
Greater Bendigo Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021 – 2025: Issues and Opportunities Paper

Acknowledgement of Country

The City of Greater Bendigo is on Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung Country. We acknowledge and extend our appreciation for the Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung People, the Traditional Owners of the land.

We pay our respects to leaders and Elders past, present and emerging for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and the hopes of all Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung Peoples. We express our gratitude in the sharing of this land, our sorrow for the personal, spiritual and cultural costs of that sharing and our hope that we may walk forward together in harmony and in the spirit of healing.

Introduction

Every four years councils across Victoria lead their communities in the development of a Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan. This is designed to identify the key priorities that councils and their partners can work on to improve community health and wellbeing.

The Greater Bendigo Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021 – 2025 (the new plan) will build on work underway across the City of Greater Bendigo (the City), partner organisations and the community in improving health and wellbeing. Over the past four years there has been a huge amount of effort, collaboration and progress made.

To confirm the new plan's priorities, a review of policy from all levels of government, community feedback from Imagine Greater Bendigo consultation and an updated data profile will be considered. Learnings from an evaluation of the Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017-2021 (the current plan) and opportunities identified will also be incorporated.

In developing the new plan, a strong focus will be given to strengthening what we are already doing and continuing to learn through a commitment to understanding best practice approaches and undertaking evaluation. The development of the new plan is about strengthening our process as opposed to taking on copious numbers of new priorities and actions. A flexible approach will allow us to respond to emerging needs and to take up new opportunities, such as COVID-19 pandemic recovery initiatives. The Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Outcomes Framework was used to organise the goals and objectives of the current plan, under five domains.

The intention is to keep these domains as an organising framework for the new plan. The five domains address the social determinants of health, which are the non-medical factors that influence health and wellbeing. The domains also take into consideration the essential role that town planning plays in community health and wellbeing and the emerging understanding that our health is inevitably linked to the health of our natural environment.



What is health and wellbeing?

Health is a state of physical, mental and social wellbeing, which goes well beyond being free from disease. Health and wellbeing are created in our day-to-day lives – where and how we live, work, play, grow and age. Lots of things impact on our health and wellbeing, including income, housing and education, access to nutritious food, parks and public transport, being free from discrimination and violence, having strong connections with family, friends and the community, and having opportunities to be physically active. Smoking, excessive alcohol consumption and drug use can also have a major impact.

Policy context

In March 2020 the new *Local Government Act* was passed in Victoria after the first major review in 30 years. The new Act requires councils to engage with their community to develop a community vision by October 2021. This vision will serve as a compass for the whole community, guiding the work of the City and its partners to help create the Greater Bendigo our community wants for current and future generations. The vision will guide the development of a range of key plans required under the *Local Government Act (2020)* and *Public Health and Wellbeing Act (2008)*.

Under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act*, a new Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan also needs to be developed by October 2021. This new plan must be developed with reference to the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019-2023. It must also have regard to climate change and incorporate actions focused on preventing and responding to family violence.

A review of Local, State and Federal government policy has highlighted an increased focus over the previous years on:

- Gender equality
- Mental health
- Obesity
- Family violence
- Prevention and health protection
- Climate change
- Aboriginal reconciliation and self-determination
- Affordable housing
- Social procurement
- Addressing inequality
- COVID recovery and structural changes across Victoria such as the establishment of 'Public Health Units'

The outcome of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and Royal Commission into Aged Care will influence future priorities. Due to COVID, policy is in a state of flux, resulting in a rapidly changing policy context. The conversation needs to continue, with a flexible approach and ability to respond and adapt to new policy changes as they arise.

Local policy context

The City, together with partner organisations and the community, has developed several key strategic documents that guide the work undertaken across the five health and wellbeing domains, including:

- Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Plan (currently under review and update)
- Walk Cycle Greater Bendigo 2019
- All Ages All Abilities Action Plan 2019
- Community Volunteering Strategy 2019-2023
- Greater Bendigo Environment Strategy 2016-2021
- Explore, Engage, Empower - Greater Bendigo Youth Strategy 2017-2021
- Barpangu (Build together) - Greater Bendigo Reconciliation Plan 2021-2025
- Greater Bendigo Coalition Gender Equity Strategy 2020-2025
- Greater Bendigo Economic Development Strategy 2020-2030
- Food System Strategy 2020-2030
- Greening Greater Bendigo 2020-2050
- Greater Creative Bendigo Strategy
- DRAFT Social Justice Framework

Strategic documents and functions relating to health and wellbeing sit across City of Greater Bendigo units, reflecting the understanding that health is everyone's business. The Health and Wellbeing directorate leads much of the work, planning and delivering of community services and programs aimed at supporting people to live their lives fully and be active, safe, engaged and healthy. The focus of the directorate is on developing policy, plans and programs in partnership with the community, delivering services and supporting the delivery of community infrastructure projects.

Key service provision roles across the City that promote health and wellbeing include:

- Early learning centres
- Home Support service
- Maternal and Child Health service
- Leisure facilities development and management
- Maintaining passive reserves, play spaces and sports fields
- Sports club development
- Community organisation support
- Provision of community facilities
- Community safety initiatives
- Planting and maintaining trees to increase urban shade
- Construction of paths, trails and infrastructure that allows residents to safely walk and cycle for transport and recreation
- Health protection and the work of Environmental Health Officers
- Bendigo Animal Relief Centre (BARC)
- School crossing supervision
- Arts and culture provision

Planning alignment

The effort to promote health and wellbeing is shared across Greater Bendigo by a wide range of organisations and community groups. Whilst the City is up-to-date on much of the work underway, we cannot capture the entirety of the effort. By setting key health and wellbeing priorities through the plan, the aim is to help focus effort on things that need our attention the most.

The Bendigo Loddon Primary Care Partnership, Bendigo Community Health Services, Bendigo Health, Heathcote Health and Women's Health Loddon Mallee developed a joint strategic approach to integrated health promotion planning aligned to the current plan. This was to ensure a coordinated local prevention effort and highlights the contribution of partner organisations in addressing the priorities of the current plan. It is expected this approach will carry through to the new plan.

The work undertaken over the previous four years across the City, partner organisations and community to improve health and wellbeing should be celebrated. The increased understanding and demonstrated commitment to the role we all play in shaping the health of the community has put Greater Bendigo in good stead to continue to strengthen our work into the next four years.

Community feedback

Imagine Greater Bendigo community consultation asked the community what they value for a healthy and liveable community. The impacts of COVID over the previous 12 months have re-shaped the community's priorities, as well as provided new insights and opportunities. In previous engagement residents said they value:

- Cool, shady and green streets with accessible parks and play spaces
- Access to cheap, healthy food
- Walking and cycling paths for people of all ages and abilities
- Growing more food locally in schools, community gardens and on farms
- Affordable, safe and secure housing
- Better access to public transport and walking and cycling paths to move around
- Better access to health services for older residents

These seven areas were all reinforced in new survey responses, and six new areas were identified:

- Environmental sustainability
- Community facilities – sport and recreation
- Social inclusion and connection
- Education, training and employment
- Planning and urban sprawl, density and walkable neighbourhoods
- More support for rural areas and smaller communities

The new plan will strengthen the focus on community connectedness, environmental sustainability, climate change, and accessible and liveable communities.

Greater Bendigo data profile

A data profile has been developed to undertake an analysis of local health and wellbeing data.

Data profile summary

Healthy and well

- Greater Bendigo adults are obese and pre-obese at higher rates than the state average
- 57.3% of Greater Bendigo residents meet the physical activity guidelines
- 12.9% of Greater Bendigo residents meet the recommended daily serves of vegetables

- Visits to green spaces more than once per week is below the state average and hasn't improved over the previous four years, although anecdotal evidence suggests an increase in accessing green spaces during COVID
- Greater Bendigo's adults are reporting high/very high psychological distress above the state average, and this has increased in the previous four years. Evidence shows that spending time in nature is good for both physical and mental wellbeing
- The experience of community members during COVID lockdowns in 2020 has shone a light on the importance of access to the natural environment for both our physical and mental wellbeing
- Mental wellbeing has been significantly affected by COVID, with a survey conducted for the Greater Bendigo Relief and Recovery Plan identifying community impacts highlighting 'a level of highly distressed and overwhelmed people, wondering what the future will hold'
- A recent survey by VicHealth supports this, showing that mental wellbeing has deteriorated across Victoria during COVID

Safe and Secure

- The number of Greater Bendigo households experiencing rental stress is higher than the state average and has increased since 2017, with social housing as a percentage of total dwellings less than the state average and decreasing since 2017
- During community engagement for the draft Greater Bendigo Affordable Housing Action Plan individuals and organisations reported a worsening of issues relating to affordable housing during the pandemic, specifically the ability to pay for basic living expenses (such as food, heating, rent or mortgage payments) and being able to secure rental housing
- The number of people waiting to be housed in social housing is almost the same as the current supply of social housing dwellings in Greater Bendigo. In 2019 there were 2,183 people on the social housing wait list and there are currently 2,386 social housing dwellings. To meet the current wait list demand, the social housing supply would need to double
- Females feel less safe than males walking alone at night in Greater Bendigo and less safe than the Victorian average
- Greater Bendigo residents experience food insecurity at a higher rate than the Victorian average and at a higher rate than in 2017
- Family violence incidents are reported in Greater Bendigo at higher rates than the state average

Able to participate

- Greater Bendigo residents feel part of the community, agree the community is close knit and feel valued by society all less than the state average
- The proportion of children vulnerable in one or two domains on the Australian Early Development Index is higher in Greater Bendigo than the state and has increased since 2017
- Young people aged 20-24 and not employed or enrolled in education is higher than the state average
- Greater Bendigo's single person households has increased and is higher than the state average, supporting the need for increased community connection
- Volunteering rates in Greater Bendigo and participation in citizen engagement are higher than the Victorian average, which presents an opportunity to further support this involvement
- The Greater Bendigo Relief and Recovery Plan highlights that the percentage of women in their teens, 20s and early 30s engaged in the workforce in central Victoria has dropped dramatically, the steepest falls of any group

Connected to culture and community

- Greater Bendigo residents experience discrimination at a higher rate than the state average, with a lower than state average number of adults who thought multiculturalism made life better
- A survey that was recently developed to review the Bendigo Human Rights Charter highlighted addressing racism as the highest priority social justice issue among respondents
- Better meeting the needs of refugees and people seeking asylum was also among the top social justice priorities. Respondents expressed concern about recent racist incidents targeting people of Asian appearance, including members of the Karen community in the context of the pandemic
- The City of Greater Bendigo's Active Living Census found that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples reported lower levels of life satisfaction and higher rates of not feeling valued by society than non-Aboriginal people.
- While social and family-connection is relatively high among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria, many community members report barriers in connecting to culture and community.
- Priorities identified during staff and stakeholder consultation to inform a City of Greater Bendigo submission to the Victorian whole-of-government LGBTIQ Strategy included improving inclusion in government and government-funded services, improving the mental health of LGBTIQ people, improving rural and regional inclusion and participation, and improving the physical health of LGBTIQ people including through inclusive recreational settings

Liveable

- Climate change has been identified as the greatest threat to public health in the 21st century (WHO, 2015)
- Loddon Campaspe climate projections include maximum and minimum daily temperatures will continue to increase over this century (very high confidence), extreme rainfall events are expected to become more intense, on average, through the century but remain very variable in space and time, and by the 2030s an increase in daily maximum temperatures up to 1.7°C (based on 1990s figures) are expected (Loddon Campaspe Climate Projections 2019)
- Greater Bendigo resident's satisfaction with local roads and footpaths is higher than the state average and has not changed from 2017
- Residents reported having good facilities and services like shops, childcare, schools and libraries at approximately the same rate as the state average, with no change from 2017
- Greater Bendigo was reported to be a pleasant environment with nice streets, is well planned with open spaces, above the state average and at the same rate as 2017
- The proportion of Greater Bendigo residents that rode a bicycle or walked to work decreased in 2021 from 2017, which may have been due to COVID but is also below the state average
- An increased focus on sustainability and the environment was highlighted during community engagement. This was also supported by the data profile with the percentage of waste recycled close to half as much as the state average

The Greater Bendigo data profile supports the community's feedback for a renewed focus on areas such as mental wellbeing, sustainable environments and community connectedness. It also reminds us these are not the only areas requiring support.

We know our community has increased rates of obesity and chronic disease, and a higher number of vulnerable children and family violence incidents above the Victorian average. We have reduced

rates of STI's, improved physical activity levels and a slight reduction in female smokers but we can't afford to lose focus on these areas now.

Opportunities

The following opportunities have been identified by the City, partner organisations and stakeholders:

Advocacy opportunities:

- Water security, access, planning and usage, aligning with *Water Sensitive Bendigo*
- Influence how State Government 'Public Health Units' operate in our region
- A stronger regional approach with increased partnerships, information and resource sharing
- Social prescribing
- Digital access and inclusion
- Social housing
- Transport
- Stronger land use policy to promote healthy food environments

Education opportunities:

- The role of the City in supporting health and wellbeing
- Use the implementation of the Domestic Wastewater Strategy to communicate the relationship between climate change and health
- Circular economy and how it benefits the community and influences health and wellbeing

Areas to be strengthened:

- Equitable access to services and infrastructure
- Being an inclusive city and welcoming diversity
- Gender equality
- Emergency preparedness – looking after the community's physical and psychological safety and needs during an emergency and during recovery
- COVID recovery – responding to new opportunities for funding and an increased awareness of the function and importance of health protection.
- Continued focus on Health in all Policies
- Community connectedness through community hubs, social opportunities, supporting for organisations/groups through community grants etc.
- Social infrastructure
- Promotion of business as usual and strategic work undertaken by the City to protect and promote community safety and security, particularly with respect to safe and secure food, water, environment, housing, education and employment
- Climate change and health
- Cultural safety of City services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and inclusion in opportunities
- Evaluation

Health and wellbeing domains

The Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Outcomes Framework was used to organise the goals and objectives of the current plan under five domains. The intention is to keep these domains as an organising framework for the new plan.

The health and wellbeing domains and their respective priorities do not sit in isolation from each other and should be considered in a holistic way. For example, positive mental wellbeing can be

supported through increased physical activity, a more inclusive community and healthy eating as well as access to green open space.

In response to the findings of this issues and opportunities paper, there will be some small change to wording under each domain to ensure we are using contemporary language and to respond to any new priorities identified or priorities that need greater focus.

For example, under the **Healthy and well** domain there will be a reconsideration of the 'healthy lifestyles' wording. The **Liveable** domain will be updated to be called '**Liveable for all**' reflecting the focus on addressing disadvantage in the City's economic development strategy, A Stronger Greater Bendigo.

VicHealth's Healthy Persuasion: a message guide for health promotion practitioners report recommendations on framing of key messages and recommendations on how to structure communications will guide reframing some sections of the report.

Framework for Action (FFA)

The FFA is used to ensure initiatives are evidence-based and targeted appropriately. The framework guides our practice to ensure the best use of available resources.

Our principles	Equity and fairness	Accessibility	Policy alignment	Community engagement	Evidence informed	Evaluation		
Our approach	Place based	Co-design	Health in all policies	Asset-based community development	Systems thinking	Collective impact		
Our focus	Children and young people	Older residents	Disabled residents	Gender equity	Socio-economic disadvantage	Cultural diversity	Climate change impact	
Our settings and environment	Whole of population	Rural communities	Public space	Schools (including early years)	Arts and culture	Sport and active recreation	Workplaces	Health and community services
Our enablers	Shared leadership and strategic thinking	Community groups and organisations	Financing and resource allocation	Media and communications	Learning and development			

Opportunities identified to improve the FFA include simplifying the language, for example 'strength based' in place of 'asset-based community development' or 'health is everyone's business' over 'Health in All Policies'. The priority areas included within the 'our focus' section repeat some, but not all of the priorities listed under the five domains. We will consider removing the 'our focus' section from the framework. Our commitment to undertaking evaluation will be strengthened in the FFA and a risk-based approach will be a new addition.

The development of a glossary of terms for inclusion in the new plan will support understanding of terms not familiar to City staff, partners, stakeholders and community.

We acknowledge this report has been written from a City of Greater Bendigo staff perspective and we welcome feedback from organisations and the community on what else should be included. Further community consultation, particularly with children, will continue to inform the development of the new plan.

The governance of the new plan will be strengthened to reflect a collective impact approach. A networked governance structure will provide opportunity to share learnings, align priorities and celebrate success.

Evaluation of the current plan

A full evaluation of the current Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan (2017-2021) has been undertaken. The evaluation will inform the new Plan, identifying areas where improvements can be made.

The evaluation was informed by:

- feedback from City staff and stakeholders (survey, workshops)
- data profile comparisons
- a survey gathering feedback on the Framework for Action

The domain of 'healthy and well' was readily identified by stakeholders as the space where most effort was being spent. It was resolutely clear that 'climate change impact' was the weakest focus area where stakeholders felt the least amount of work was done.

There are several factors identified that are locally hindering monitoring, evaluation, and learning, namely capability. It is suggested that evaluation, monitoring and learning should:

- foster learning,
- be useful,
- be accessible and inclusive,
- be aligned, and,
- be clear from the start.

To achieve MPH&WP goals, effective implementation is required – there is no one-size-fits-all model for all. City staff and stakeholders identified that successful implementation of the Framework for Action requires:

- ongoing organisational supports to build capacity (at the individual level) and leadership,
- local partnerships,
- adequate resources, and,
- strategic thinking to ensure organisational and community readiness.

The review of the Framework for Action suggests continuing to focus on building staff capacity to apply principles and approaches rather than general information to support understanding, which is already quite high. It also suggests supporting the delivery of a capability building program for the Project Reference Group and other interested stakeholders. This would support understanding and application of principles and approaches, as well as continuing to build relationships, partnerships, awareness and alignment of the collective effort.

The 'Data Profile' for the new Plan needs to include several additional indicators relating to health protection and antimicrobial pathogens. It also needs to identify key indicators in the remit and scope of the City to report on and do so in line with clear key evaluation questions.

The full evaluation report will be available in June 2021 and a copy can be requested by emailing Sophie Hickingbotham at s.hickingbotham@Bendigo.vic.gov.au

Next steps

The City of Greater Bendigo invites your feedback on the following:

1. Reflecting on your experience or the experience of your organisation or network, are there any unidentified gaps in our focus areas?
2. Any general feedback relating to the issues and opportunities paper

To submit your feedback, please email c.smith@Bendigo.vic.gov.au
Submissions will stay open until the 11 June 2021.

Attachments

- Plan on a page
- Glossary