

Yarra Ranges Council

Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2029



Acknowledgement of Country



Yarra Ranges Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri and other Kulin Nation peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of these lands and waterways. We pay our respects to all Elders, past, present, and emerging, who have been, and always will be, integral to the story of our region. We proudly share custodianship to care for Country together.

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Commitment to an inclusive and fair society

Our community is made up of diverse cultures, beliefs, abilities, sexualities, ages and genders. We recognise the strength that comes from the varied backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives within our community. We are dedicated to ensuring that everyone feels respected, welcomed and valued, and has the opportunity to reach their full potential. We are committed to removing systemic barriers and promoting an inclusive, equitable society that supports individuals' physical, mental and cultural health and wellbeing.

Acknowledgements

Council would like to acknowledge and thank the many people and partners who shared their expertise and insights to help develop this Strategy:

- Health and Wellbeing Advisory Committee
- Indigenous Advisory Committee
- Disability Advisory Committee
- Sustainable Environment Advisory Committee
- Youth Ambassadors
- Positive Ageing Reference Group
- Service partners of Council's Health and Wellbeing Steering Committee
- The many people with lived experience who have shared their ideas and experiences to help shape this Strategy
- Support from the Department of Health



Message from the Mayor



Cr Jim Child,
Mayor
Yarra Ranges Council

October 2025

“Community is at the heart of everything we do.”

Yarra Ranges Council exists to serve the residents and businesses of our region, ensuring that current and future generations are afforded opportunities to succeed.

In addition to the beauty of the region, we take pride in our exceptional sports facilities, open spaces and community facilities, which will continue to form part of our Council’s role to support health and wellbeing.

We know that the Shire will continue to evolve and face ongoing challenges such as a growing and ageing population, an increase in severe weather-related events and lack of essential services.

Through the development of this important Strategy to Council, we have identified the role of Council in taking realistic actions over the next four years to improve the health and wellbeing of communities that are playing to our strengths.

Our community has told us that they want to see all residents able to access and enjoy the many amazing places and natural spaces, plan and prepare for emergencies, and access the services and facilities that they need.

We have listened, and in response to this, many of the actions within this Strategy have an inclusion focus and a clear roadmap to support the wellbeing of our diverse community.

Council is only one stakeholder. We know that to achieve better wellbeing, we also need to continue strengthening our partnerships with other levels of government, community organisations, businesses and our residents, to maximise wellbeing outcomes into the future.

I sincerely thank and acknowledge everyone who has helped in shaping this important Strategy.

Introduction

The Yarra Ranges Council Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-2029 (the Strategy) is a strategic road map for how Council will support the health and wellbeing of local communities.

It meets Council's obligations under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*¹, and is aligned to the Victorian Government's Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023-2027². The Strategy is updated every four years, following a general Council election.

Council supports community health and wellbeing in many ways, providing a wide range of services, facilities and programs which people rely on every day. Some examples include waste and recycling, parks, sporting facilities, maternal child health, immunisation, protecting public health, and the environment. While Council leads much of this work, it often collaborates with other levels of government, community groups and the private sector to achieve the best outcomes. Council also plays a critical role in advocating for change and amplifying community voice.

The Strategy:

- Sets out focus areas for action to improve health and wellbeing.
- Focuses on improving systems and access to build a healthier, safer and more vibrant community.
- Identifies key partnerships across government, organisations and communities that are integral to the success of the Strategy.
- Acts as both a planning framework and an advocacy tool that sets the scene for growth over the next four years.
- Focuses on where Council has the responsibility, capability, influence, roles and resources to make a difference outside of regulatory and compliance obligations.

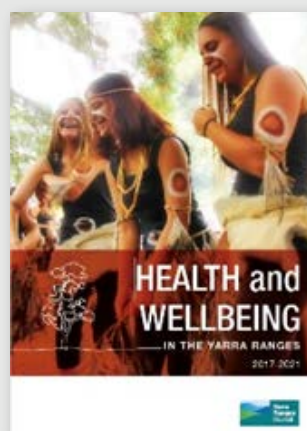
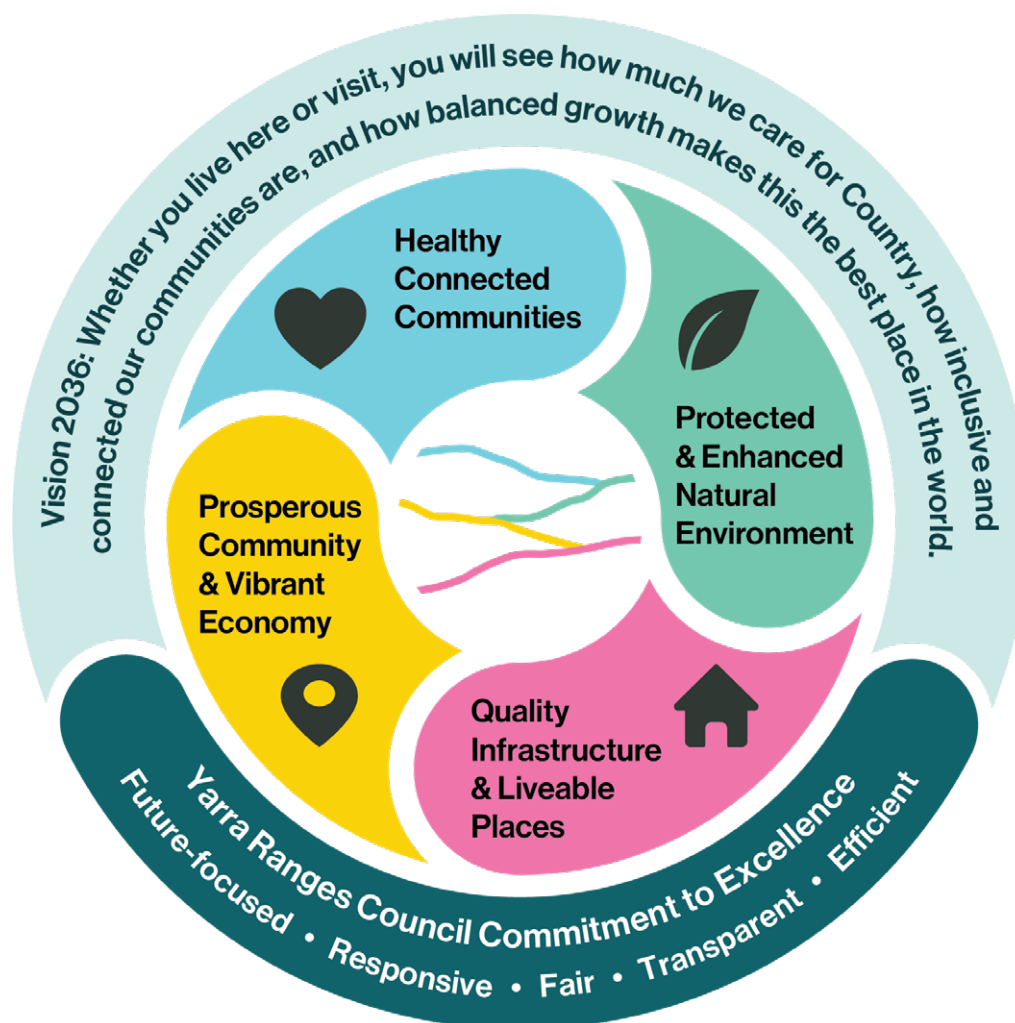


Figure 1: Yarra Ranges Council Key Strategic Objectives 2025-2029



The Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-2029 is Council's lead strategy for achieving the strategic objective of the Council Plan 2025-2029: Healthy Connected Communities. Under this objective, it is envisioned that *"Communities are safe, healthy, inclusive and socially connected. Quality services are accessible to everyone."*

This Strategy was shaped by feedback from government, local services and the community. It identifies four key focus areas to improve health and wellbeing outcomes. See *Attachment 1: Community Engagement Report*.

Evidence supports the close relationship between people's health, and the living and working conditions which form their social

environment.³ Factors such as socioeconomic position, educational attainment, conditions of employment, the distribution of wealth, empowerment and social support - together known as the social determinants of health - can act to strengthen or undermine the health of individuals and communities.

While this Strategy does not directly address all social determinants of health, Council's broader integrated planning framework ensures these are addressed through reinforcing strategies, policies and plans. A summary of these documents is provided. See *Appendix 1 – Supporting strategies, policies and plans*.

Yarra Ranges Council's roles and definitions



Provider

Responsible for delivery of services, programs, infrastructure and support to individuals and groups.



Educator

Share information, raise awareness, develop knowledge and skills to empower individuals and groups.



Partner

Build relationships and partner with others to enable things to happen and work towards common goals.



Advocate

Raise awareness and show leadership for the interests of local communities, to other decision makers e.g. State and Federal Government.



Planner

Use evidence, including community views to plan for current and future community needs and priorities.



Regulator

Prioritise safety and regulate compliance of activities through local laws and legislation.

Health and Wellbeing Strategy: at a glance

Our vision

Yarra Ranges is a safe, inclusive and connected community, where people can access the services and information that they need to be healthy and well at every stage of life.

Our purpose

To achieve a healthy connected community which is safe, healthy, inclusive and socially connected. Quality services are accessible to everyone.

Health and Wellbeing Strategy focus areas

Focus Area 1:

**Increasing community adaptation
to climate-related health risks.**

Focus Area 2:

Improving mental wellbeing.

Focus Area 3:

**Supporting our community to
lead healthy lives.**

Focus Area 4:

**Creating safer and more inclusive
communities.**

Our guiding principles

Below is the set of principles that set the foundation for a system of belief, behaviour, attitudes and governance for Council.



**Human rights and
health equity**



Intersectionality



**Indigenous ways of
knowing, being and doing**



Gender equity



Evidence informed



**Social determinants
of health**

Our guiding principles

This set of principles set the foundation for a system of belief, behaviour, attitudes and governance for Council, ensuring that we work towards our shared vision and purpose. We apply the lenses of age, gender, cultural diversity and place across all aspects of Council business.



Human rights and health equity:

Acknowledging that everyone has the right to health and access to necessary resources, striving for fair treatment and equal opportunities in health care for all people.



Evidence-informed:

Using research, data and community views to guide decisions and actions, ensuring that approaches are based on the best available information.



Intersectionality:

Individual characteristics such as Aboriginality, age, disability, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, and cultural upbringing can shape the experiences, perspectives, needs, and challenges of individuals. The intersectional nature of a person's circumstance can result in compounding layers of barrier and discrimination, or power and privilege.*



Gender equity:

Gender equity ensures fair treatment of individuals of all genders by addressing their unique needs and experiences. It focuses on eliminating disparities to provide equal access to opportunities, resources and rights, fostering safer, healthier, and more connected communities.



Social determinants of health:

Factors like housing, income, education and environment that affects people's health and wellbeing, showing that health is influenced by more than just medical care.



Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing:

Valuing and incorporating the knowledge, traditions and practices of Indigenous peoples, recognising their unique perspectives on health, community and the environment.

*State Government of Victoria. Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector. (2022). *Applying intersectionality*. Retrieved from <https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/applying-intersectionality>.

What the community liked about the focus areas

“

Liked “*acknowledgement of intersectionality...focus on place based approach because different parts of the shire can be very different from each other... acknowledgement of the impact climate has on health...good to know that council will be advocating for housing, as affordable housing is such a big issue that impacts particularly younger residents.*”

– **Man, 16-24, Mooroolbark**

Liked the focus on improving access to mental health treatment.

– **Women, 35-44, Menzies Creek**

“I like that this plan treats climate change as a real health issue, not just an environmental one, and takes clear, practical steps to help vulnerable people and communities adapt. It’s locally grounded and genuinely forward-thinking.”

– **Women, 55-64, Upper Ferntree Gully**

Liked the focus on “*improving outdoor facilities to promote physical activity (parks, paths)*”. I would like a focus on making more accessible and enjoyable walkways.

– **Women, 25-34, Mooroolbark**

”

Health in Yarra Ranges: 2024-25 snapshot

Our region



165,137
residents
in 2024



2,500km²
Land area
approx.



55 townships
with mix of urban
and regional
communities



52% of population
live in urban areas,
representing only
7% of landmass



Extensive green
space in the
Dandenong Ranges
and Yarra Valley

Community strengths



Many residents
work locally



Above average
income



Low unemployment
rates



Housing is more
affordable than in inner
Melbourne



Good health status amongst
older residents, with generally
low hospital admission rates.



Falling hospital admissions
rates and a below average level
of premature deaths.



Most residents feel that
multiculturalism makes life in
the area better, and there is a
low level of reported racism.



High level of community
involvement,
volunteering and
carer roles



Very low crime rates
and a high level of civic
trust



Low level of infectious
diseases for most
conditions



Good maternal and
infant health status

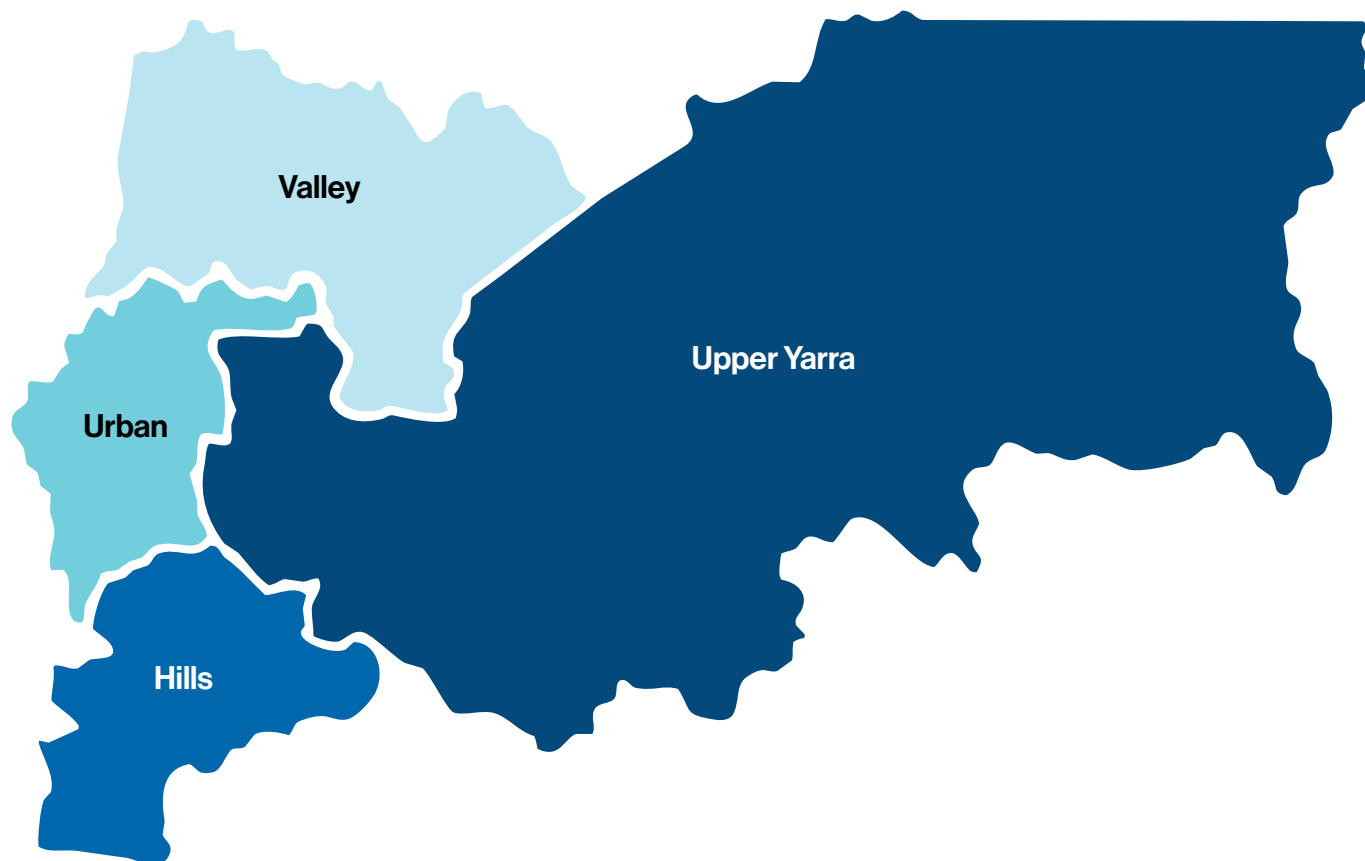
A place-based approach

Analysis of health data for Yarra Ranges informed the four focus areas and advocacy priorities of the Strategy.

See Attachment 2, *Health and Wellbeing Data Profile of Yarra Ranges: Summary Report*. This health profile, in addition to *Access to Human Services in the Yarra Ranges*⁴, was developed by Council and is a resource available for local services, agencies, students and community to access.

Yarra Ranges has four sub-regions; Urban, Hills, Valley and Upper Yarra. The delivery of actions within this Strategy will take a place-based approach, considering the strengths, opportunities and priorities of these diverse local communities.

Health status varies by suburb and township within Yarra Ranges, with some areas having considerably worse health indicators and lower levels of access to services. These variations tend to be linked to socio-economic characteristics, e.g., income, housing affordability, food security, transport access, health service access, and education and employment levels. Emergencies such as the June 2021 storms and the cost-of-living crisis have placed recent stress on the community, contributing to the health concerns outlined under each focus area in this Strategy.





Delivering the strategy

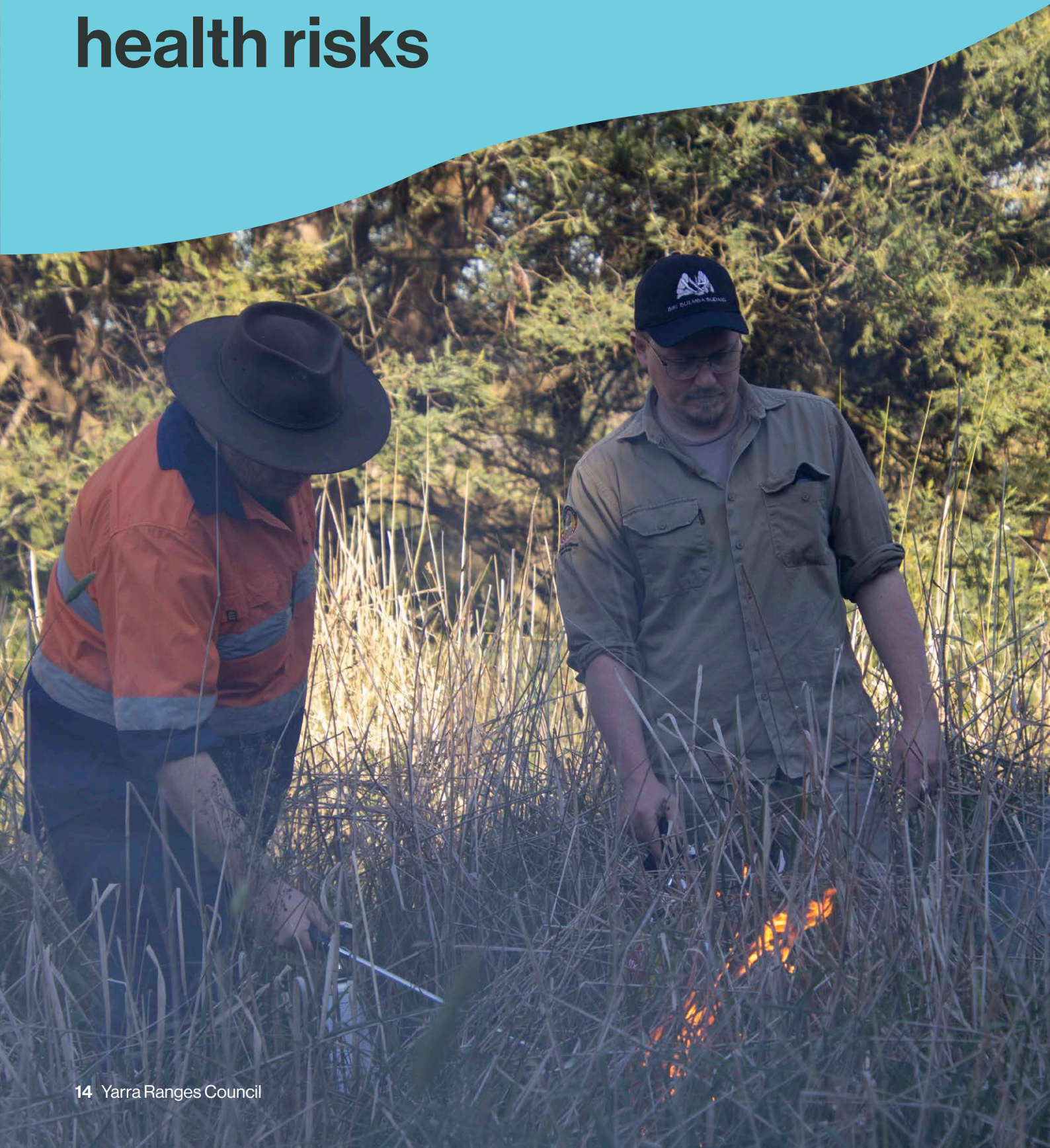
Council will lead the delivery of this Strategy, in partnership with other levels of government, local organisations and communities.

The Strategy focuses on four strategic focus areas, each with long-term goals and outcomes to guide Council's work over the next four years. Strategic actions under each focus area outline how Council will make steady, evidence-based progress to improve community health and wellbeing. These outcomes align with the Victorian Government's Public Health and Wellbeing Outcomes Framework⁵.

The Strategy is supported by an implementation plan that will support the delivery of these actions, ensuring Council remains responsive to community needs and aspirations. Progress will be reviewed and reported each year to ensure accountability and track the outcomes achieved.

Focus Area 1

Increasing community adaptation to climate-related health risks



Focus Area 1

Why is this a focus area?

The *Climate Change Act 2017*, requires local governments to have regard to climate change when preparing their **Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans**.⁶

Climate change has both direct and indirect health impacts. Direct impacts are caused by exposure to more frequent and intense weather-related events, such as bushfires, droughts, floods and heatwaves. Direct health impacts include ill-health, injuries and deaths due to heat stress, respiratory disease, cardiovascular disease, infectious diseases, hypothermia, food poisoning, allergies, mental health issues, injuries, drownings and malnutrition. Indirect impacts include reduced water and air quality, reduced food security and safety, and increases in infectious diseases.

The social determinants of health are also affected, including the cost of living. For example, rising food, insurance and power costs; impacts on housing, employment, income, transport, access to open space, services and infrastructure, workplace safety, recreational opportunities, and social support networks. Most local human services expect climate-related disasters and extreme weather events to increase future service demand; access to climate-resilient housing is seen as a key challenge for low-income households.

The Emergency Leaders for Climate Action have identified five concrete steps that Australian governments can take, to better protect communities from the impacts that many people are already experiencing due to climate change and natural hazards.⁷ These have informed development of the goals and desired outcomes for Council work in supporting community adaptation.



Key indicators for Yarra Ranges under increasing community adaptation to climate-related health risks:

- Yarra Ranges has the **second-highest level in Melbourne of properties at medium to high risk of being affected by climate change.**
- Yarra Ranges **ranks third in Victoria for storm hotspots.**
- Yarra Ranges has the **highest bushfire risk in the country.**
- There were more than 450 hospital admissions for heat stroke amongst Yarra Ranges residents in 2022/23.
- Yarra Ranges has the second-highest level of assistance seeking from national disaster recovery funding.

Focus Area 1

Goal 1: Residents are equipped to protect their health and wellbeing from climate-related risks.

Desired Outcomes

- The community has the knowledge and tools to respond to climate-related health risks and extreme weather events.
- Reduced risk of climate-related ill-health and wellbeing, especially amongst vulnerable communities.
- Council is recognised as a trusted source of information on climate health risks.

Strategic actions	Council's role
Provide clear, timely information and education, to enhance community understanding of and response to changing climate and extreme weather events (e.g., heatwaves, storms).	Educator
Share evidence-based health advice.	Educator
Build community understanding of climate-related health risks, through local programs and partnerships.	Educator, Partner, Provider
Offer evidence-based resources and programs to address eco-anxiety, especially for young people.	Educator, Partner, Provider
Improve community access to thermally comfortable public spaces during extreme weather events, to reduce risks such as heat stress.	Educator, Planner, Provider

Focus Area 1

Goal 2: Council operations, assets, and services are resilient to changing climate conditions and extreme weather events.

Desired Outcomes

- Council facilities, services and communications are prepared for climate impacts and extreme weather events.
- Open spaces and outdoor infrastructure are designed to remain safe and accessible in hotter conditions.
- Nature-based solutions are used to reduce climate related impacts, such as urban heat.
- The people and places most at risk from climate-related hazards are prioritised.

Strategic actions	Council's role
Strengthen the resilience of Council infrastructure, services, and communication systems, to ensure ongoing delivery of essential community services during extreme weather events.	Advocate, Partner, Planner, Provider
Review and update staff and service delivery policies, to ensure worker safety and mental wellbeing during climate-related disruptions.	Regulator, Provider
Align open space and outdoor infrastructure with Council strategies, policies, and standards to enhance resilience to heat, and support safe use of these areas during warmer conditions.	Provider
Develop, implement and monitor guidelines for integrating nature-based solutions (e.g., tree planting) into Council led projects, in order to cool areas, support community wellbeing and reduce climate-related health risks.	Planner, Provider
Identify the people and places most vulnerable to climate-related health hazards (e.g., heat, poor air quality), to inform targeted health protection and adaptation planning.	Educator, Partner, Planner

Focus Area 1

Goal 3: The community is prepared for climate impacts and extreme weather events.

Desired Outcomes

- Residents and businesses are equipped to manage disruptions to essential services and infrastructure.
- More homes are resilient to extreme weather and climate impacts.
- Residents understand the role of insurance in managing climate-related risks.

Strategic actions	Council's role
Advocate for improved essential services and infrastructure, and for disaster preparedness and recovery support.	Advocate
Support community-led adaptation initiatives, such as community emergency groups.	Educator, Partner
Provide guidance on how to increase the climate resilience of local properties; and advocate for more government support for home and business owners.	Advocate, Educator
Provide education initiatives to increase awareness of insurance options and underinsurance risks, both directly and in partnership with other services.	Educator, Partner

Focus Area 2

Improving mental wellbeing



Focus Area 2

Why is this a focus area?

Poor mental health is a major issue in Yarra Ranges, particularly evident since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Residents have a high prevalence of long-term mental health conditions, particularly amongst young people and females; and more than one in four adults have high levels of psychological distress. Disability related to mental health affects 10% of National Disability Insurance Scheme recipients in Yarra Ranges. More than one in five adults are lonely, and nearly one in four have low or medium life satisfaction. There has been a large rise in older residents being admitted to hospital for dementia. Residents have high and rising usage of mental health prescription medication and treatment services; and high use of hospital and emergency departments for mental health issues, including self-harm and attempted suicide.

These health issues particularly affect children, teenagers and young adults. Recurrent themes for young people included growing stress, depression and anxiety; also eating disorders and gender identity. High school students and school leavers have also experienced reduced connections with education and employment since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, and worse educational outcomes.

Yarra Ranges does not have enough local referral and treatment services, such as general practitioners and psychiatrists. Poor service access is one of many issues exacerbating poor mental health in Yarra Ranges. Being unable to see a GP when needed or having no private health insurance are associated with higher levels of psychological distress.⁸



Key indicators for Yarra Ranges under improving mental wellbeing:

- 26% of adults have high or very high psychological distress - **the 3rd highest level in the state.**
- 24% of adults sought professional help for a mental health problem in the past 12 months – the 9th-highest level in the state.
- Mental health hospital admissions have risen by 40% amongst 15-24 year olds.
- 10% of residents have a diagnosed mental health condition, **the 7th-highest level in Melbourne**; 13% of females and 8% of males are affected.
- More than one in five adults are lonely.

Focus Area 2

Goal 1: People feel a sense of belonging and strong community connection.

Desired Outcomes

- Towns and public spaces foster belonging, and connection to place and nature.
- Council's role in community strengthening is clear and coordinated.
- More people feel connected and mentally well through community participation.
- Council facilities support inclusion and connection across all ages and abilities.

Strategic actions	Council's role
Engage with communities to inform improvements in public spaces and support placemaking that brings people together.	Partner, Planner, Provider
Deliver programs and services that support community connection, inclusion, and civic engagement.	Educator, Partner, Provider
Develop and implement a community strengthening approach to guide how Council works with communities to achieve their aspirations for healthy connected communities.	Educator, Partner, Planner
Collaborate with Burmese community members and key partners, to foster inclusion, strengthen social cohesion, and provide community support.	Advocate, Partner
Strengthen local community groups' relationships, skills, and networks, enabling them to take action on the outcomes they identify for their communities.	Partner, Provider
Use Council's grants to fund and promote community-led projects supporting belonging, creativity and cultural participation.	Partner, Provider
Fund and partner with neighbourhood houses to support social connection, lifelong learning and volunteering.	Partner, Provider
Create inclusive place-based opportunities for children, young people and families, to have a say and get involved in shaping their community and Council services.	Educator, Partner, Planner, Provider
Take a needs-based approach to the allocation of resources for building, upgrading and maintaining community facilities, to support increased opportunities for community connection.	Advocate, Partner, Planner

Focus Area 2

Goal 2: People have better access to mental health supports and services.

Desired Outcomes

- Community know where and how to access mental health support.
- Families are better equipped to support mental wellbeing.
- Council has strong place-based partnerships to improve wellbeing outcomes for children, young people and families.

Strategic actions	Council's role
Advocate for better access to mental health and wellbeing services and supports.	Advocate, Partner
Work with partners to support and promote community-led initiatives that build mental wellbeing, resilience and social connection.	Educator, Partner
Build the skills and capacity of young people and families to improve their mental health and wellbeing.	Partner, Planner, Provider
Strengthen place-based partnerships and programs to support mental health and wellbeing.	Partner, Planner, Provider
Seek partnerships and funding opportunities which will increase availability of mental wellbeing supports and services.	Advocate, Educator, Partner, Provider

Focus Area 2

Goal 3: People have better access to emergency, social and affordable housing.

Desired Outcomes

- Community members in need are supported to access suitable housing.

Strategic actions	Council's role
Work with local services to better coordinate support for people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.	Advocate, Partner
Advocate for increased investment in social and affordable housing, and homelessness services.	Advocate, Partner
Deliver actions from the Yarra Ranges Housing Strategy, to support housing security and diversity.	Advocate, Partner, Provider

Focus Area 3

Increasing community capacity to lead healthy lives



Focus Area 3

Why is this a focus area?

Chronic (long-term) diseases are a major cause of ill-health and some physical health issues and risks have worsened since the pandemic. In Yarra Ranges, 35% of residents report at least one long-term health condition, compared to 31% across Victoria. The most common conditions are mental health issues, asthma, arthritis, diabetes and heart disease. Rates are higher than the Victorian average for mental health conditions, asthma, arthritis and cancer. Dental health is also an issue – a high level of residents have gum disease. Females and older residents were much more likely to have chronic health issues.

Chronic diseases are the main cause of death nationally and locally, including coronary heart disease (10.5% of deaths in Yarra Ranges), dementia (8%), lung cancer (6%), cerebrovascular disease (6%), chronic lung disease (4%) and colorectal cancer (3%). Yarra Ranges has had a rising level of avoidable deaths amongst men aged less than 75. Death rates are relatively high for heart and lung disease, accidental falls, some cancers, influenza and pneumonia. Hospital admissions for dementia nearly tripled in the four years to 2022/23; emergency department use for heart issues and pneumonia rose; and cancer screening rates dropped.

Healthy eating, regular exercise, and avoiding smoking/vaping and drinking alcohol, all reduce the risk of chronic disease. But these behaviours remain a challenge for many people.

Health risks are made worse by poor access to human services. Yarra Ranges faces critical shortages in almost all health professions, including GPs, specialists, nurses, midwives, and allied health workers. It has the third highest health workforce shortfall in Melbourne. Access to childcare is also very low, with implications for early childhood development and education outcomes.



Key indicators for Yarra Ranges under increasing community capacity to lead healthy lives:

- 7% vaped daily (3rd highest in Victoria), and 8% smoked daily (below Victorian average).
- 17% of adults were at increased risk of alcohol-related harm or injury (above the 13% Victorian average).
- 9% of adults had experienced food security.
- 37% of adults consumed sugary drinks daily or a few times per week.
- 61% of adults did not do the minimum exercise for good health.
- Alcohol-related service use and hospital treatment also rose substantially during the pandemic.

Focus Area 3

Goal 1: The community has increased capacity to access healthy, affordable food.

Desired Outcomes

- Increased consumption of minimally processed foods and reduced consumption of discretionary foods.
- Fewer people experience food insecurity.

Strategic actions	Council's role
Deliver and support healthy eating initiatives, across key settings.	Advocate, Educator, Partner, Planner, Provider
Strengthen food security through local and regional partnerships.	Advocate, Educator, Partner, Planner, Provider

Goal 2: The community has access to substance-free spaces and activities.

Desired Outcomes

- Reduced risk of harm from alcohol, tobacco and e-cigarettes.

Strategic actions	Council's role
Promote and provide substance-free environments and activities.	Educator, Partner, Provider

Focus Area 3

Goal 3: Neighbourhoods provide a wider range of accessible options to participate in physical activity.

Desired Outcomes

- People have more opportunities to be physically active.

Strategic actions	Council's role
Increase inclusive, safe and accessible options for physical activity, through infrastructure, programs and partnerships.	Advocate, Partner, Planner, Provider
Plan and design parks, playspaces and outdoor infrastructure, which support people of all ages and abilities to be active.	Advocate, Partner, Planner, Provider
Support access to local balance and strength activities, which will improve older people's agility and balance, maintain mobility, and reduce the risk of falls.	Educator
Facilitate learn to ride programs, to encourage cycling as an accessible physical activity.	Educator, Partner, Provider

Focus Area 4

Creating safe and more inclusive communities



Focus Area 4

Why is this a focus area?

Under the *Family Violence Protection Amendment Act (2017)*, councils must specify measures to prevent family violence and respond to the needs of victims of family violence, when preparing municipal public health and wellbeing plans⁹.

The *Gender Equality Act (2020)* requires the public sector, councils and universities to undertake Gender Impact Assessments when developing or reviewing any policy, program or service, that has a direct and significant impact on the public¹⁰.

While Yarra Ranges is a relatively safe community, some groups face higher risks – particularly older people, young people, and those affected by family violence. Key safety issues include family violence, falls amongst older residents, and drowning. Preventing falls is essential for healthy ageing. Preventing family violence is crucial for protecting the physical and mental health of women and children and ensuring their safety and wellbeing, and social and economic security.

Council is focused on improving safety for all residents; its role and capacity are focused on safe spaces and working with the community on the prevention of violence. Whilst Council's work on improving gender equity and preventing family violence supports the safety of all groups in the community, the data shows that women and girls are disproportionately affected by family violence.

Family violence

Yarra Ranges has a below average rate of family violence. Family violence increased by 18% during the pandemic but declined in 2023. However, over the past four years, there has been a sharp rise in older victims—those aged 55 and over—and significant changes in the age of perpetrators. The number of perpetrators aged over 55 more than doubled (up 103%), while those aged 0-17 increased by 72%. Most victims of family violence were female, and most perpetrators were male.



Key indicators for Yarra Ranges under creating safe and more inclusive communities:

- The family violence rate was below average, at 1,224 per 100,000 residents (compared to 1,366 Victoria, in the year to September 2022/23).
- In 2022/23, Yarra Ranges had a low level of hospital admissions for assault, at 24 per 100,000 (36 per 100,000 Victoria, 2022/23); statewide, males are the main victims of non-family violence assaults (local breakdown by sex not available).
- Consultation data showed community desire for safe inclusive spaces for young people, women, LGBTIQ+ residents, and other groups in the community, so that they could socialise in safety.

Focus Area 4

Goal 1: Our community works together to prevent all forms of violence.

Desired Outcomes

- Reduced levels of violence against women and children
- Reduced levels of elder abuse
- Increased sense of community safety.
- Reduced levels of violence in the community.

Strategic actions	Council's role
Advance gender equality and prevent gender-based violence through Council initiatives. E.g., health promotion, gender impact assessments, service referrals, educational activities, and implementation of child safety standards.	Advocate, Educator, Partner, Planner, Provider
During emergency events, provide information about the increased risk of family violence, and details of local support services.	Educator, Partner
Work with partners, including the Together for Equality and Respect Partnership, to advance gender equality and prevent gender-based and family violence.	Advocate, Educator, Partner, Planner, Provider
Support community-led initiatives which promote gender equality, respectful relationships and healthy masculinities.	Advocate, Partner
Promote respect for older people, and strengthen community capacity to prevent elder abuse.	Educator, Partner, Provider
Educate older people to manage scam risks.	Educator, Partner

Focus Area 4

Goal 2: Our community has equitable access to spaces and services where everyone feels welcome and included.

Desired Outcomes

- Increased access to safe, accessible and inclusive Council spaces and services.

Strategic actions	Council's role
Apply accessibility principles and conduct "lived experience" site visits with relevant community representatives, to identify improvement opportunities in parks and playspaces.	Partner, Provider
Where practical, use Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design and Gender Inclusive principles, to promote safety, belonging and accessibility in parks and civic spaces.	Planner, Provider
Develop a Code of Conduct for people hiring/leasing Council venues, to ensure safety and inclusion for all, including how to report concerns or complaints.	Educator, Provider
Establish a Human Rights and Social Equity position statement, to guide Council's decisions ensuring fair access, inclusion and respect for the rights and dignity of all residents.	Partner, Planner, Provider
Seek feedback from Council's Health and Wellbeing Advisory and Steering Committees, to incorporate community needs and service insights into Council work.	Partner

Advocacy

In addition to the priorities of the Strategy, there are other areas where Council will take an advocacy role. These advocacy priorities point to important systemic issues and the social determinants of health. Many are a longstanding focus for Council. The key health and wellbeing advocacy priorities and desired advocacy outcomes, are listed below.



Increase housing opportunities and partnerships

- Increased state and federal government investment in social and affordable housing and homelessness services.



Increase physical activity

- Increased funding to improve walking, cycling and transport routes.
- Support for infrastructure upgrades to create inclusive recreation and sporting facilities.



Increase health services

- Sustainable funding for the integrated Aboriginal community-controlled health service.
- Better access to health prevention, early intervention and health care services, particularly for children, young people and vulnerable population groups.



Increase climate adaptation and reduced impacts of extreme weather

- Increased place-based funding and resources to help communities to adapt to the health impacts of climate change.
- Resilient telecommunications and energy infrastructure for communities and households.



Increase safety and inclusion

- Improved public and community transport, to increase service access in outer areas.
- Increased availability of culturally safe and inclusive services and spaces, particularly for women, young people and diverse groups.



Increase food security

- Increased investment in food hub infrastructure such as regional food hubs, community gardens, markets and local agribusinesses.

Governance and reporting

Council reviews the Health and Wellbeing Strategy each year to track progress and assess whether actions are achieving the intended outcomes, need adjusting, or should be continued, stopped or replaced.

This keeps the Strategy relevant and responsive to community needs. Reviews may also identify new actions in response to emerging issues. Each annual review will be presented to Council.

These reviews help celebrate achievements, inform other Council strategies, policies and plans, guide funding decisions, and highlight partnership opportunities. The final-year review will have a longer-term view, focusing on the Strategy's overall impact and outcomes, aligned with the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Outcomes Framework.¹¹

Council is developing performance indicators to measure outcomes and will seek feedback from its advisory committees as part of the review process.

The Health and Wellbeing Advisory Committee and Health and Wellbeing Steering Committee will provide ongoing advice and input into the Strategy's implementation. Neither committee has authority to make decisions on behalf of Council, nor do they have delegated authority to act for or incur expenditure on behalf of Council.

Health & Wellbeing Advisory Committee

The Health and Wellbeing Advisory Committee meets every 8 weeks and includes 12 endorsed community members, representing all regions of the Yarra Ranges. The elected Committee will serve a four-year term (2022-2026) and meetings are chaired by a delegated Councillor representative. The committee provides advice, insights and feedback on the Strategy's development, implementation and review.

Health & Wellbeing Steering Committee

The Health and Wellbeing Steering Committee meets quarterly, and includes organisations with an interest and/or role in community health and wellbeing issues in Yarra Ranges. The committee offers guidance to support the implementation of the Strategy, align efforts, and raise emerging trends or identified health and wellbeing issues for the Yarra Ranges community.

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Appendix 1

Integrated Planning:

Supporting strategies, policies and plans that support the delivery of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-2029

Focus Area 1: Increasing community adaptation to climate related health risks	
Community Waste and Resource Recovery Plan 2023-2030	Presents a vision for a Yarra Ranges community working together towards a circular economy, minimising waste sent to landfill and maximising resources - avoiding waste, reusing and rehoming items wherever possible, sorting recycling well and minimising rubbish.
Environment Strategy 2015-2025	Protects natural resources, supports sustainable land and water management, and strengthens climate resilience through sustainable agriculture, adaptable infrastructure, and reduced carbon reliance. It engages the community via environmental education, sustainable transport advocacy, Indigenous land management collaboration, and support for local sustainability initiatives. Key priorities include preserving agricultural land, enhancing local food systems, conserving valued landscapes, and greening urban spaces.
Integrated Water Management Plan 2017	Aims to improve water security and protect against drought, bushfire, heat, and rising costs by managing the entire water cycle. Key goals: Reduce potable water use; Increase use of rainwater, stormwater, and recycled water; Apply best practice stormwater management to protect waterways and reuse stormwater; Minimise wastewater discharges; Ensure sustainable use of groundwater and surface water.
Liveable Climate Plan 2030	Envisions a climate-ready Yarra Ranges with energy-efficient buildings, 100% renewable energy, and a strong circular economy. It prioritises green spaces, summer shade, food security, and sustainable transport to create healthy, walkable neighbourhoods with equitable access for all. By supporting active travel, public transport, and electric vehicles, it reduces emissions while ensuring a low-carbon, resilient future for the community.
Municipal Emergency Management Plan	Outlines the shared responsibilities of government, emergency services, and communities in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from emergencies. It serves as the overarching framework for emergency management, supported by hazard-specific and response-based plans to ensure coordinated service delivery.

Focus Area 1:

Increasing community adaptation to climate related health risks

Nature Plan 2024-2034

Aims to integrate Indigenous land management, expand environmental education, and support community-led conservation. Key initiatives include cultural awareness programs, Indigenous ranger employment, citizen science, and nature-based learning. The strategy enhances biodiversity, urban greening, and sustainable land management while strengthening community engagement in sustainability.

Tree Canopy Strategy 2024-2044

Sets our vision, objectives and targets for the long-term protection, management and planting of trees in Yarra Ranges. Our tree planting will prioritise the urban parts of Yarra Ranges in built up areas where canopy cover is low or declining. Amongst other things, the strategy commits to increasing tree canopy cover for all activity centres, key pedestrian routes, play spaces and bio links between areas with recognised biodiversity value.

Focus Area 2:

Improving mental wellbeing

Economic Development Strategy 2022-2032

Focuses on protecting and regenerating the environment, community, cultural heritage, and local character while building a diverse, resilient economy that adapts to climate change, the circular economy, and workforce challenges. Supports local businesses by streamlining permits, strengthening regional networks, and fostering partnerships. Key initiatives include workforce development, career expos, growing the night-time economy, and driving innovation through mentorship, collaboration, and innovation hubs.

Creative Communities Strategy 2018

Council aims to foster a vibrant and inclusive creative sector by centring audience participation, celebrating local history and culture, and amplifying Indigenous voices. Key priorities include supporting local artists, developing education and employment pathways, and creating opportunities for community leadership and cultural expression.

Housing Strategy 2024

Guides housing growth in the Yarra Ranges by identifying suitable locations, aligning with population changes, and supporting diverse housing needs. It will also promote affordability, sustainability, and urban consolidation while providing clarity for the community and developers.

Focus Area 2:

Improving mental wellbeing

Strategic Asset Plan 2022-2032

Sets out how Council proposes to fund the acquisition/creation, maintenance, operation, upgrade/expansion and renewal of the assets it owns, to help achieve the objectives defined in the Community Vision and Council Plan. Planning relating to the management and maintenance of footpaths, reserves, parks, play spaces, trails, community centres, swimming pools, splash parks, sporting pavilions. Includes safety features such as lighting, change rooms, accessibility etc.

Focus Area 3:

Increasing community capacity to lead health lives

Active Recreation Plan 2023

This plan aims to identify: Opportunities for the activation of existing assets; Design features that can be used in new asset design and retrofitted to existing assets to help make active recreation easy and enjoyable; Equity in providing opportunities for people to be active in Yarra Ranges.

Aquatic and Leisure Strategy 2022-2033

Provides a 10-year road map towards a diverse network of aquatic and leisure facilities. Our facilities will deliver adventure, leisure, education, health and fitness and therapy-based programs, and participation opportunities for our community.

Integrated Transport Strategy 2020-2040

Includes a suite of actions designed to make walking and cycling the first choice for the many short trips that occur every day within our local neighbourhood; Street designs that make walking and cycling safe, including prioritised crossing points, dedicated lanes for cycling and lower speed limits in built up areas; Expand the footpath network across Yarra Ranges; Advocate for much-needed transport infrastructure.

Open Space Strategy (in development)

Aims to enhance health and wellbeing by activating and better connecting existing spaces while prioritising environmental sustainability. It recognises the importance of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, ensures spaces cater to diverse community needs, and promotes a well-integrated network for recreation, social interaction, and biodiversity.

Paths and Trails Plan 2024-2034 (in development)

A 10-year plan to guide investment into existing and new trails throughout the Shire.

Focus Area 3:

Increasing community capacity to lead health lives

People and Dogs in Parks Plan (in development)

Recognises the important role dogs play in people's lives, supporting physical and mental well-being. The objective is to balance the needs of dog owners with those of the broader community by providing safe, well-planned off-leash areas while ensuring open space remains accessible and environmentally protected. This includes improving education, regulation, and standards for off-leash areas to accommodate current and future populations.

Playspace Plan 2019-2029

Recognises the importance of play for all people. Play is a fundamental component of health, wellbeing and community resilience. Play provides physical, social, cognitive and creative benefits for children, teenagers, and adults of all abilities. This plan defines a framework for the provision of play spaces across the Yarra Ranges municipality.

Sport and infrastructure plan (in development)

Focuses on improving sports and recreation infrastructure, promoting active lifestyles, and ensuring healthy, connected communities.

Focus Area 4:

Creating safe and more inclusive communities

Disability Action Plan 2025-2029

Improving accessibility and inclusion of people with disabilities and unpaid carers by enhancing public facilities, parks, and transport pathways, providing clear accessibility information online. Supporting inclusive community programs such as Maternal and Child Health Services, Pathways for Carers, community grants, and accessible recreation. Ensuring inclusion in emergency planning and capacity-building initiatives.

Key Life Stages Plan

This includes Early and Middle Years Plans, Youth and Healthy and Active Ageing Plans. An integrated strategy that supports children, families, young people and the ageing population. It adopts a life-course approach, recognising that our health and wellbeing needs to be supported proactively and continuously to enable positive outcomes throughout the lifespan.

Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan 2024-2026

Commitment to reconciliation by fostering strong relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, promoting cultural awareness, and celebrating key events like NAIDOC and National Reconciliation Week. Key actions include anti-discrimination efforts, cultural learning, creating culturally safe environments, and improving employment and economic opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Focus Area 4:

Creating safe and more inclusive communities

Melbourne East Region Sport and Recreation Fair Access Policy 2024

Addresses known barriers experienced by women and girls, transgender and gender diverse people in accessing and using community sports and recreation infrastructure. It aims to progressively build the capacity and capabilities of the Melbourne East Regional Sport and Recreation Strategy Group and associated stakeholders in identifying and eliminating systemic causes of gender inequality in policy, programs, communications, and delivery and allocation of community sports and recreation infrastructure.

Attachments

Attachment 1:

Health_and_Wellbeing_Strategy_Community_Engagement_Phase_1_Report.pdf

Attachment 2:

Health and wellbeing profile Yarra Ranges Council

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