



Yarra Ranges Council

Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025 – 2029

Community Engagement Report





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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Introduction

This report summarises the two rounds of community engagement that helped shape the Yarra Ranges Council Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-2029 (the Strategy):

Phase 1: November 14 to December 15, 2024

Sought input from community about their health and wellbeing priorities asking two key questions: What keeps you healthy and well? Rank your health and wellbeing priorities?

Phase 2: July 9 to August 10, 2025

focused on seeking feedback on the Draft Strategy, to ensure it reflects community needs and expectations. Two key questions were asked: What do you like about the Strategy? What would you add/change?

Background

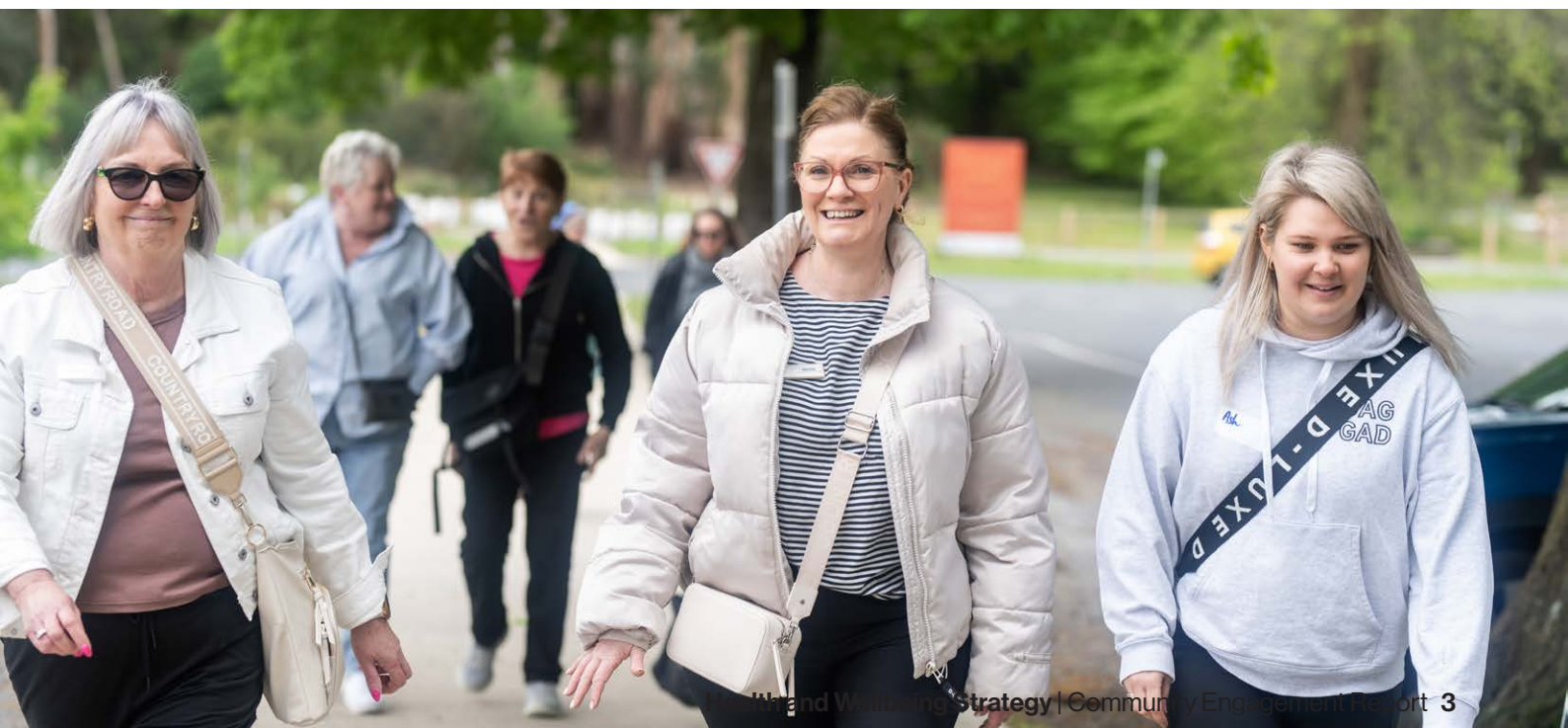
Improving population health means considering where people live, work, and spend time, as well as the diverse needs of different groups at all life stages.

It relies on working with governments, health partners, organisations and communities, with local input at the heart of placed-based approaches to improving wellbeing.

To inform the Strategy, Council gathered community feedback from:

- Health and Wellbeing Strategy engagement, phase 1 (2024)
- Council Plan engagement (April 2024)
- Youth Summit event (April 2025)
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy engagement phase 2 (2025)
- Council Advisory Committees

Community feedback plus a wide range of health data has informed the development the Strategy. There are also legislated requirements regarding what councils need to respond to within their health and wellbeing plans.



Promoting engagement opportunities

Council is committed to actively listening and involving community in decision making. To reach a variety of people, Council used the following methods to promote community engagement opportunities for the Strategy:



Website promotion



E-Newsletters



Printed media



Social media



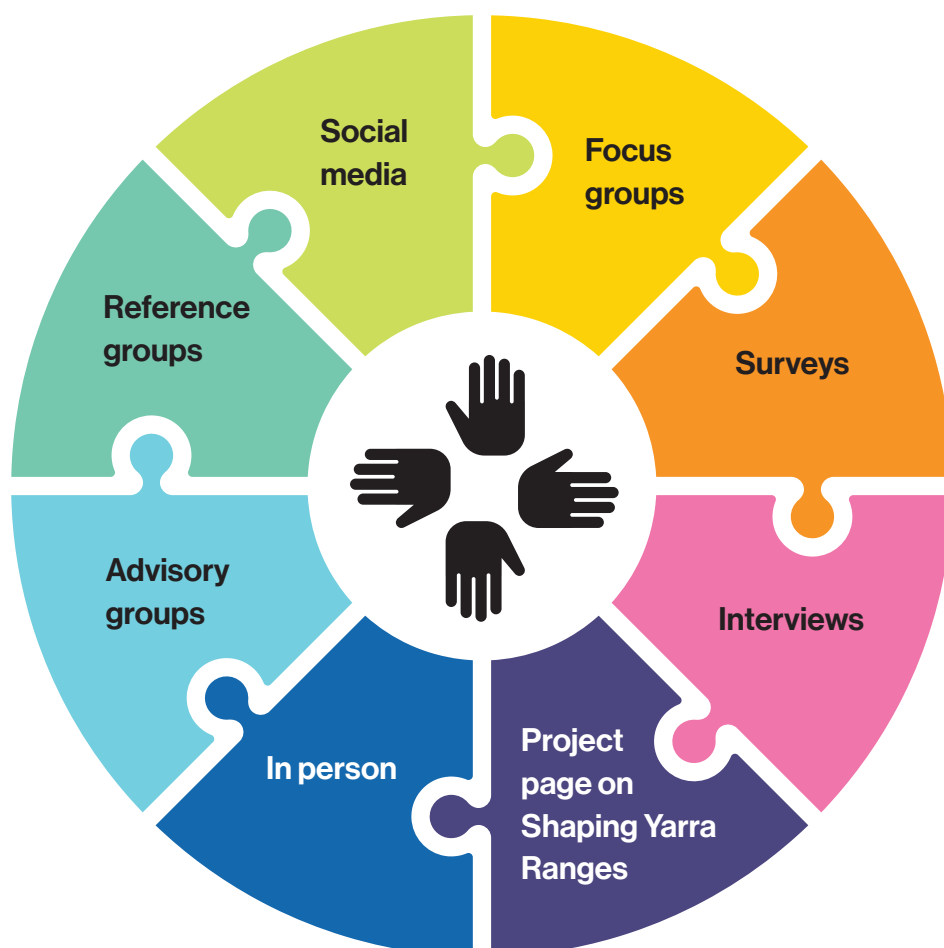
Presentations



Email distribution

Methods of data collection

To broaden our understanding of health and wellbeing in the Yarra Ranges, the community was able to get involved in the following ways.



How people got involved – Phase 1

The engagement methods, number of participants, and key themes from those who participated in developing the Draft Strategy are shown below.

E-newsletter

- Over **11,171** recipients received Council E-newsletters

Social Media

- **16,756** people reached through Yarra Ranges Council Facebook and Instagram pages

Printed media

- Two stories in **six** local newspapers

Shaping Yarra Ranges webpage

- **842** visitors
- **177** contributions

Written submissions

- **Two** written submissions received

Community engagement roadshows

- **411** people reached at seven community roadshows in Chirnside Park, Tecoma, Kilsyth, Seville, Lilydale, Warburton.

Youth-specific

- **Three** youth focus groups
- **3,838** people reached through youth social media
- Advice from **Youth Ambassadors**

Interviews, networks and Council staff

- **Four** interviews with individuals and networks
- **One** men's focus groups
- **One** staff event
- **Seven** meetings with local and regional partners

Council Plan engagement

- **135** people at three summit events
- The Council Plan engagement reached a maximum of **5,498** people, with active involvement from **1,091** participants

Advisory and Steering Committees

- Health and Wellbeing Advisory Committee
- Indigenous Advisory Committee
- Disability Advisory Committee
- Sustainable Environment Advisory Committee
- Youth Advisory Group
- Positive Ageing Reference Group
- Combined Advisory Group event
- Health and Wellbeing Steering Committee



Summary of feedback – Phase 1

The community highlighted several key themes relating to health and wellbeing, providing valuable insights. These themes are summarised below.

Top priorities from face-to-face community engagement

- Mental wellbeing and community connection
- Access to services, especially mental health
- Active living
- Support for children and young people (linked to multiple priority areas)

Key issues for community health services

- Healthy eating
- Adapting to the health impacts of climate change
- Family violence
- Alcohol and other drugs
- Hospital usage/access

Online engagement (Shaping Yarra Ranges)

- Improving mental wellbeing
- Health impacts of climate change
- Increasing active living

Amongst the comments, the over-arching theme was active living – including ways that Council could support active living, the walkability of Yarra Ranges, and access to swimming pools. Social connections and mental health support were another key theme, along with cost of living, and facilities and programs. Mental wellbeing and social connection were clearly linked for many respondents.

Issues and concerns relating to walkability included safety, accessibility, path quality and location – e.g., lighting, having good walking paths close to home.

Key themes from Council Plan engagement (related to health and wellbeing)

- Reducing climate change impacts
- Community safety and health – including health services, community safety work, and emergency management
- Supporting the community – health services and information for individuals and families at all life stages
- Supporting the community to thrive - Maintaining sports facilities, open spaces and other infrastructure

Community Vision (elements linked to health and wellbeing)

- Climate change risks are reduced
- The community is connected, volunteers and supports each other
- The community is prepared for extreme weather events
- Disadvantaged residents are well supported

Overall priorities

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

Priority 2: Improving mental wellbeing

Priority 3: Increasing community capacity to lead healthy lives.

Priority 4: Creating safe and more inclusive communities.

Key insights

- Climate change and mental wellbeing are the top concerns.
- Children and young people are a priority across all health issues, particularly mental wellbeing and service access.
- The social determinants of health – e.g., affordable housing, food security, education, public transport, affordable services and local jobs - underpin many concerns. Locality, cultural diversity, age and gender also affect people's concerns and priorities for their wellbeing.



How people got involved – Phase 2

The engagement methods, number of participants, and comments from those who participated in providing feedback on the Draft Strategy.



E-newsletter

- Over **11,171** recipients received Council E-newsletters

Social Media

- **24,712** people reached through Yarra Ranges Council Facebook and Instagram pages

Printed media

- Stories in **six** local newspapers

Shaping Yarra Ranges webpage

- **1,357** visitors
- **36** contributions

Written submissions

- **Four** written submissions received

Community engagement roadshows

- **97** people reached at six community roadshows in Healesville, Lilydale, Belgrave, Warburton, Menzie's Creek and Monbulk.

Youth-specific

- **One Youth Summit**
- 50 people reached through six schools
- Advice from **Youth Ambassadors**

Interviews, networks and Council staff

- **Four** interviews with individuals and networks
- **One** men's focus groups
- Five staff event
- **Seven** meetings with local and regional partners

Advisory and Steering Committees

- Health and Wellbeing Advisory Committee
- Indigenous Advisory Committee
- Disability Advisory Committee
- Sustainable Environment Advisory Committee
- Youth Advisory Group
- Positive Ageing Reference Group
- Health and Wellbeing Steering Committee

What people told us via the Shaping Yarra Ranges webpage – Phase 2

When asked one thing you like/love about the Strategy?

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

"The focus on the impact of climate change is good"

"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".

"The holistic consideration of health and consideration of planet/environmental health direct impact on human health".

"Priority to increase community adaptation to climate-related health risks".

Priority 2: Improving mental wellbeing

"Focus on improving access to mental health treatment".

"That there is a focus on mental health in the community".

"I like the focus on mental health and wellbeing".

"Community groups connecting all ages for a healthy community".

Priority 3: Increasing community capacity to lead healthy lives.

"In the interest of a healthy community you are going to rebuild the Hawthory Road indoor 50 pool as promised by the majority of the current council".

"A focus on improving outdoor facilities to promote physical activity (parks, paths)".

"Yarra ranges is such a beautiful area. Please provide more safe bike paths to connect all the different little towns so we can ride safely through the Dandenongs. It would be great to get the bikes off the roads and onto paths, imagine riding along a path following around the Silvan dam".

"Walking tracks, bike tracks".

"Supporting our community to lead healthy lives".

Priority 4: Creating safe and more inclusive communities.

"It addresses key aspects such as climate resilience, mental health and family and domestic violence. I have concerns about the rise of the "Mano sphere" in Yarra Ranges and feel that this is addressed in the equity priorities".

General

"Opportunities to review and comment on it."

"Thorough use of comparative data, well written".

"I like the four priority areas".

"Statements of commitment to equity approaches".

"Someone spent a lot of care and effort on it. Very feel good and caring".

"The place based approach".

"Good coverage of statistics across Yarra Ranges".

"It was easy to read and seems comprehensive".

"How the strategic is both a framework and an advocacy tool. It's good for council documents to be multi-purpose".

"It is very forward looking and positive".

"It's broad focus for our community".

"It covers multiple facets affecting health".

"It has covered the areas of need in our community".

"Sets out key health risk data for the region".

"Focus on four areas seems much more realistic and impactful. Actions are open meaning flexibility over the life of this plan".

"Clear aims that have practical actions".

"The admission that the Health & Wellbeing of Yarra Ranges is close to the worst in Victoria. p 10".

"Clear responsibilities for Council action".

"Council's role is clearly defined in Table 1".

"It's very comprehensive and includes a broad range of needs of the community relating to health and well being".

When asked one thing you would add/change about the Strategy?

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

"Increase the focus on climate related health risks".

"Why the shift in language from natural disasters to climate related disruptions. Our community has been impacted by natural disasters. The June Storm in 2021 is my example".

"There is a great deal of detail about making climate resilient communities, but nothing about advocating for action on climate change. This is a glaring omission. The plan addresses advocating at a state and local level for greater investment in social and affordable housing, but does not indicate anything about advocacy for action on climate change. Our federal member belongs to a political party which basically denies climate change. We are disproportionately affected by climate change, and I believe it falls into the remit of the council to advocate for greater federal action on this issue, and I think this should be included in the plan. Your team can't be expected to constantly provide Band-Aid solutions to a national problem".

"YRC should do less talking (providing information & education) and more provision of places to relieve mental health and to escape from high temperatures. Think urban swimming pool at Kiloran Park."

"A greater focus on preparedness for natural disasters as well as response after the event."

Priority 2: Improving mental wellbeing

"More focus on size-inclusive practice and positive body image initiatives - this is really neglected in the strategic plan and its one of the biggest contributors to poor mental health, as well as eating disorders which is a huge health issue in the YR".

"Feels empty.. health and well-being would be greatly improved with lower rates, more help and support, everyone is struggling financially, no one is helping each other, there's no time for community, it's just work, work, work so we still can't afford rates and bills and food".

"Greater emphasis on postnatal mental health".

Priority 3: Increasing community capacity to lead healthy lives.

"In the 3rd point regarding health.

Parks and exercise are terrific but please highlight the importance of aquatic options for both health and safety of the resident of the Yarra ranges.

The urban area now has no all weather opportunities to use water for fitness, recovery from health issues or education around water safety since you have taken away the pools at Hawthory Road.

Please consider the importance of this and replace the pools there".

Priority 3: Increasing community capacity to lead healthy lives.

"Things council could do in relation to food security and climate resilience (direct association with health and well being): fostering/supporting more local small scale food".

"Push to get our pool back!"

"There is no mention in the plan about assistance to the disadvantaged, especially in the area of food insecurity".

"Quote from my 8 year old: If the government wants us to eat healthy, why do they put all of this food in our shops that are not good for us? (he evaluated this himself). The supermarkets have a huge pull in healthy eating, targeting our local shops to reduce discretionary foods and reducing the cost of healthy foods would be great. P.S I'm overweight, and majored in nutrition at university. I too see environmental factors as a major impact".

"Bike paths".

"To add more footpaths around more popular rural areas and along public transport routes.

This will help with increasing exercise and allow people to get to urban areas to access services.

For example down the Warburton highway, bus route, it is quite dangerous to walk to some of the bus stops and others cannot be easily accessed due to the lack of footpaths".

"Build a year round full size swimming pool for the 100,000 urban residents of the shire. Do not put it off for another 8 years."

Priority 4: Creating safe and more inclusive communities.

"While there is good commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion - this doesn't actually flow through to the data (very limited gender disaggregated data included and almost no intersectional) or the actions including in the plan. Who is the priority group and why? How is the commitment operationalised? I'd also recommended using men, women and gender diverse rather than male and female".

"Support for seniors to assist writing advance care plans and assist with all the paperwork what goes with it".

"Strategy lacks a gendered lens everywhere but in the gendered violence section. Much more to women's health equality that violence prevention."

"More specific focus on seniors".

Priority 4: Creating safe and more inclusive communities.

"To reduce violence against women and children, targeting education for teachers and parents through schools, offering free online seminars by leading experts (ie John Gottman institute on healthy relationships or local experts in behaviour change such as David Nugent from the Heavy Metal Group to offer workshops for our local community). Their workings and frameworks shift perspectives to leading positive and healthy relationships. The issue is cyclic and dynamics across out community continue the cycle. Our community would benefit from more specialised and targeted education above just being able to identify abuse. Understanding the cycle of abuse and different dynamics of power and control (and the various roles people take on in this cycle) can help to break the cycle within our community".

"More specific focus on seniors".

"I would include sporting initiatives to encourage our older residents to participate in sporting clubs for health and social connections. Sporting groups such as Lilydale Croquet club who have 40 members and gaining new members every week. They only have 1 small court and this is limiting membership as members have long wait times to play a game of croquet. We have been asking council to give them at least another 2 courts to encourage and provide members the opportunity to have a few games a day and visit most days to connect with others socially and exercise to remain a healthy lifestyle. 5 years is a long time to complete the redevelopment of Melba park. We need a new club room and only have 1 shared toilet. No handicap toilet. We host competitions but this is limited as only one court. Lilydale Croquet club is very competitive and win or get a place in all their metropolitan Competitions. Council as yet has not as yet given us a new court or clubhouse. Your new strategy discusses Community involvement providing health initiative for all ages of residents in your Shire. Please consider this Croquet development upgrade."

"More consideration given to people in need of support such as women in domestic violence circumstances, homeless and people on low incomes."

General

"There is a long list of actions, I didn't read them all but I wonder if this could have been refined. How will Council remain accountable to all these actions".

General

"The plan could be clearer on who is responsible for each action and how success will be measured – adding some specific targets and timelines would help track progress more effectively".

"I would like to see consideration of the 'commercial determinants of health'. Considering this in councils assets and environments of eating. Commercial determinants include marketing/ advertisement and links to procurement or other. The wording place-based is region specific only and not a place such as an environment or setting. This could be clearer in the plan. For protective health factors - consuming fruit and vegetables should be listed. Especially as healthy eating was a key health consideration through community engagement outcomes. Only sugary drinks is mentioned at this draft. In line with this Goal 1. should state Wholefoods and not minimal processed only such as wholefoods and minimal processed foods. No processing is best. The initiatives should include 'healthy and sustainable food systems' not just initiatives alone. Food security could be detailed to show the understanding of link with Family Violence and population groups. I would hope to see 'commercial determinants' considered such as protection of marketing and advertisement messaging of unhealthy behaviours (alcohol, foods, gambling, vaping/cigarettes) especially targeting children in community spaces".

"Infographics might make it more visually appealing".

"No more fee or rate increases."

"Nothing I can think of".

"I would maybe just note or add that the role of Council in advancing some of the goals and priorities may be subject to change. Considering the plan is meant to cover 4 years, a lot can happen in 4 years and Council's role can evolve or change over time and I wouldn't want the plan to have no flexibility in that. Also add a plain English or one-pager version of the plan at the start".

General

“Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy. I commend Council for its focus on addressing housing-related issues as a key component of community wellbeing.

I note the Strategy outlines Council's intention to advocate to state and federal governments for investment in social and affordable housing and homelessness services. While I acknowledge that homelessness is a serious and complex issue, the document does not present specific data or evidence to demonstrate that this is a critical or growing challenge within our local government area to justify prioritisation of this advocacy focus. In contrast, the Strategy presents clear and concerning evidence that our region is facing significant and compounding risks related to climate change and natural disasters, including:

- The second-highest risk level from climate change impacts,
- The second-highest reliance on national disaster funding,
- Ranking third in storm hotspots across the state,
- Holding the highest bushfire risk in the country.

Given these risks, a more pressing and immediate issue impacting housing security for many residents is the increasing cost and inaccessibility of home insurance. While the Strategy includes an action to “partner and deliver education initiatives to increase awareness of insurance options and underinsurance risks,” this does not go far enough in addressing the root problem — that many households are now unable to afford adequate coverage due to surging premiums in high-risk areas.

I encourage Council to consider expanding its advocacy focus to address housing insurability and affordability of insurance. Partnering with state and federal governments to identify and deliver policy or funding solutions that reduce insurance premiums or improve access to coverage would provide significant benefit to residents and may help prevent future pathways into housing vulnerability or homelessness.

By helping our community retain secure and insurable housing, Council can take a more preventative approach to wellbeing and housing stability. Thank you for considering this feedback”.

“Mention of \$1.2b visitors spend for our economy. No mention of how we could capitalise on this to support the large council area? We got lots of beautiful land; why aren't we using this for tourism to pay for the health and wellbeing initiatives of the people living here? Think long term!”

“Nothing.”

“Why are you wasting rate payers money on this dribble?”

General

"I am surprised that a large part of Council's role in the health and wellbeing of the community is due to the work of the Public and Environmental Health Officers, yet little mention is made in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy of their frontline role as a regulator and educator of community health and wellbeing in areas such as Food Safety Standards, Public Accommodation Standards, Health and Beauty Businesses, responding to community environmental and health concerns, assessment and approval of wastewater and septic system designs, responding to infectious disease outbreaks, etc, etc. The work of the P&EHO's is fundamental to all of the State Government priority areas listed on page 9 and surely play a vital role in Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The draft HWS should be more explicit about the work of Council's P&EHO's and the role they play in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy".

Summary of feedback – Phase 2

Key themes from online engagement (Shaping Yarra Ranges)

1. Increased focus on Community Infrastructure

- Strong demand for year-round, all-weather public swimming pools.
- Better sports and recreation facilities for all ages, including older residents (e.g. croquet courts, clubhouses, accessible toilets).
- More and safer walking and cycling paths.
- Inclusive recreational spaces that cater to women, non-binary people, and diverse body types.

2. Increased access to Health Services

- More affordable and accessible mental health services, including postnatal support, targeted youth initiatives (e.g. vaping prevention), and safe spaces for teenagers.
- Targeted programs addressing family violence and healthy relationships.
- Better GP access, bulk billing, urgent care, and support for neurodivergent people.

3. Increased focus on equity, inclusion and accessibility

- Calls for stronger gender analysis and intersectional approaches across all priorities, not just in gender-based violence prevention.
- Greater inclusion of disadvantaged groups.
- More accessible and affordable facilities so everyone can participate.

4. Increased focus on Climate Change and Preparedness

- Recognition of climate change as a critical health issue, with requests for clearer advocacy to federal and state governments.
- Calls for greater focus on disaster preparedness, recovery, and addressing housing insurance affordability in high-risk areas.

5. Increasing healthy environments and food systems

- Support for improving local food security, and limiting marketing of unhealthy products (alcohol, sugary drinks, fast food, gambling, vaping).
- Suggestions for supporting local food production (e.g. farmer programs, composting, small-scale producers) to strengthen healthy and sustainable food systems.

6. Increased Governance, Accountability and Communication

- Requests for greater clarity on how actions will be monitored and measured.
- Desire for a plain English summary and more engaging presentation (e.g. infographics).
- Recognition of Council's regulatory role in environmental and public health, with calls for this to be more visible in the strategy.
- Mixed views on scope—some support the breadth of priorities, while others feel the strategy is too high-level and vague.

Key themes from face-to-face engagement

1. Importance of mental health and social connection

- Greater focus on men's mental health, particularly fathers, and mental health impacts of cost-of-living pressures.
- More affordable, accessible, and locally available mental health services.
- Requests for Mental Health First Aid training for community groups and ongoing mentoring for trained volunteers.
- Social connection valued through activities like water aerobics, bowls, and exercise groups, highlighting the importance of low-cost or free access to facilities.
- Concerns about social isolation for older residents, especially those unable to drive.

2. Importance of Ageing well

- Support for ageing in place.
- Need for printed information and analogue service options.

3. Increased housing and vulnerable populations

- More affordable and secure housing needed for vulnerable groups, including single men and women escaping violence.

4. Increased equity, inclusion and accessibility

- Importance of visible recognition of minority cohorts in demographics and planning.
- Requests for Easy English versions of key documents, and broader cross-cultural communication.
- Inclusion of LGBTIQ+ experiences of domestic violence and greater cultural safety across priorities.
- Low-cost or free access to Council spaces for community-led activities.

5. Increased focus on Young People

- Better skate and bike facilities, safe hang-out spaces, and affordable activities.
- Improved employment opportunities.
- Stronger action on vaping.
- Recognition of climate change's disproportionate mental health impacts on young people.

6. Increase focus on Climate change and environment

- Calls for prioritising climate change adaptation and recognising health impacts.
- Concerns about planned burns in native forests and associated air pollution.
- Requests for clear advocacy and practical local action on environmental health risks.

7. Increased Governance, accountability and communication

- Preference for priorities without numbered order to avoid perceived hierarchy.
- Suggestions for stronger monitoring and evaluation frameworks, including measuring partnerships.

Key insights to inform the finalisation of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy

- Use of language; preference for Focus Areas instead of Priorities to avoid perceived hierarchy.
- Inclusion of infographics and placement of data throughout documents.
- Consideration to accessibility of document; design colours, theming, dissemination once finalised.
- Community infrastructure – strong demand for improved, accessible and inclusive recreation facilities, year-round pools, and safe walking/cycling paths. Actions reflected in the Strategy and Advocacy Priorities.
- Health and mental wellbeing – need for more affordable, local mental health services, targeted support (men, youth, postnatal etc), and stronger prevention programs. Actions reflected in the Strategy and Advocacy Priorities. Addition of data to reflect men and women.
- Equity and inclusion – calls for intersectional approaches, cultural safety, and low-cost access to facilities so all community members can participate. Council continues to complete Gender Impact Assessments on all programs, policies and plans. Actions reflected in the Strategy and Advocacy Priorities. Added State Government definition for Intersectionality and additional desired outcome under Focus Area 4.
- Climate change and environment – recognition of climate change as a health issue, with emphasis on adaptation, disaster preparedness, and local environmental action. Actions reflected in the Strategy and Advocacy Priorities.
- Healthy food systems – support for food security, sustainable local food production, and limiting unhealthy product marketing. Actions reflected in the Strategy and Advocacy Priorities.
- Housing and vulnerable groups – need for affordable, secure housing, especially for people escaping violence and other vulnerable cohorts. Actions reflected in the Strategy and Advocacy Priorities.
- Young people – requests for better recreation spaces, safe hang-outs, employment opportunities, and action on vaping. Actions reflected in the Strategy and Advocacy Priorities.
- Addition of thematic colour coding throughout Strategy and inclusion of supporting documents. This to highlight where Council Strategy, Plans or Policy relate to desired outcomes; Housing Strategy, Economic Development, Key Life Stages etc.
- Governance and communication – desire for clearer monitoring, and plain English communication. Addition of recognition of Health & Wellbeing Advisory Committee and Health & Wellbeing Steering Committee to Strategy. Inclusion of Evaluation Framework and accountability through annual report to Council.



Limitations

During the engagement, Council successfully connected with people living, working, and spending time in the Yarra Ranges. The engagement sought views on what supports individual and community health and wellbeing. The feedback reflects the views of those who self-elected to participate and may not be representative of the whole community. Council cannot take immediate action in response to all feedback received. Any action must align with the Council's ongoing legislative responsibilities, budgetary constraints, and the focus areas of the Strategy.

Acknowledgements

Council would like to acknowledge and thank the many people and partners who shared their expertise and insights to help inform the development of the Yarra Ranges Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-2029. Community and stakeholder contributions have been invaluable in shaping a strategy that reflects the diverse needs, strengths, and aspirations of our community.