitoring, and prostate health.

The hospital also ensures there is a dietitian at the saleyards events, along with a mental health nurse for general wellbeing.

"They walk the floor and just chat, they have a conversation about cattle prices, the impact of floods, they chat about various topics and we're seeing quite a few referrals come through from the saleyards now," Ms Heard said.

"That's a particular space where it can be challenging to engage with rural communities on seeking out counselling support or someone to talk to."

She said the saleyards visits have led to further community connection, with one of the nurses invited to speak at a farming community dinner on health and wellbeing.

Flood recovery grants helped fund the initiative, with the Murrindindi Shire Council.

She said the hospital staff were trying to find ways to promote their health services and connect with the local community.

"The 2022-23 floods significantly impacted our shire and the farming communities were particularly hard hit with stock losses, loss of feed and other crops," Ms Heard said.

"Given we've had multiple flooding events, it's particularly started to wear on their finances but also it's had a significant toll on their health and wellbeing in general.

"A couple of the key parts to this is turning up every month, so they knew who we are, and also could rely on us coming."



📷 Yea & District Memorial Hospital staff have visited Yea saleyards for health checks since November. Picture supplied

Ms Heard said they had been able to offer farmers a head-to-toe assessment across a 12-month period.

She said the health checks have led to an influx of visitors, with general community members starting to attend the clinics because of an overwhelmed local general practitioner service.

She said farmers had presented to the urgent care facility and local GP service following their checks at the saleyards.



"We're talking about farmers and the wider community who may not necessarily access healthcare unless they're really sick," Ms Heard said.

The hospital is also taking part in a research project, with Dr Jennifer Keast from the University of Melbourne Rural Health Academic Network.

"We are developing some research around this program now and we are also looking at how we can potentially expand this model," she said.

"It's also creating a really fantastic opportunity for us to work with local clinicians who aren't necessarily under our banner."

She said the work also allowed for a stronger partnership with the local council, and an opportunity for the hospital's staff in training to have new learning opportunities.

"As far as we've seen, this is the only model we know of that goes directly to these types of events in the farming community," she said.

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