

INTRODUCTION

In August 2023, a new Cancer Nurse Coordinator (CNC) intake position was implemented at the Bendigo Regional Cancer Centre in response to consumer and clinicians needs.

Extensive consultation with consumers, priority groups and cancer workforce informed the needs for better coordination and early navigation support for patient's at the start of the cancer journey[1]. Implementation of the role was supported by an expert working group, providing medical triage mentoring and redesign of central intake processes.

1] Bendigo Regional Cancer Centre, Bendigo Health 2022. Consumer consultation process, Regional Cancer Services Plan-2023-2028.

AIM

To evaluate the impacts from the implementation of the CNC role on patient care, health service delivery and experience.

METHOD

The evaluation incorporates retrospective quantitative data sourced from hospital data sets and qualitative data from clinicians (n=9) and patients (n=3) surveys and interviews over September 2023 to April 2024.

MODEL OF CARE

- 1 Triage new patient referrals and complete work-up for first appointment (aligned with optimal care pathways and supported by Oncologists)
- 2 Early Navigation support commences with phone contact to the patient before first appointment, CNC as key contact for any questions, concerns, information and support
- 3 Intake supportive care screening over the phone, identifies needs and vulnerabilities to inform clinic preparation and initiates early referrals to other clinicians and services
- 4 Patient attends new patient clinic appointment, multidisciplinary treatment recommendations, connections made to metro, treating teams and community services close to home

CNC Scope: Includes all solid tumours, from new patient referral (suspected or newly diagnosed) to treatment, Step 2 & 3 Optimal Care Pathway)

RESULTS

PATIENT CARE IMPACTS

In the eight months since the CNC role started 523 new patients were seen in oncology new patient outpatient clinic. A total of 446 newly referred patients from the Loddon Mallee catchment and other bordering regions received contact and early navigation support from the CNC, refer to Figure 1 and 2.

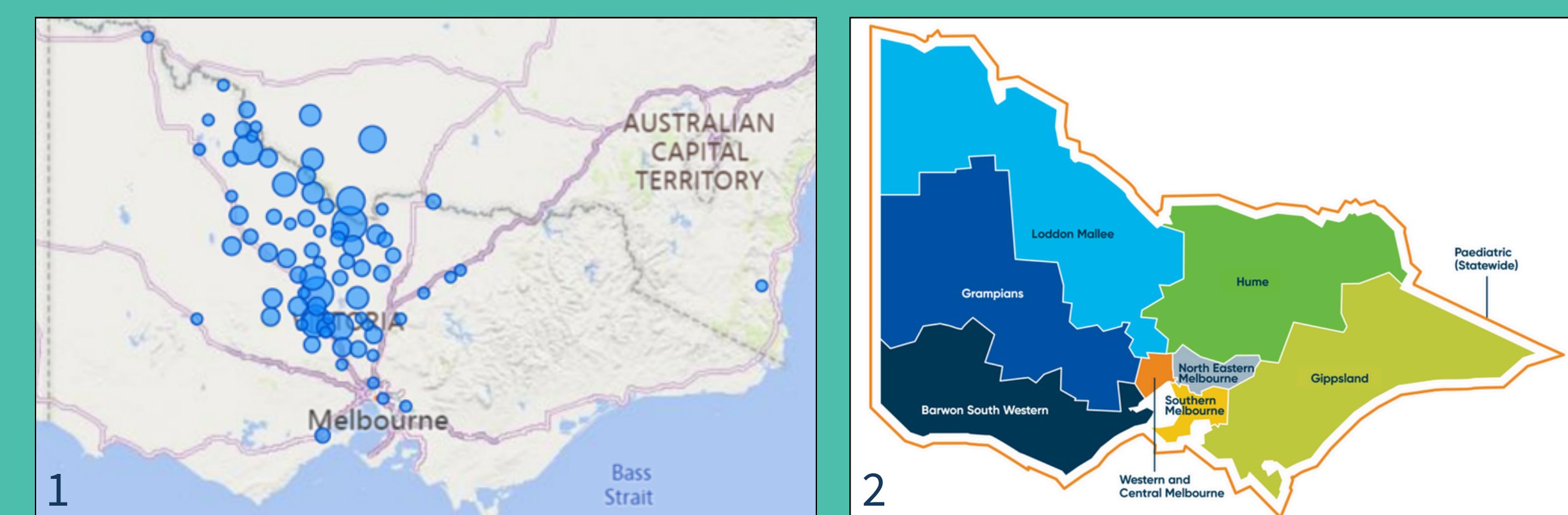


Figure 1. New Patient Contacts by Residential Postcode Location
Figure 2. Map of Victoria showing the Loddon Mallee region

SERVICE UTILISATION

Phone contacts

446 (85%) patients were contacted
132 (25%) patients received more than one contact

Screening completed

412 (79%) patients received screening over the phone

Referrals made

177 early referrals made, 34% patients received referrals

HEALTH SERVICE IMPACTS

- **Clinician time saved on triage duties** (1-1.5 hours per week)
- **Improved completeness of patient work-up information** (fewer patients re-booked due to insufficient information)
- **Established clinic preparation documents** detailing complex, vulnerable needs and early referrals
- **Improved attendance rates at first appointment** (fail to attend rates 0.9%: Sep 23-Apr 24, compared to 4.2%: Jan 23-Aug 24)
- **Formalised three metro- regional pathways** for Sarcoma, Head and Neck and Gynaecological tumours
- **Connecting care closer to home** through early referral to community allied health and other support services

TIMELINESS FROM REFERRAL TO FIRST APPOINTMENT

Pre CNC implementation

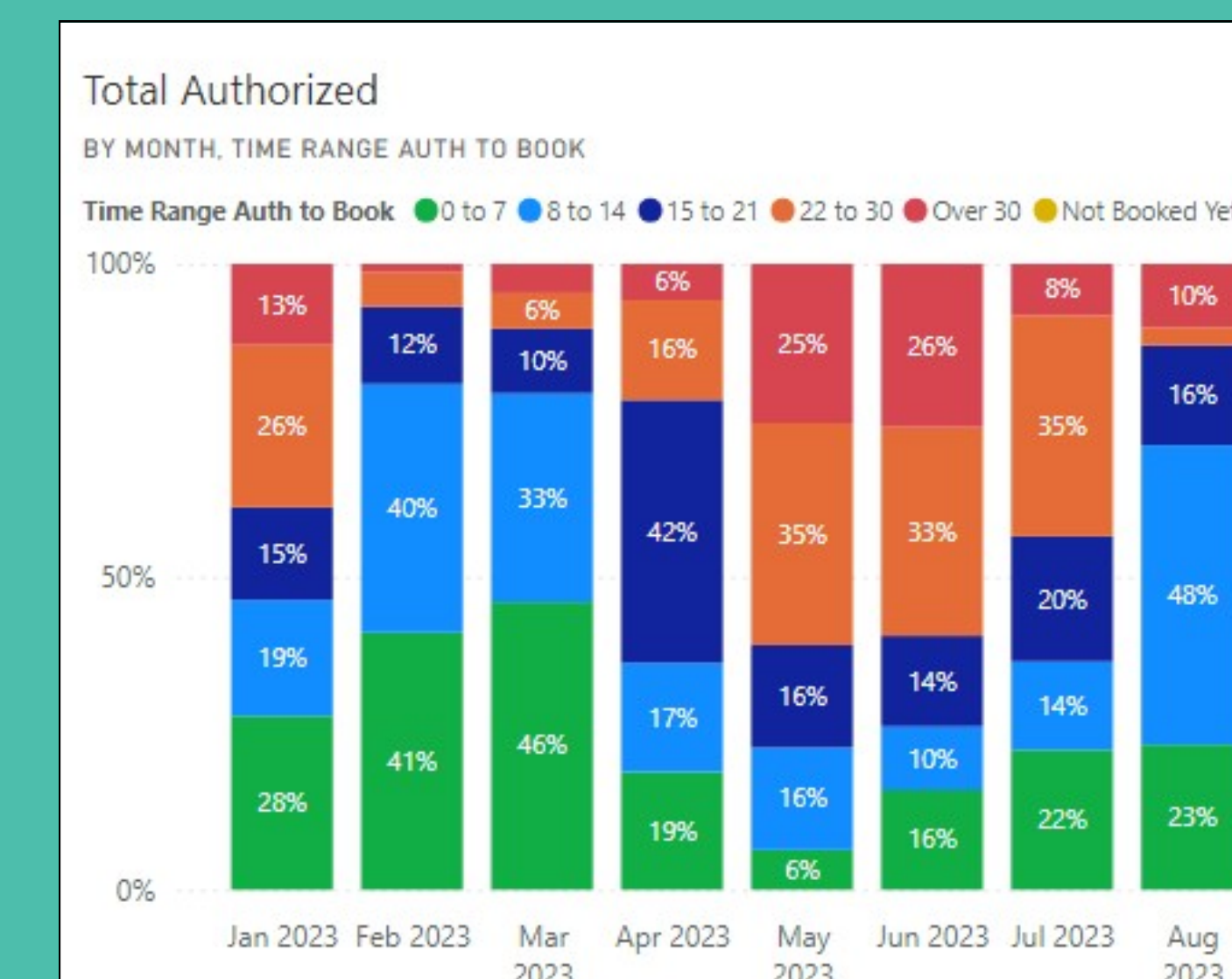


Figure 3. First appointment booked Jan 23-Aug 23

Post CNC implementation

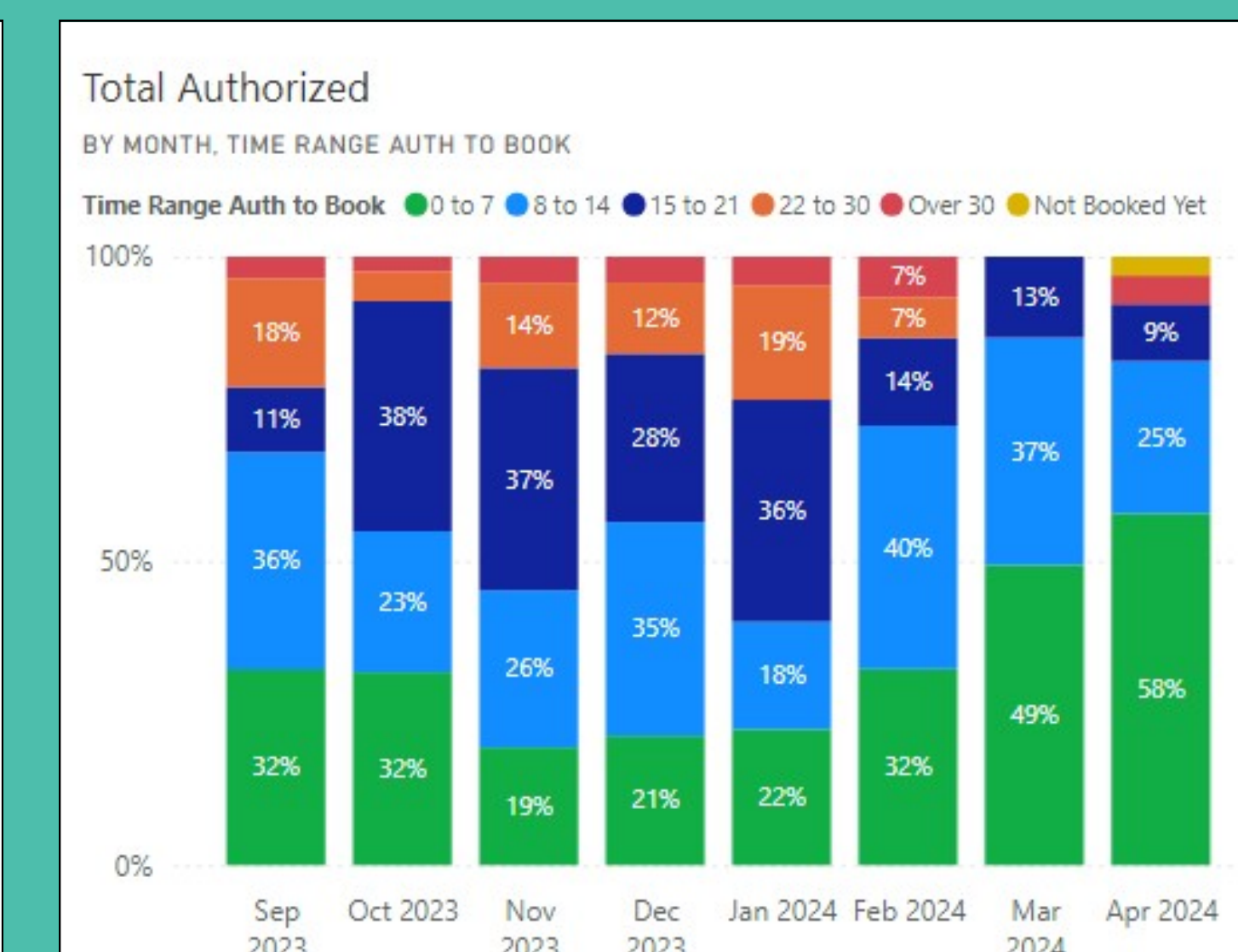


Figure 4. First appointment booked Sep 23- Apr 24

More timely scheduling of first appointment

Patients are waiting less time to see the Oncologist, on average 86.5% patients are seen within 21 days post CNC implementation compared with 68.2% pre CNC.

CONCLUSION

The CNC role has demonstrated positive impacts in patient care and health service efficiencies.

Key benefits:

- Early navigation support for all new patients with solid tumours
- Improved timeliness of entry for first appointment
- Centralised intake and improved service coordination

Next steps:

- Evaluate patient experience and acceptability (6 months)
- Work with stakeholders to optimise the new model

"I was put at ease when the nurse phoned me and could answer my questions expertly, she was on top of things"

"I was blown away by the quality of the service, and knowing that I could get this care close to home"

"It was so helpful that my appointment times were coordinated, and we received accommodation and transport support"

Carer resides 2.5 hrs from Bendigo

PATIENT EXPERIENCE