

PCNSW Congregational Health Check-Up

2024-2026 pilot scheme



OVERVIEW

After several years of consultation and development the M&M Committee is asking presbyteries to pilot the Congregational Health Check-Up as the preferred system for ordinary visitations through the remainder of 2024 through to the 2026 assembly. Presbyteries are invited to submit written feedback between October 2025 and March 2026. We will host a feedback forum in March 2026 before bringing any final proposals to the 2026 GANSW.

FIVE BIG IDEAS BEHIND THE CONGREGATIONAL HEALTH CHECK-UP

- 1. IT'S A CHECK-UP** – not a deep dive. This is designed to examine a number of different measures of congregational health in a consistent way, across the different churches in your presbytery. It's like visiting your GP.
- 2. EASY. QUICK. BEST WHEN REGULAR.** Like a normal check-up with your GP, it's not a long process and it works best when it's done regularly so you can track how things are going. Ideally it would be good for each church to do this every two years.
- 3. THREE CORE ELEMENTS.** The health check-up includes
 - a short and simple **congregational survey** covering 15 key areas of congregational life
 - a tool **analysing statistical data** from 7 areas of congregational life
 - an **interview with the pastor** (and spouse) of the congregation to get a sense of their personal wellbeing. A sample template is provided.
- 4. FLEXIBILITY.** The presbytery can contextualise the health check-up by adding extra elements to the three core elements if it wants to go deeper. These non-core extras include
 - the long-form Church Health Survey
 - an audit of church records
 - inspection of the property
 - Anything else the presbytery believes is appropriate in the context

Presbyteries should take care not to overburden themselves and churches unnecessarily. Special concerns can always be dealt with by a special visitation. At the core of the Health Check-Up design is that it's easy for congregations and presbyteries to make use of.
- 5. AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO CHURCHES.** Our hope is that the Congregational Health Check-Up will be so easy to use and so helpful that session will be keen to use it every two years. Because it has the potential to be an encouragement to congregations, we strongly recommend that the session report back to the congregation what the elders learned as a result of the congregational survey.

**OUR GOAL: HEALTHIER CHURCHES
AND HEALTHIER PRESBYTERIES**

THE FOUR PART PROCESS

PART 1 GETTING ORGAISED – THE PRESBYTERY

- Presbytery prepares a schedule for when each church will do the health check-up and to which meeting they will report back across the coming 2-3 years. (Churches should do the check-up two months before the presbytery meeting at which they will report so that there is time for the session to consider the results).
- Presbytery appoints a member to coordinate each health check-up and to organise the interview¹ with the minister/pastor.
- The presbytery coordinator contacts M&M to obtain a unique survey link for the church and the link for the data analysis.
- The presbytery coordinator for that health check-up advises the session clerk and minister 3 months in advance of the meeting. They organise a time to conduct the interview with the pastor (and spouse), and provide the survey link and data analysis link to the session clerk asking them to complete both elements at least 2 months before the presbytery meeting at which they will report. The presbytery coordinator also provides an outline of the process so that the session clerk and pastor know what steps to take.

PART 2 GETTING THE INFORMATION TOGETHER

- Local church runs the Vital Signs congregational survey. The survey is designed to be done digitally. Paper copies can be provided if needed, but these will then need to be entered online to complete the survey. Ideally the link is provided to everyone in the congregation (a QR code will also be provided) and members are given a week to complete it. The survey typically takes about 6 mins.
- The local session clerk and/or minister complete the data capture document for the statistical analysis and submit this using the online link.
- Presbytery coordinator organises the interview with the pastor (and spouse) to get a sense of their personal wellbeing and to encourage them. This can be repeated where there are multiple ministry staff. It is important that the presbytery coordinator is joined by a pastorally minded woman for the interview where spouses or female staff members are included in the interview process.

PART 3 DOING SOMETHING WITH THE REPORTS

- M&M prepares reports and sends them to the session clerk and the presbytery coordinator.
- Session schedules a time to reflect on the reports and think about
 - what action they might need to take in response to what they learn
 - what they want to say at the meeting of presbytery
- The basic framework for the session's report to the presbytery is to be able to answer the following four questions:
 - What have we been encouraged by and what do we see working well in our congregation?
 - What are we struggling with as a church?
 - Where might we need some help from the presbytery or from outside the presbytery?
 - What do we want prayer for in our church?

PART 4 AT THE PRESBYTERY MEETING

- An order of the day is created to allow a church to report back to presbytery.
- Representatives from the session report to presbytery by talking about their answers to the four questions above.
- A report about the interview is presented by the coordinator if appropriate.
- Presbytery responds with encouragement, prayer, and where needed, assistance. (M&M will provide information on what kinds of denominational and external assistance are available and how to access it.)

¹ M&M recommends that where possible the interview be conducted by two members of presbytery. A female member of the interview group is in addition to this.

APPENDIX 1 – Vital Signs congregational survey questions

Members of the congregation will be asked to choose a response for the following 14 sets of statements. Each question allows for one choice on the following scale:

Strongly Disagree *Disagree* *Uncertain* *Agree* *Strongly Agree*

OUR FAITH

- Our church loves to hear the Bible taught clearly and faithfully – even when it challenges us
- Our church helps people to clearly understand who Jesus is
- Our church encourages me to live for Jesus and to grow to be more like him

OUR PRAYER LIFE

- Our church shows its dependence on God by prioritising prayer in everything we do

OUR PURPOSE

- Our church has a shared sense of purpose
- Our church is clear about what we are trying to achieve together

OUR GROWTH

- The people in our church are growing in their faith
- Our church is growing in number as new people join us
- Our church is a place where people become Christian

OUR LOVE

- The people in our church genuinely care for each other
- The people in our church trust each other and enjoy spending time together

OUR LEADERS

- Our leaders set a godly example and direction for the church
- Our leaders are trustworthy and loving
- Our leaders are constantly pointing us to Jesus

OUR WORSHIP

- Our church helps me lift my heart in worship to God

TRAINING

- Our church helps and trains those who serve, so they can do a good job

OUTREACH

- Our church tries to share the message of Jesus in our community
- Our church supports missionaries, both at home and overseas

CONFLICT

- Our church doesn't pursue conflict, but isn't afraid of disagreements
- Our church tries to restore broken relationships where possible

IMPROVEMENT

- Our church is willing to change the things we do to be more effective in serving Jesus

OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY

- Our church deliberately tries to show the love of Jesus in our local community
- Our church gets involved in local community activities at least once a year

MY SATISFACTION

- I am happy to invite other people to attend our church
- I love being a part of our church

OUR RESOURCES

- Our church properties are in good condition
- Our church is in a good financial position

COMMUNICATION

- The minister and elders welcome feedback and listen to the congregation
- I feel free to communicate with the minister and elders

NB: The Vital Signs congregational survey is not designed to accurately measure how well your church is doing in each of these areas. It is designed to allow members of the congregation to report back to the elders how well they perceive the church is doing in each of these areas.

APPENDIX 2 – Statistical information required for analysis

You will be asked to supply the following information.

1. average Sunday attendance including children for the current year and the previous two years
2. average adult attendance for last year
3. number of adult attenders actively involved in a small group that involves intentional Bible study
4. number of adult attenders engaged in serving/ministry at least once a month
5. number of conversions or new professions of faith in the last 3 years
6. total ordinary giving for last year
7. cost of employing ministry staff last year
8. total expenses of the congregation last year
9. total given to external ministry causes last year
10. yes/no we have an intentional pathway for welcoming and integrating newcomers.

APPENDIX 3 – Sample template for interview

Choose appropriate questions from the list below. Feel free to adapt these questions and add others.

General questions to open with

- How are you doing at the moment?
- What do you want us to know? / What do you want to talk about today?
- What's it been like to go through this Congregational Health Check-Up process?
- Are you feeling supported in ministry?

Other questions to help you go further (as needed)

- What are your current frustrations?
 - How are you dealing with those?
 - As you reflect on that, are there ways you might have contributed to the situation?
 - Who do you share those frustrations with and where do you find support?
- Has there been anything that's brought you significant joy over the last 6 months or so?
 - If so, how have you celebrated that? Who have you been able to share that with?
- How do you invest in your personal relationship with God?
 - What progress in your life and godliness do you think your congregation are seeing in you?
- Marriage questions:
 - Question to spouse: How is your marriage being impacted by ministry?
 - How much do the two of you talk about this together?
 - Question to ministry worker: How do you feel about what you've just heard?
 - To both: where do you get support and encouragement in your marriage?
- How are your children doing?
- If resources were no issue, what would you love to see in this church over the next 10 years?
 - What kind of help do you think you need to get there?
 - What plans do you and the elders have to help the church get there?
- What do you think you need most to remain encouraged in ministry for the next five years?
- How is your relationship with the elders?
- Is there anything the presbytery can help you with?

It may be wise to create a moment where the woman on the interview team has a chance to talk with the wife separately to ask if there's anything she wants to talk about privately.