



Yarra Ranges Council

DRAFT Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2029



Acknowledgement of Country



Yarra Ranges Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri and other Kulin Nations 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.

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

“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.

Jim Child

Mayor, Yarra Ranges Council

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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 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 that 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.

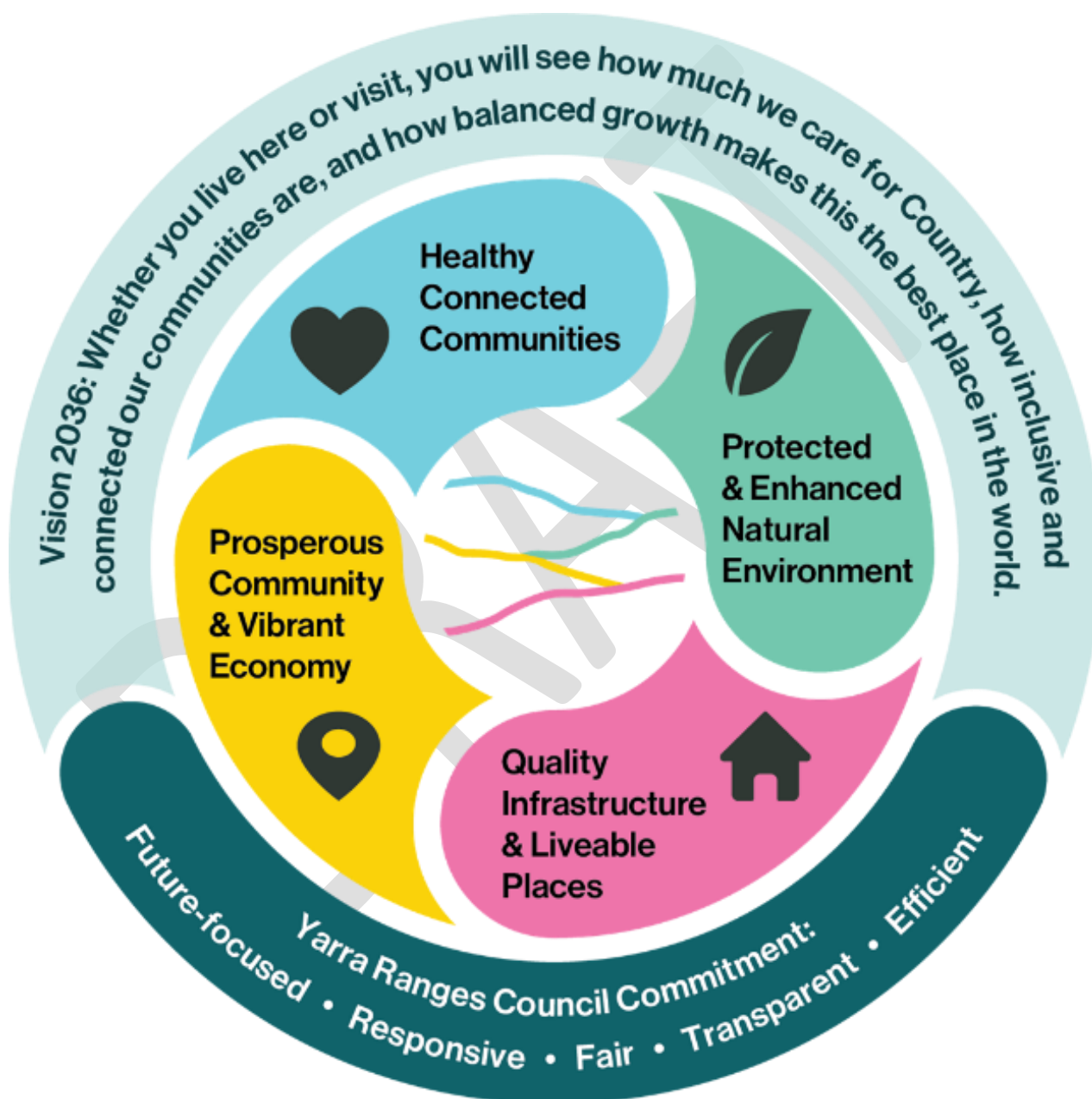
The Strategy:

- Sets out priority 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.

¹ Victorian Government: Department of Health. (2023). *Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Planning*.

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 (see figure 1). Under this objective, it is envisioned that *"Communities are safe, healthy, inclusive and socially connected. Quality services are accessible to everyone."*

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



This Strategy was shaped by feedback from government, local services and the community. It identifies four key priority 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 environment². 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*.

Table 1: 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 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

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024). *Social determinant of health*.

Health & 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.

Our 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.

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.

Gender equity:

Gender equity ensures the 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.

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.

Evidence-informed:

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

Social determinants of health:

Factors like housing, income, education, and environment that affect people's health and well-being, showing that health is influenced by more than just medical care.

Health and Wellbeing Strategy priorities

Priority 1: Increasing community adaptation to climate-related health risks.

Priority 2: Improving mental wellbeing.

Priority 3: Supporting our community to lead healthy lives.

Priority 4: Creating safer and more inclusive communities.

Snapshot of health status in the Yarra Ranges³

Mental health

- 26% of adults had high/very high psychological distress (3rd highest in state), 2023 survey
- 10.3% of residents had diagnosed mental health conditions, including 13% of females and 8% of males (7th highest in Melbourne, 2021 Census)
- 22.1% of adults experienced loneliness, compared to 23.3% across Victoria (2023 survey)

	Yarra Ranges	Victoria	Year
% of adults seeking professional help for a mental health problem in past 12 months	24% (9 th highest in state)	20%	2023
Growth in mental health admissions amongst 15–24-year-olds. *Note this data covers a period during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.	40% ↑		2019/20 to 2022/23

³ Yarra Ranges Council. (2024). *Health and Wellbeing Data Profile of the Yarra Ranges: Summary Report*.

Children and young people

	Yarra Ranges	Victoria	Year
Increase in number of 5–14-year-olds with a disability	47% ↑		2016-2021
Change in number of sexually transmitted disease notifications, 15–24-year-olds	9.1% ↑		2019-2023

Climate impacts

- The number of hospital admissions for heat stroke exceeded 450

Chronic diseases & health risk

- 8.9% of adults had experienced food insecurity in the past 12 months, compared with 8% across Victoria (2023)
- 23% of adults had fair/poor dental health, compared with 27% across Victoria (2023)
- 61% of adults did not do sufficient weekly exercise, compared with 64% across Victoria (2023)

	Yarra Ranges	Victoria	Year
% of residents with at least one long-term health condition	35%	31%	2021
% of residents with diabetes	4.7%	6.1% (Australia)	March 2023
% of adults overweight or obese	57%	54%	2023
% of adults who smoke daily	8%	10%	2023
% of adults who vape daily	7% (3 rd highest)	4.5%	2023
Risk of increased harm from alcohol-related disease or injury	17%	13%	2023
% of adults unable to see a GP when needed in the past 12 months	19%	19.5%	2023

Safety and inclusion

- 35% increase in the rate of crimes amongst 10–17-year-olds in Yarra Ranges, between March 2019 and March 2024
- 16% of Yarra Ranges adults experienced discrimination, equal to Victoria (2023)
- 3% of Yarra Ranges adults experienced racism, compared to 7% across Victoria (2023)

	Yarra Ranges	Victoria	Year
Family violence incidents per 100,000	1,224	1,366	Year to Sept 2022/23
Crime rate per 100,000	3,042	5,536	2023
Deaths from accidental falls, rate per 100,000	11.5 19% above average	9.7 (Australia)	2017-2021 combined

Community snapshot

Demographic snapshot for Yarra Ranges⁴

Census 2021 indicators	Yarra Ranges	Victoria
Estimated resident population (2023)	158,694	
Indigenous residents	1.1%	1.0%
Born in Australia	79.4%	65.0%
Adults LGBTIQ+	11.0%	11.0%
Residents with a disability	5.4%	5.9%
% aged 65+	17.2%	16.4%
% aged 0-24	30.6%	30.2%
Providing unpaid assistance to a person with a disability or health condition	14.7%	12.9%
Doing voluntary work through an organisation or group (2021)	15.5%	13.3%
Family households	76.7%	70.1%
Attending tertiary education	20.6%	24.5%
Level of separate houses	93.7%	73.4%
Households with a mortgage	48.2%	36.1%
Level of properties being rented	14.0%	28.5%
Median weekly household income	\$1,881	\$1,759

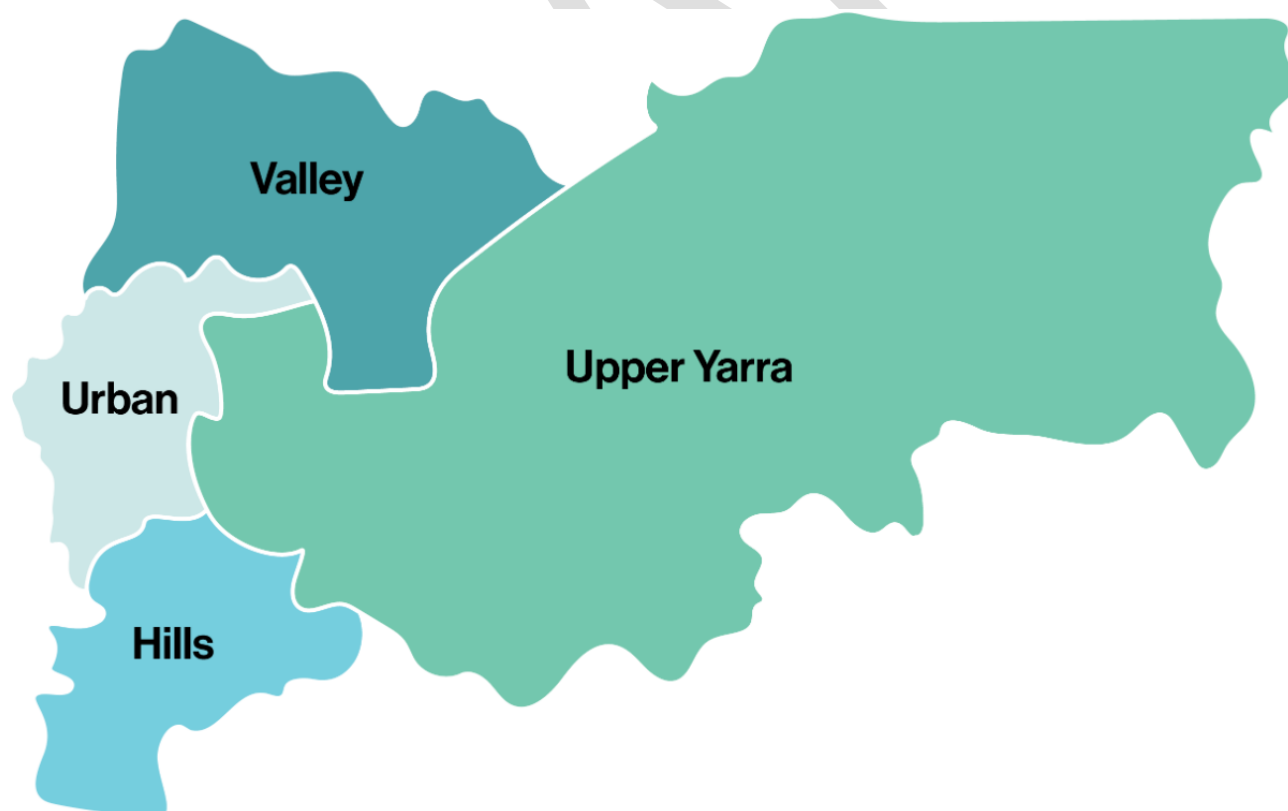
⁴Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Yarra Ranges 2021 Census All Persons QuickStats*.

A place-based approach

Analysis of health data for Yarra Ranges informed the four priority 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*⁵, 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. 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, insurance and utility costs, 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 priority area in this Strategy.

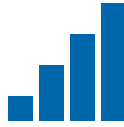


⁵ Yarra Ranges Council. (2023). *Access to Human Services in the Yarra Ranges*.



Our region

- Land area approx. 2,500 km²
- Largest local government area in Melbourne
- 9 wards and 55 townships
- Mix of urban and regional communities
- 52% of the population live in urban areas, representing only 3% of landmass



Our economy

- 13,991 local businesses
- 55,544 local jobs
- Est. \$1.2b visitor spend
- Income is above average
- Housing is more affordable than in inner Melbourne
- Amongst 20% of local government areas with lowest levels of disadvantage on the Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage



Our community

- High level of community involvement, volunteering and carer roles
- Very low crime rates and a high level of civic trust
- Good maternal and infant health status
- Good health status amongst older residents

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 priorities, each with long-term goals and outcomes to guide Council's work over the next four years. Strategic actions under each priority outline how Council will make steady, evidence-based progress to improve community health and wellbeing.

Annual business plans 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.



Priority 1:

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

Priority 1: Increasing community adaptation to climate-related health risks

Why is this a priority?

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 extreme weather events such as bushfires, droughts, floods and heatwaves. Potential direct 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 quality, declines in food security and safety, worse air quality, 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; and impacts on housing, employment, income, transport, access to services and infrastructure, workplace safety, recreational opportunities, and social support networks. Local human services expect that climate-related disasters and extreme weather events will impact future service demand (51%), with access to climate-resilient housing seen as a challenge for low-income households.

Key indicators for Yarra Ranges include:

- Yarra Ranges has the second-highest level in Melbourne of properties at high or medium risk from climate change.
- Residents have experienced frequent impacts from heating or cooling failing due to power outages, as were seen in the 2019/20 extreme heat and the June 2021 storm. Already, 39% of Victorians feel too cold in their homes during winter and 44% feel too hot in their homes during summer. 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 – it has sought and received assistance 42 times since 2006/07. Assistance was mostly sought due to storms (27), floods (17) and bushfires (5), with some events involving multiple hazards (e.g., bushfire and storm).
- Yarra Ranges ranks third in Victoria for storm hotspots.

⁶ State Government of Victoria. (2025). *Climate Change Act 2017*.

- Yarra Ranges has the highest bushfire risk in the country. The 2019/20 bushfires saw a spike in respiratory and mental health issues amongst residents, an indication of what can be expected with future increases in high heat and bushfire risk days. There was a large spike in asthma admissions in 2022/23; residents with respiratory conditions are particularly at risk from smoke and fires.
- The impact of the June 2021 storms included damage to and destruction of homes and businesses, loss of power and internet for extended periods, fallen trees, damage to roads, blocked access to communities, loss of communication including ability to contact emergency services, disruptions to schools and health services and transport, loss of access to public space.

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 form part of the evidence base used to shape the goals and desired outcomes for Council's work in supporting the community to adapt to the health impacts of a changing climate and increasing numbers of emergency events.

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.
- 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 and response to extreme weather events, such as heatwaves and poor air quality.	Educator
Share evidence-based health advice and build community understanding of climate-related health risks through local programs and partnerships.	Educator, Partner, Provider
Support mental wellbeing by offering resources, programs and opportunities to connect with nature to help community manage climate-related stress and anxiety.	Educator, Partner, Provider

⁷ Emergency Leaders for Climate Action. (2024). *Too close to home: How we keep communities safer from escalating climate impacts*.

Strategic Actions	Council's role
Improve community access to thermally comfortable public spaces during extreme weather events to reduce risks like heat stress.	Educator, Planner, Provider
Collaborate with key stakeholders to include community health and wellbeing in climate-health policy and planning.	Educator, Partner, Planner

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.
- 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 continued delivery of essential services to protect community wellbeing throughout extreme weather events.	Advocate, Partner, Planner, Provider
Strategic Actions	Council's role
Review and update staff and service delivery policies to ensure worker safety, mental wellbeing, and uninterrupted service during climate-related disruptions.	Regulator
In line with Council standards, integrate heat-resilient and accessible design features into open space and outdoor infrastructure, to reduce heat stress risks and encourage safe physical activity during hotter conditions.	Provider
Develop, implement and monitor guidelines to support integration of best practice nature-based solutions (e.g. tree planting) into Council led projects to cool areas, support mental wellbeing and reduce climate-related health risks.	Planner, Provider

Strategic Actions	Council's role
Identify people and places most vulnerable to climate-related health hazards, such as heat and poor air quality, to guide targeted health protection and adaptation planning.	Educator, Partner, Planner

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 disaster preparedness and recovery support.	Advocate
Support community-led climate adaptation initiatives such as community emergency groups.	Educator, Partner
Provide guidance and advocate for support to increase property's climate resilience.	Advocate, Educator
Partner and deliver education initiatives to increase awareness of insurance options and underinsurance risks.	Educator, Partner

Playspace Chat

How to use this board:

- Point to the symbols to share a message with someone
- You can talk while you point at the symbols
- If someone can not point, you can read out the words as you point and they can say yes or no
- Scan the QR code to use this board on your phone or tablet



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Priority 2:

Improving mental wellbeing

Priority 2: Improving mental wellbeing

Why is this a priority?

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 1 in 4 adults have high/very high levels of psychological distress. Disability related to mental health affects 10% of NDIS 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, including self-harm and attempted suicide.

These issues particularly affect children, teenagers and young adults. 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 has a shortage of local referral and treatment services, such as general practitioners and psychiatrists. Service access is one of many issues contributing to 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

⁸ Yarra Ranges Council. (2024). *Health and Wellbeing Data Profile of the Yarra Ranges: Summary Report*.

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

Desired Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public spaces and townships 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
Work with communities to improve 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
Embed an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach within Council and community practice.	Educator, Partner, Planner
Collaborate with community members and key partners to foster inclusion, strengthen social cohesion, and support the communities of Burma in Yarra Ranges.	Advocate, Partner
Strengthen relationships and networks to support local community groups to take action in achieving desired outcomes for community.	Partner, Provider
Via Council's grants program, fund and promote community-led projects that foster 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
Undertake research and engagement to guide needs-based allocation of resources for the building, upgrading and maintenance of community facilities.	Advocate, Partner, Planner

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

Desired Outcomes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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
Work with local services and communities to better coordinate support for mental health and wellbeing.	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 mental health and wellbeing outcomes.	Partner, Planner, Provider
Strengthen place-based partnerships and programs to support health and wellbeing.	Partner, Planner, Provider
Advocate for improved access to services.	Advocate, Planner
Seek partnerships or funding opportunities which target increased availability of mental wellbeing supports and services.	Advocate, Educator, Partner, Provider

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

Desired Outcome	
3A: Community members in need are supported to access suitable housing.	
Action	Council's role
Work with local services to better coordinate support for people experiencing or at-risk of homelessness.	Advocate, Partner
Advocate for increased investment in social and affordable housing and homelessness services.	Advocate, Partner



Priority 3:

**Increasing community capacity
to lead healthy lives**

Priority 3: Increasing community capacity to lead healthy lives

Why is this a priority?

Chronic (long-term) diseases are a major cause of ill-health. 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 in Yarra Ranges are mental health issues, asthma, arthritis, diabetes and heart disease. Rates are higher than the Victorian average for mental health conditions (seventh highest), 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 for most residents, 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 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, making it the second most common cause of death. Emergency department use for heart issues and pneumonia also rose. Cancer screening rates dropped during the pandemic.

Healthy eating, regular exercise, and avoiding smoking, vaping and drinking regularly reduce the risk of chronic disease. But many of these behaviours remain challenging across Australia. In 2023, in the Yarra Ranges:

- 37% of adults drank sugary drinks daily or a few times a week.
- 61% of adults did not exercise enough each week (average level)
- Nearly 60% of adults were overweight or live with obesity (average level)
- 7% vaped daily (3rd highest in Victoria)
- 8% smoked daily (below State average)
- 8% of adults had been sunburnt several times in the past year.
- 17% of adults were at increased risk of alcohol-related harm or injury (above the 13% Victorian average).

Alcohol treatment and hospital admissions rose substantially during the pandemic.

Food security is also a concern. In 2023, 8.9% of adults (compared to 8% across Victoria) ran out of food at some point in the past year and could not afford to buy more – up from 8% in 2020. 10.5% had been worried about becoming food insecure.⁹

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.

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⁹ Yarra Ranges Council. (2024). *Health and Wellbeing Data Profile of the Yarra Ranges: Summary Report*.

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

Desired Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.	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 Outcome <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced risk of harm from alcohol, tobacco and e-cigarettes. 	
Strategic Actions	Council's role
Promote and provide substance-free environments, activities, and health campaigns.	Educator, Partner, Provider

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

Desired Outcome	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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, Educator, Partner, Planner, Provider
Design and maintain parks, play spaces, and outdoor exercise equipment that encourage all ages and abilities to participate.	Advocate, Partner, Planner, Provider
Support access to local balance and strength activities that help older people improve agility and reduce the risk of falls.	Educator
Facilitate learn to ride programs to encourage the uptake of cycling as an accessible physical activity.	Educator, Partner, Provider



Priority 4:

Creating safe and more inclusive communities

Priority 4: Creating safe and more inclusive communities

Why is this a priority?

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 plans¹⁰.

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 public¹¹.

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.

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.

¹⁰ State Government of Victoria. (2025). *Family Violence Protection Amendment Act 2017 (Part 7)*.

¹¹ State Government of Victoria. (2025). *Gender Equality Act 2020*.

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

Desired Outcomes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced levels of violence against women and children Reduced levels of elder abuse 	
Strategic Actions	Council's role
Promote gender equality and prevent violence against women and children through whole-of-Council action.	Advocate, Educator, Partner, Planner, Provider
During emergency events, provide key messages regarding the increased risk of family violence, and information about local support services.	Educator, Partner
Work with partners, including the Together for Equality and Respect Partnership, promote gender equality and prevent violence against women and children.	Advocate, Educator, Partner, Planner, Provider
Support community-led initiatives that 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
Empower older people to manage scam risks.	Educator, Partner

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

Desired Outcomes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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
Apply Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design and Gender Inclusive principles to enhance safety, belonging and accessibility in parks and civic spaces.	Planner, Provider

Strategic Actions	Council's role
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 decision making, service delivery and community engagement, ensuring fair access, inclusion and respect for the rights and dignity of all residents.	Partner, Planner, Provider

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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, they are:

Increase housing opportunities and partnerships

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

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 safety and inclusion

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

Increase physical activity

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

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 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 published on Council's website.

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.¹²

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 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.

¹²State Government of Victoria (2024) *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Outcomes Framework*.

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Appendix 1

Supporting strategies, policies and plans – Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-2029

Strategy/Policy/Plan	Key Aim
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.
Early and Middle Years Plans (in development)	Support children aged 0 to 12 years and their families. These plans aim to foster a child-friendly Yarra Ranges, where children are meaningfully engaged and supported to thrive as they grow.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
Council Heat Health Policy (internal)	Sets out Council's workforce policy for high heat days.
Healthy Active Ageing Plan (in development)	Supports older adults (aged 50+ years) and their carers. This Plan responds to the demographic shift taking place towards an ageing population and seeks to support Yarra Ranges residents to age well.
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.
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.

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.

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.

Key Life Stages Plan (in development)

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.

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.

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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
Workforce Plan 2022-2026	Commitment to deepening Council's traineeships/partnering with educational providers. Commitment to action on gender equity through initiatives like the Gender Equality Action Plan.
Youth Plan (in development)	Supports young people aged 12 to 25 years. This Plan prioritises young people's safety, connectedness, and sense of empowerment, and recognises the importance of their voices in shaping their community.
YR Ignite Strategy 2021-2025	Embed the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach to sustainable community-driven development. Progress the Gender Equality Action Plan and build our practice in delivering Gender Impact Assessments.

Attachments

Attachment 1: [Health Wellbeing Strategy Community Engagement Report](#)

Attachment 2: [Health and Wellbeing Data Profile of Yarra Ranges: Summary Report](#)

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