

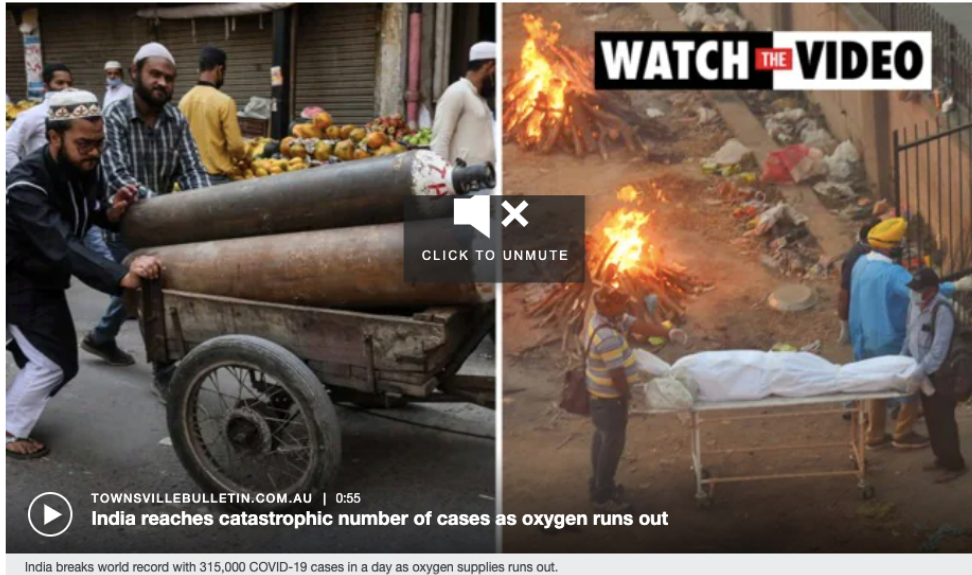
GEELONG

All of Geelong's latest health news for the week of April 26

A Geelong man who launched a popular COVID-19 community help website harnessing the goodwill of local neighbourhoods has expanded it to India, signing on 30,000 people in just a few days.

Tamara McDonald, Geelong Advertiser

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India breaks world record with 315,000 COVID-19 cases in a day as oxygen supplies runs out.

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A Geelong man who launched a popular COVID-19 community help website has expanded it to India, signing on 30,000 people in just a few days.

Geelong tech guru Aamir Qutub developed the Angel Next Door platform last year, harnessing the goodwill of local neighbourhoods during COVID-19 lockdowns.

The website helped around 10,000 isolated local residents within three weeks of its launch.

Following its success in Australia, Mr Qutub expanded the site to India on Thursday in a bid to help during the COVID-19 crisis.

More than two million new COVID-19 cases have been recorded in India in the past week.

Mr Qutub said the non-profit community-driven venture had helped save lives.

"India is in real crisis at the moment and Australians can offer help and assist also by bringing this to the attention of family and friends in India," he said.

"I've been hearing news of so many deaths every day from my relatives and friends in India and there's no central resource to provide any help."





Aamir Qutub has taken his viral Geelong COVID-19 community help platform to India - with around 30,000 people using the service as the country grapples with a rise in coronavirus cases. Picture: Mike Dugdale

Mr Qutub said the website had received a strong response “right across India”, with request and offers uploaded and updated every couple of minutes.

“It has been providing oxygen, ventilators, ICU beds and drawing huge responses from people all over the country,” he said. The website is intended to link people who could use a helping hand with those willing to be a “real-life angel” in their area.

Piyush Mishra, who lives near New Delhi, was in need of oxygen cylinders for his father.

He tried to get leads through Instagram stories, but it was of no help.

He was informed about the resource platform and within two minutes was able to reach out to a verified supplier who also helped him with free delivery.

Mr Mishra’s father is now stable and is expected to be discharged from hospital. The Angel Next Door website offers greater security and privacy than other help sites.

Identity and contact details are kept fully confidential and not shared with the platform users at any stage, unlike Facebook groups and other online communities.

NO CURE FOR NERVE TUMOUR CONDITION

Grovedale’s Kaitlyn Thomas is just 26, but a health disorder has left her hobbling around on crutches and unable to work.

Ms Thomas was diagnosed with neurofibromatosis (NF) when she was about three years old. NF is a lifelong genetic condition that causes tumours to form on nerves in the body, including the brain and spine.

Progressive and unpredictable, NF can also cause cancer, blindness, deafness, as well as learning difficulties and chronic pain. It affects one in every 2500 adults and children and, on average, every three days a child is born with NF in Australia.

With limited treatment options and no cure for NF, those diagnosed can spend much of their lives waiting for further signs of progression.

Ms Thomas suffered epilepsy as a child, but has largely outgrown seizures now, and experienced some learning difficulties.

“For the last six to seven years I’ve had chronic pain because of NF,” Ms Thomas said. “I’ve got tumours at every level of my spine.”



Neurofibromatosis (NF) Awareness Month case study. Kaitlyn Thomas and partner Christian Hehir. Picture: Mike Dugdale

Ms Thomas considers herself lucky that her tumours have so far been non-cancerous.

She recently graduated from a social work degree but is currently unable to work due to NF.

"I can't work, I have issues sleeping, I have to use crutches to get around," she said. "It's really difficult to stay positive."

Her message to others battling the condition was not to be afraid.

"Don't let it hold you back, there's a lot of people out there who also have it," she said. "There's nowhere near enough awareness."

NF Awareness Month kicks off from Saturday.

Federal Health Minister Greg Hunt in February announced \$7m to support NF research, and a further \$1m over the next four years to support the ongoing work of the Children's Tumour Foundation.

Children's Tumour Foundation in Australia head of marketing and fundraising, Renee Anschau, said NF was the most common neurological genetic condition, yet few people had heard about it.

Awareness initiatives will run for the entire month of May but will culminate on World NF Awareness Day on May 17, when Australia will light up blue and green.

Geelong's catenary lights will honour the cause on May 16.

GEELONG EXPANDS COVID VACCINE ROLLOUT

BARWON Health is increasing capacity in preparation for more people becoming eligible for the coronavirus vaccine from Monday.

Anyone aged over 50 will be eligible to receive AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine from next week.

Barwon Health spokeswoman Kate Bibby said the community vaccination hub at the former Ford site in Norlane has the capacity to vaccinate at least 2000 people per day.

The expanded criteria comes after the hub's scope expanded to welcome anyone aged over 70 last week.

Ms Bibby said this week, demand for vaccination appointments has been steady.

"We do have available bookings and we encourage community to book in or turn up," Ms Bibby said.

"We've set up more clinics next week in anticipation of the increased demand from people over 50 who will now be able to access AstraZeneca vaccinations.

"Bookings are now open for people over 50 and we've seen just under a 40 per cent increase in our website traffic this week.

"Barwon Health is increasing capacity and we have adequate vaccine supply to ensure we can meet demand."

The hub at the former Ford site is currently open Monday to Saturday, and there is scope to extend hours further into the rollout.

"The demand for appointments guides how many days we operate and the hours of operation," Ms Bibby said.

"Also as vaccine supply increases we anticipate being able to run extended hours clinics and over the weekends.

"The COVID-19 vaccines are safe effective and free and we encourage everyone to take advantage of what is offered as we all want to keep our loved ones safe and minimise the risk of a return to restrictions."

Vaccination bookings are now available at the community vaccination hub at the former

Ford site for people aged over 50.

To book call 1800 675 398 or go to barwonhealth.org.au/coronavirus/covid19-vaccine

NO COVERT HEALTH AMALGAMATION PLAN, STATE SAYS

The state government has rubbished opposition claims that it is covertly planning on amalgamating health services.

The opposition launched a 'Hands Off Our Hospitals' petition, on the back of claims there was a growing push to amalgamate services under a 'formal partnership approach'.

It claimed a government plan would see health services, including in Geelong, appointed as lead organisations above smaller hospitals in what Labor branded "Regional Area Health Partnerships".

The opposition claimed rather than being an equal partnership, health services feared it was designed to simplify the process of sweeping amalgamations in the future.

Opposition health spokeswoman Georgie Crozier said the state government must "come clean" on what Labor's "secret plan" to amalgamate health services will mean.

But a state government spokeswoman said the government was not amalgamating local hospitals and any suggestion of this was "simply scaremongering".

"Providing safe and quality healthcare close to home is our priority and we will not be dictated by those engaging in political point scoring," the spokeswoman said.

"Our hospitals and health services have a strong history – well before the coronavirus pandemic – of working together to provide better healthcare for local communities, with more specialists and care services and more jobs for local communities."

There are current partnerships and numerous projects between health services across the state.



Drug user told cops she had knife to stab someone in attack

BID TO GROW THERAPY DOG PROGRAM FOR GEELONG KIDS

A fundraiser is calling for cash to support using pooch power to calm local kids.

Paws4Kids is raising funds to bring MacKillop Family Services' innovative therapy dog program to Geelong.

MacKillop's Paw Pals program uses therapy dogs to help vulnerable children who have stopped going to school – or are at risk of disengaging from education – to manage their emotions and behaviour, improve their confidence and reconnect with their education.

Many of the children struggle because they are dealing with tough issues beyond the school gates: family violence, neglect, living out of home, disability, or social and emotional challenges.

To support the expansion of the program, a matched-giving fundraising day called Paws4Kids will take place on Wednesday.

Every dollar donated will be tripled by matching partners, with the aim of raising \$250,000 for Paw Pals.

Subject to reaching that target of \$250,000, PETstock Assist will continue to triple donations to help raise another \$120,000 so MacKillop can bring Paw Pals to Geelong.

Paw Pals co-ordinator Sarah Castle sees how therapy dogs have turned around the



MacKillop Family Services students Xavier Anthony, left and Matt Woods with Paw Pals therapy dog Indie. Picture: Alison Wynd

lives of children who were struggling to engage in learning.

“I wish everyone could see what a difference working with our therapy dogs makes to these children’s lives and to their families,” Ms Castle said.

“Paws4Kids has enabled the program to get off the ground and become a success, we now need to grow so we can get that support to as many children as possible.”

Once the Paws4Kids target has been reached, MacKillop plans to launch the program in Geelong later in 2021.

To find out more or donate, visit paws4kids.org.au

GEELONG INDIAN COMMUNITY SHOCKED AT CRISIS

Geelong’s Indian community members hold fears for loved ones as the country battles a devastating second wave.

Confronting vision from India has shown people dying with COVID-19 in plain sight in public as the nation grapples with an oxygen shortage.

India has recorded more than 17.3 million coronavirus cases, and more than 195,000 deaths.

It recorded [more than 350,000 new cases on Monday alone](#).

Atamjit Singh, who is the Sikh Community of Greater Geelong treasurer and secretary of the Indian Association of Geelong, moved to Geelong in 2006 from India.

Mr Singh, who is from Punjab region, said he had friends who had contracted COVID-19 in India.

While they have recovered, they had not been confident they would have survived if they had required hospitalisation.



“They said the health system was not prepared,” Mr Singh said.

Mr Singh said the government had not learnt from the India’s first wave, and scared relatives were locking themselves in their homes to try and avoid catching coronavirus.

Mr Singh said there were some students from Deakin University in Geelong who lost parents to COVID during the country’s first wave and flew back to India.

He said local members of the Indian community were “really grateful” for how Australia had handled coronavirus.

“We are concerned about the situation in India,” he said.

Mr Singh said the Sikh community had done “a lot” during COVID.

Members of the Sikh community have worked tirelessly to provide thousands of meals to Geelong community members in need during the pandemic.

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In India, Sikhs were distributing food and oxygen, Mr Singh said.

He said the Sikh community would try to support their counterparts in India as much as they could.

“Obviously you can’t do much, you can’t travel,” he said.

Diversitat acting chief executive Brian McMahon said the organisation was deeply concerned about the rate of new cases and the high death toll associated with the second wave of COVID-19 in India.

“As you would expect, the Indian community in Geelong are extremely worried about their friends and relatives overseas,” Mr McMahon said.

“Diversitat continues to provide support to all of our clients with friends and relatives overseas suffering as a result of COVID-19.”

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Deakin University Pro Vice-Chancellor (International) John Molony said prioritising support for Indian students and all student cohorts continued to be a primary focus for Deakin.

“During the difficult peak pandemic impact in Australia, Indian students represented the largest cohort of students to receive support,” he said.

“As we continue to work through our academic year, it is pleasing to see a reduction in requests for support from students as they move back into the workforce and re-establish income security.

“In the main, our Indian students who were located in Australia at the beginning of the pandemic have remained in Australia.

“We have also welcomed many new students, who are beginning their study with us from overseas.”

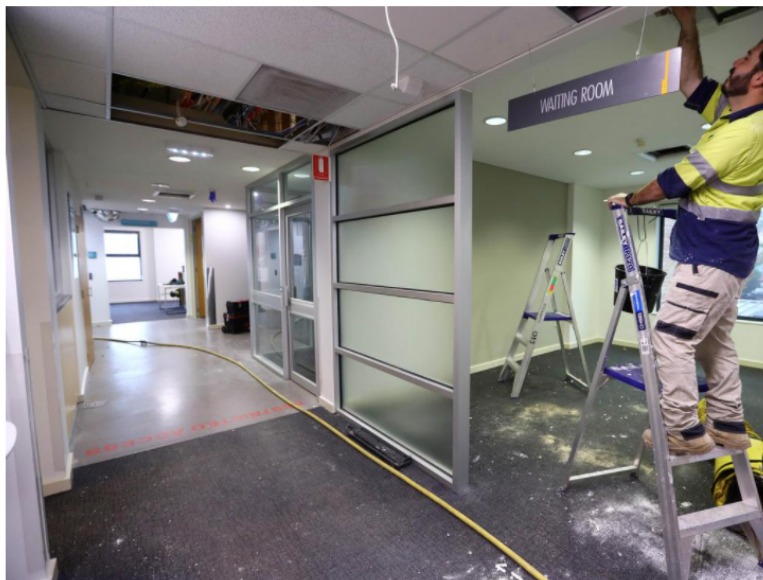
tamara.mcdonald@news.com.au

SURGERY WAITS SLASHED THANKS TO EX-PRIVATE HOSPITAL WORKS

Two additional operating theatres at University Hospital Geelong Building B have created additional capacity for elective surgery in a boost for the region.

With Geelong experiencing strong population growth, Barwon Health operating services manager Elyse MacDonald said the additional theatres would help address demand for elective surgery, particularly those deferred due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We expect to perform around 3300 surgeries per annum initially, growing that number in the future,” she said.



Renovations have taken place inside the former Geelong Private Hospital, now University Hospital Geelong Building B

“The project involved refurbishing theatres previously used at the old Geelong Private Hospital and reconfiguring the space to include first and second stage recovery, reception, change rooms, staff rooms, equipment stores, offices and an education space.

“Our initial focus will be on elective gynaecological surgery, along with urology and general surgerv.”

A significant recruitment campaign for the refurbished theatres netted 30 new staff, including several who have relocated to the region from Melbourne and more still being recruited for.

Newly appointed Building B admission and discharge nurse Melissa O'Connor is excited to start her new position at Barwon Health this month, after finishing her current role at Alfred Health.

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"I did my graduate year at Barwon Health in 2005 and I'm looking forward to returning to my roots in this new and exciting role," she said.

"Working in the public health system is important to me so I'm thrilled to join my husband who also works at Barwon Health, and return to Geelong and improve my work-life balance."

The new theatres will be operational between 7am and 8pm, four days per week.

Completed last month, the project was made possible with funding from the Victorian Department of Health and the combined efforts of Barwon Health's Operating Services and Building Services.

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Originally published as [Geelong tech guru's app helping rescue India in crisis](#)

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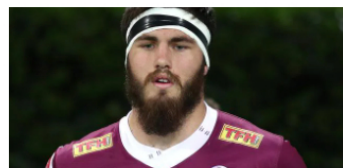
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High jump brothers earn top national accolades, battle for best leap

One is left footed, the other right, but they share the same goal – World Junior titles and the quest to be better than the other.



Wright set for key role off the Reds' bench

SUPER RUGBY AU Reds captain Liam Wright is

Couple's Facebook marketplace crime spree

QLD COURT A couple, who post pictures of themselves posing with a gun, have fronted court after terrorising a Facebook marketplace seller in Queensland.



Man in hospital after single-vehicle smash

Emergency services were called to a busy



still an important part of Queensland's Super Rugby AU grand final plans despite being dumped to the bench.



stretch on the Sunshine Coast after a man was injured in a single-vehicle crash.



India breaks world record with 315,000 COVID-19 cases in a day as oxygen supplies runs out.