

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023



Registered  
NDIS Provider

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### Vision

Optimum personal recovery and wellbeing.

### Our Purpose

To provide opportunity for people living with mental illness and/or complex needs to enjoy a meaningful life by strengthening self-identity, personal responsibility and hope.

### Our Guiding Principles

Recovery-orientated practice is a partnership where the person with the lived experience is the expert in their recovery and our staff bring their understanding and expertise to support this journey.

- Person centred
- Respect and dignity
- Acceptance of diversity
- Reflective practice
- Strengths based approach
- Flexibility and innovation
- Collaborative partnerships
- Community connection and participation
- Skilled, supported and informed workforce
- Evaluation, planning and continuous improvement



## CHAIR/CEO REPORT

**As has been the case in the previous three years, the 2022-2023 financial year has been a period in which Mentis Assist has experienced a combination of continuing change and increasing challenges.**

Significant among the challenges being dealt with has been our ability to provide our traditional high-quality level of services in a financial environment of increasing costs and diminishing revenue in 'real terms'. Indeed, the following statement made in last year's Report remains valid today... and probably more so:

"In recent times, every passing year seems to have been characterised by significant challenges for organisations such as Mentis Assist. This is particularly so in terms of maintaining a sustainable and financially viable organisation when government funding levels are simply not keeping pace with the actual costs of service provision".

The ongoing viability of the organisation has been a major focus of the Board and the senior management team throughout the year. In particular, it has been necessary to very closely monitor the 'performance' of our NDIS funded programs to ensure that the deficit from these activities is mitigated in the short term and can be considered to be remediable and sustainable into the longer term.

In the context of change, the sector wide redesign and transformation initiated by the state government, has meant that organisations have found it necessary to 'rethink' their business models. To this end, Mentis Assist has undertaken the process of reassessing its strategic direction and has subsequently developed a new set of strategic and business planning documents to guide and evaluate our future activities over the next planning period.

This planning process was necessarily thorough and involved stages of: exploration, consultation, distillation, finalisation. The outcome is a 'roadmap' for the next three years. Themes and comments from our external stakeholders and Participant Advisory Group were noted. We have reproduced two 'key' comments below:

- "Mentis Assist is identified and well embedded into its community".
- "Reputation and inter-organisational relationships between Mentis Assist and partners are robust and valued across multiple workforce levels".

We accept that these comments are relevant to the fact that in the period 2022-2023, Mentis Assist supported 1,700 clients, accepted 714 new clients, (excluding a newly developed service known as Frankston Mental Health & Wellbeing Local) delivered 28,000 hours of service to NDIS clients and "tens of thousands" of service hours across all our programs. Through our targeted outreach programs and our deep connection to local community our 'teams' have supported some of the most vulnerable people in our community and have provided them with recovery based, trauma informed, person centred care. Individuals have been supported to stabilise, monitor and manage their mental health as well as being assisted to connect with the services and supports they need to build capacity and become more connected and involved in their community.

The closure of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub, which had been running successfully in Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula, was an unfortunate outcome of the cessation of funding as a result of the sector wide redesign of service systems that we referred to earlier in this report. Nevertheless, as part of the change process, we have fortunately and proudly been part of a successful tender with our partners Wellways Australia and Peninsula Health. The tender process resulted in the commencement of the Frankston Mental Health and Wellbeing Local in late 2022. This program is a State Government funded initiative to provide people over the age of 26 years of age with Mental Health and/or Drug and Alcohol 'supports' without the need to present to a hospital emergency department. It provides free services and offers clients a mental health navigator and range of other supports appropriate to their needs, including psychologists, mental health nurses, peer workers, art therapists, psychiatrists, or addiction specialists, among others.

Also on a very positive note, it was also pleasing to receive notification that funding for the much-needed services provided through the Stepped Care program along with the EIPSR (Early Intervention Psychosocial Support Response) program, has been renewed for a further two years.

Factors such as healthy KPI results, successful client outcomes, ongoing recovery from the pandemic, settling into new ways of working and an overall high level of satisfaction from clients, staff and carers indicates that Mentis Assist has achieved another year of operational success despite the financial factors referred to at the commencement of our report. In this regard, as we said earlier, the NDIS funding model continues to be a challenge. However, despite this challenge, we are pleased to be able to say that the delivery of services to NDIS participants has been of the same high standard as our other programs.

The past year also brought some organisational restructuring as a result of the retirement the Director of Services, Mark Smith, who had been in that role for the previous six years. Mark's overall contribution to the community managed mental health sector was highly valued and his years of leadership and professionalism at Mentis Assist, especially during very challenging times such as the 'global Covid 19 pandemic' was integral to our success as a respected service provider.

The restructure following Mark's departure has resulted in a new directorate for clinical services which brings together the programs that align in the work we do around the 'stepped care' model. A separate directorate has also been created encompassing the functions of business development and community services. Accordingly, we now welcome our new Director of Clinical Services, Michael Sillekens, and our new Director of Community Services and Business Development, Jayne Parish.

Our corporate sponsors, Peninsula Hot Springs, continue to impress us with their level of commitment through the hosting of the Ride for Relief event which runs for a week through Gippsland and ends on the Mornington Peninsula.



This is the fifth year that the bike ride has occurred with preparation taking a full year and countless hours being provided by volunteers to produce the very successful event it has become. This year, corporate sponsorships were at an all-time high, finishing up with approximately \$150K provided to Mentis Assist... all of which supports the operation of the Breaking Barriers program. We are both excited and grateful that this event will remain as a yearly calendar 'fixture'.

As always, we would like to acknowledge and thank all associated individuals, companies, government departments and other entities for their contributions to our achievements over the past twelve months. We would particularly like to thank our Board of Directors, executive, leadership team, volunteers, participant advisory group and all staff for their ongoing hard work and support.

Without the contribution of these many people and entities, Mentis Assist could not achieve the positive outcomes that the organisation has for years been become known for.

In conclusion, we remain hopeful that moving forward into the new financial year the findings of the recent 'White Paper' published by the 'Ability Roundtable' and titled "Insights into Financial and Workforce Performance of the Disability Support Sector" may lead to system wide mental health reforms which can acknowledge the almost 40 years of professional and skilled work that Mentis Assist has provided to our community and which will enable us to continue to do so in a viable manner.

**Paul Burness**  
Board Chairman



**Terry Palioportas**  
Chief Executive Officer





## DIRECTOR OF CLINICAL SERVICES REPORT

### PARTNERSHIP WORK

This year we have invested a lot of time in partnership work, meeting regularly with South Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network, Peninsula Health, Wellways, and the Dept. of Health to include a few. The development of communities of practice in stepped care leads the way for future system planning and reform. Steering committees under the Mental Health and Wellbeing Local is driving the new era for mental health service delivery and internally we are bringing our different programs together under the one director to improve synergies and collaboration. We have also worked very closely with the Department focusing on implementation and evaluation preparing for the roll out of future Locals across the region and state.

### FUTURE PLANNING

We've already commenced planning for the next year with a small expansion of our API program into the Frankston LGA. We are tendering for new Locals in the Southeast region continually improving the stepped care program and embedding the Frankston Mental Health and Wellbeing Local and new ways of delivering services. A new mental health and Wellbeing Act comes into force in September 2023 and an alignment to the 12 principles is imperative.

### INTERNAL FOCUS

Leading the way in clinical governance and quality improvement has also been a big focus for the year. Reviewing every clinical incident with an eye on safety and best practice has seen the roll out of a secondary consult panel for Mentis Staff, promotion of staff trainings, improved supervision processes, review of risk assessments and overall, better supported, and developed staff.

**Director of Clinical Services, Michael Sillekens**



**Leading the way in clinical governance and quality improvement has also been a big focus for the year.**



## Client Story

Cindy's story highlights how a program can help people move from meaningless to meaningful. We call this client Cindy because of her story. Moving from New Zealand as a young child with her mother, Cindy never became an Australian citizen. Her mother remarried and moved in with her new husband and their son. As she got older, Cindy struggled with anxiety and social phobia. Something sinister at home was suspected as the family controlled her movements and had some vested interest in keeping her at home. Her role in the house was to cook and clean. No accommodation was made to meet her vegetarian diet and as such she often went without basic food. She was not entitled to receive an income, unable (or not allowed) to work externally and relied entirely on the family for everything. She described never having owned a pair of jeans, only got new underwear at Christmas time and never had any personal items. When we finally arranged to get her admitted to PARCS (Prevention and Recovery Care Service), she had no sanitary products and the staff chipped in to buy her some from the local supermarket before getting assistance from a family support agency.

Initially the level of involvement was slow, and it took a long time to build trust and rapport. The focus on sorting out visas was a dead end until a recent change in policy will allow for her to seek Australian residency.

She was engaging but it took a long time. We linked her up with a new position we created for a student provisional psychologist on placement with Mentis. Again, this was a slow process and took several sessions just to cut through the wariness before some meaningful work could commence. Being invested in her own self-recovery helped and setting tasks for Cindy as homework saw her eventually catching a bus to come and see her psychologist at the office. Two attempts to get her to PARCS failed because of the anxiety this caused but, on the 3rd try, she was admitted for a two week stay. Advocating for her and a good relationship with Monash Health allowed space for her to fail but try again. A visit to her in PARCS by our clinicians found her sitting at the dining room table in conversation with co-residents. So impressed with her progress, PARCS offered Cindy the opportunity to move to Extended PARCS where she could stay for up to six months. At this stage she has declined, mainly due to a strange hold the family have over her at home. As of 1<sup>st</sup> July, she will be eligible to apply for permanency as a resident due to changes which will at least give her some income and better opportunities to find work alongside some independence. Cindy wrote the following letter to us following exit from PARCS:

### MHICC Clinician

Hi,

*I will choose not to share my identity, only my experience working with Mentis Assist.*

*I currently am 28 years of age, and emigrated from New Zealand to Australia in April of 2004, at the age of 9.*

*I have battled with anxiety (social and generalised) for as long as I can remember, and depression since I was 16 years old.*

*In July of 2022, I self-referred to MHICC program for assistance with my mental health and began working with a nurse on exposure therapy, among other CBT therapies, in an attempt to combat my anxiety struggles.*

*I was recommended a self-help book called "feel the fear and do it anyway" - by Susan Jeffers, that I listened to as an audio book; which further trained my brain to think better, and understand better the things that we worry about.*

*An opportunity arose during my time to speak with a provisional (now fully qualified) clinical psychologist to provide extra support and assistance with my mental health struggles.*

*They helped me as they pushed me just a little out of my comfort zone without causing too much overwhelm from the stress of change. They combined the theoretical and practical knowledge of psychology, with tools to help me in order to get better from my illness.*

*The case manager additionally provided assistance with sorting out my visa struggles - as I am/was an unprotected citizen of New Zealand, residing in Australia.*

*I was also referred a short two week stay at PARCS Narre Warren for 24/7 ongoing support, which really boosted my ability to be more confident and socialise with people better and set goals for my recovery afterwards.*

*I envision things a little better now; even though the path through any illness is a lifelong journey, albeit one that I can manage better, so long as I can reach out for help when I am struggling with anything.*

*I am slowly becoming more independent and assertive with myself- recognising when I need to reach out for help and when I can handle things on my own.*

*Thank you for taking the time to read this letter about my time receiving support, and I hope my story can help anyone struggling to seek and accept help to work on themselves to better their mental health.*

Peace,

Anonymous.

# DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT REPORT

**Dear Stakeholders, I am pleased to report that for the period 2022 to 2023 Mentis Assist has remained committed to our mission of providing accessible and compassionate mental health services to the community. Our strength and commitment are reflected in our achievements, challenges and our ongoing efforts to support the mental wellbeing of individuals across the Southeast Melbourne region.**

In the year from 2022-2023 we supported 1699 clients, took on 714 new clients, and delivered over 27,000 hours of service to clients across all of our programs (excluding the new Frankston Mental Health and Wellbeing Local). Through our targeted outreach programs and our deep connection to local community, we have supported some of the most vulnerable in our community and provided recovery based, trauma informed, person centred care. We have supported individuals to stabilise, monitor and manage their mental health, we have assisted to connect them with the services and supports they need to build capacity and become more connected and involved in their community.

While we commiserated the government's decision to defund our highly successful Mental Health Wellbeing Hub counselling program in June 2022, the introduction of two new programs has been cause for celebration. In 2019 Mentis Assist and Peninsula Hot Springs formed a community partnership to raise awareness and funds to support mental health initiatives in our community. Through the partnership an annual fundraising event 'Ride for Relief' was developed. Year-on-year the partnership and community support has strengthened, and in 2022 over \$150K of funds were raised. The Breaking Barriers program launched in August 2022, and is our first ever community mental health program to deliver outreach support services in the region that are funded entirely through community donations and without any source of government funding. To say we are proud of this achievement is an understatement!

We are also proud of our successful tender with our partners Wellways Australia and Peninsula Health, resulting in the commencement of the Frankston Mental Health and Wellbeing Local in late 2022. A State Government funded initiative, the program supports people over the age of 26 years to receive Mental Health and/or Drug and Alcohol supports without the need to present to the hospital emergency department. This new program provides free services and offers clients a mental health navigator and range of other supports appropriate to their needs, including; psychologists, mental health nurses, peer workers, art therapists, psychiatrists, or addiction specialists, to name a few.

The Mentis Assist teams of dedicated employees and support staff work tirelessly to ensure that our services are accessible, effective and responsive to the diverse needs of our community. Returning to post-pandemic life has enhanced our connection with each other, and re-established collegial relationships. The importance of feeling connected and supported cannot be overrated, particularly in the sometimes confronting space in which we operate. Post-pandemic life has also presented challenges of reestablishing office-based working when we had all become accustomed to working from home, and so we have listened and worked collaboratively with our staff to try and accommodate better work-life balance options.

Our NDIS teams have spent the past twelve months reestablishing after the difficult years of the pandemic. Our staff have once again stabilised, and we have returned to 'normal' functions of service delivery. In the final month of the reporting period we announced the launch of a new NDIS service to include therapy supports. We have been overwhelmed by the interest from our current clients and from referring services and look forward to providing updates on the growth and development of this program over the next twelve months.

Our Social Support program staff have continued to meet, and even exceed, many of their client service targets throughout the 2022-2023 year. This small but diligent team of staff are often required to work across different state funded Home and Community Care (HACC), and Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) funding streams, meaning they work with clients across the lifespan from aged 18+ and have always been our only team who are specifically funded work with clients over the age of 65 years in the My Aged Care space. They provide case management, individual support and group work for clients who present with mental health but often also have other complex issues including; elder abuse, family violence, housing instability, hoarding issues, legal matters, financial instability and social isolation. The work they do in this space is challenging, but the outcomes they achieve are impressive.

We continue with our vision of a community where everyone has access to high-quality mental health services without stigma or barriers. We extend our gratitude to our clients, our participant advisory group, peer workers, partners, employees and supporters who all make our important work possible. Your unwavering dedication to mental health awareness and support is truly commendable, thank-you.

**Director of Community Services and Business Development,  
Jayne Parish**



## Breaking Barriers: Courtney's Success Story

*I came into the Breaking Barriers Program in September of 2022 after countless cycles of hospital admissions, running through the hamster wheel of being unwell, but needing to be acutely unwell to access support. There was no in between for living outside the hospital walls and staying well. This is what I had thought until 10 years later being linked in with the Breaking Barriers Program.*

*From day one, I was met with kindness and compassion. I remember being a little frightened to sit into my first appointment, worried if this was going to just be another hour of time I didn't know how to utilise but I quickly learnt that it was the start of my life turning around. During my time in the Breaking Barriers program, I have learnt how to self-advocate, I was able to set realistic goals with the program. I never realised the value of being prescribed a cup of coffee and a walk in the park, which for many of us I know that it is such a nice change to what can be an extremely clinical process.*

*A typical day with Carmel for me starts with a good cup of coffee and a chit chat! We are able to plan what needs to be done for the day, and each week that can look very different. I am no stranger to panic in a busy supermarket, and one of my goals was to push the boundaries of my anxiety in busy crowds and public spaces. Carmel is a fundamental support during this process, I am met with nothing but encouragement, grounding and empathy during what can be a somewhat challenging situation. I am able to confidently keep challenging the situations that can be overwhelming, I am no longer running away from these situations, but rather facing them head on because I know I have the strength and courage to do so because there is someone walking beside me.*

*Nothing beats the feeling of accomplishing the tasks we set out at the start of our sessions and feeling ready to tackle the rest of the day. For me, it really is the little achievements that make way for the bigger goals we have set, and I owe this to the breaking barriers team for the opportunity to grow and thrive. My worker Carmel assisted me with other practical supports as well including assisting with my NDIS application and even writing a support letter for that application. I have been encouraged to access other supports and informed about what supports both clinical and holistic which I have been able to tailor to my specific needs.*

*Since linking up with the Breaking Barriers program, I have been able to go back to more regular working hours, I have reintegrated with the community, I am able to identify moments of crisis and utilize safety plans made with the Breaking Barriers team, and I have successfully been able to stay out of the hospital system since September - which has been due to the endless support of my care team. I want to thank Breaking barriers for continuously helping me achieve my goals, for allowing me to stand here today and speak with you all, and I am nothing short of grateful.*

*Thank you.*

*Courtney*

## STAFF INFORMATION AT THE END OF JUNE 2023



**96**

Employees (EOFY)

**140**

Total of employees throughout the year



**42**

New employees during the last 12 months



**7%**

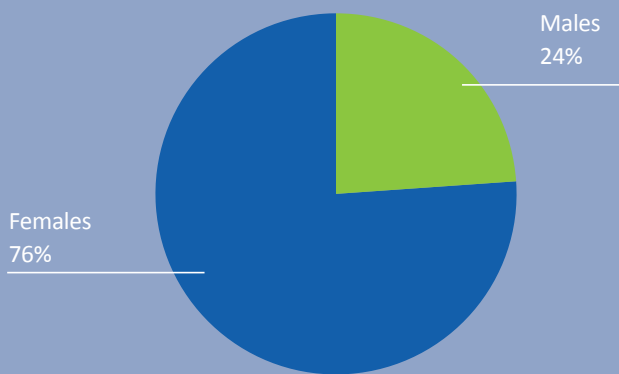
Have been with us for over 10 years



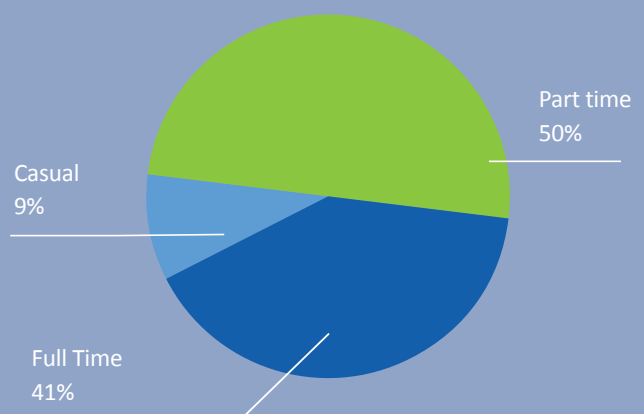
**45**

Average age

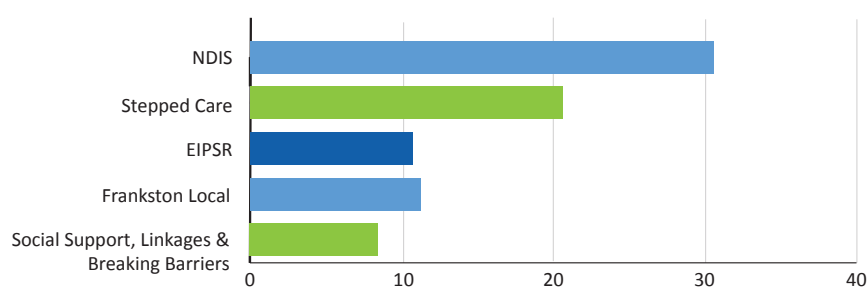
Staff is Made up of



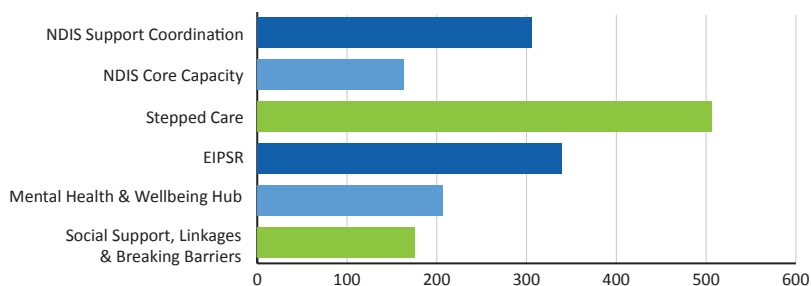
Number of Staff by Employment Type



Number of Staff Members by Program/Department



## Total number of Clients Supported during the year by programs



**714**

New Clients to  
Mentis Assist

### NDIS SUPPORT COORDINATION DATA



**302**

Clients Supported  
during the year



**28**

New Clients  
Supported during  
the year



**214**

Active Clients as of  
June 30, 2023



**10,522**hrs

Total Client support  
hours provided

### NDIS CORE SUPPORTS DATA



**165**

Clients Supported  
during the year



**36**

New Clients  
Supported during  
the year



**110**

Active Clients as of  
June 30, 2023



**17,384**hrs

Client direct  
support hours

SUMMARY PROGRAM INFORMATION YEAR ENDING 30 JUNE 2023



**1,699**

Clients Supported during the year  
(excluding the Frankston Local)



**714**

Total number of new Clients during the year  
(excluding the Frankston Local)



**27,000+** hrs

of service to our NDIS Clients  
over the year

# FINANCIAL REVIEW

**Despite ongoing sector-wide challenges faced (most notably NDIS), a surplus of \$361,544 has been achieved for the year. Whilst we continued to strive for operational excellence and optimised client outcomes across our expanded program offering, this surplus was higher than budget.**

Total service delivery Income increased primarily due to the introduction of the Frankston Local program. A sustained focus on NDIS remained and will continue well into next year. Our Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub program ceased at the conclusion of the financial year, noting that it provided excellent client outcomes both throughout and following the pandemic.

Whilst there was an increase in Total Expenditure throughout the financial year (again primarily due to the Frankston Local program), Mentis' investment in key systems meant our programs were able to benefit through more efficient client service. Notably, there were savings in payroll expenses as ongoing staff shortages continued to impact several programs. Since the pandemic, staff shortages have significantly impacted the mental health sector.

The organisation's Balance Sheet position saw an ongoing reduction in its non-current asset base due to the decision to move to a wholly leased fleet, offset by cash reserves increasing as a result of vehicle sales. A slow increase in interest rates as the financial year progressed, and prudent budgetary management also assisted. Total Equity has increased to \$2,159,291 throughout 2022-23.

## Summary Statement of Profit or Loss

	2023	2022
Commonwealth Govt. Grant Income	\$2,551,713	\$2,401,081
State Govt. Grant Income	\$4,322,513	\$3,066,083
NDIS Income	\$2,476,485	\$2,722,317
Client Program Income	\$2,278	\$355
Interest Received	\$19,923	\$2,793
Gain on Disposal of Assets	\$18,182	\$173,175
Sundry Income	\$329,426	\$74,482
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$9,720,520</b>	<b>\$8,440,286</b>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$9,358,976</b>	<b>\$8,692,881</b>
<b>Profit/(Loss)</b>	<b>\$361,544</b>	<b>(\$252,595)</b>

## Extract of Balance Sheet

	2023	2022
Total Assets	\$4,035,016	\$3,621,856
Total Liabilities	\$1,875,725	\$1,824,109
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>\$2,159,291</b>	<b>\$1,797,747</b>

*your* MENTAL HEALTH matters

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