

# Aged care workers band together during Victorian floods

Aged care staff living in flood-ravaged areas across Victoria's Hume region have banded together to support each other – and their older clients – through the crisis.

Despite many of their own homes being under threat, and some unfortunately underwater, At-Home Aged Care (AHAC) staff from Catholic for-purpose organisation VMCH have continued to work to ensure older clients are safe and well.

VMCH supports hundreds of older people with personal care, allied health, nursing, transport and meal support across the Shepparton, Rochester and Echuca regions, hit hard by devastating floods this past week.

For Shepparton resident and Rostering Coordinator Brooke Chew, 'home' is now a caravan in colleague Eloise Crees' house in nearby Yabba North. Clinical Case Manager Eloise and her family offered Brooke a place to stay when they learned her home was under threat from flood water.

"My husband and I were actually on our way to Echuca testing out our new caravan but turned around when we learned flooding was hitting crisis point in Shepp," Eloise says. "I knew Brooke lived alone so we wanted to help."

The trio went to the nearby showgrounds and lined up for their ration of sandbags, which they took back to Brooke's to help protect her home. Thankfully, the water only reached Brooke's letterbox, but the whole experience was deeply unsettling.

"I'm ok now, because I know, at the moment, my house is ok," Brooke says. "I've been very up and down all week but having the support of Eloise and her family has been great. The caravan was like a luxury. I would have been happy sleeping in a tent or on Eloise's driveway at one point! It was a difficult situation."

Despite all this, Brooke and Eloise have continued to work from Eloise's home, coordinating client rosters and working alongside case managers and client liaison officers to make welfare checks on VMCH clients to ensure they are safe and have adequate food and medications. They say, thankfully, all of their clients are safe for now, with most taken in by friends or family.

The pair are also quick to point out they're not the only ones helping out, with most AHAC staff across Hume going the extra mile to support hundreds of clients affected by the floods.

"One of our colleagues' houses is completely flooded, others are, or have been, trapped in their homes, and everyone is dealing with road closures, power outages and evacuations," Eloise says. "We help because we know our clients are in the same boat. Being involved in a natural disaster is a pretty terrifying thing to happen to your community, and especially being elderly and vulnerable, we just want to help them."

Their manager Magali Kaplan says the actions of the AHAC team are a true reflection of VMCH's values.

"Most people wouldn't be able to conceive of working during such a time, but our staff have stepped up and are putting their own challenges aside to ensure the people we support are looked after. It's incredible, and I'm very proud of them all."

VMCH will continue to provide support to its ageing clients as they begin the cleanup once floodwaters fully drop.

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