



Latrobe Health
Advocate

Quarterly Update

October to December 2020

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Message from the Latrobe Health Advocate



I am pleased to provide this quarterly update for the period October to December 2020.

During this quarter I have engaged with 1006 people. 74% of these conversations involved elevating the voice of communities and advocating for systems change in response to community needs and aspirations. The activities and events I attended are highlighted in this update along with a snapshot of what I am hearing from communities across Latrobe.

I also want to highlight the Inclusive Communities work undertaken by my office which resulted in the release of a further report in the Engagement Inspiration series during this quarter. Insights from my engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were published in December and made available on our website.

During this quarter I have heard from young people aged 12-25 years and am inspired by the number of young leaders in our community who are ready to take on the challenges that life can present us. I am also encouraged by their long-term goals and their capacity to care for others. I look forward to sharing the insights of this engagement with you in a new report due out shortly.

In October, I released my [2019/20 Annual Report](#). This report provided a snapshot of the top five community aspirations for the year and reported on the activities and projects undertaken by my office throughout the year.

In the coming months I will be turning to people who are experiencing or who have experienced family violence. Unfortunately, for many years Latrobe has been at the top of the list for instances of family violence across the 79 LGAs within Victoria.

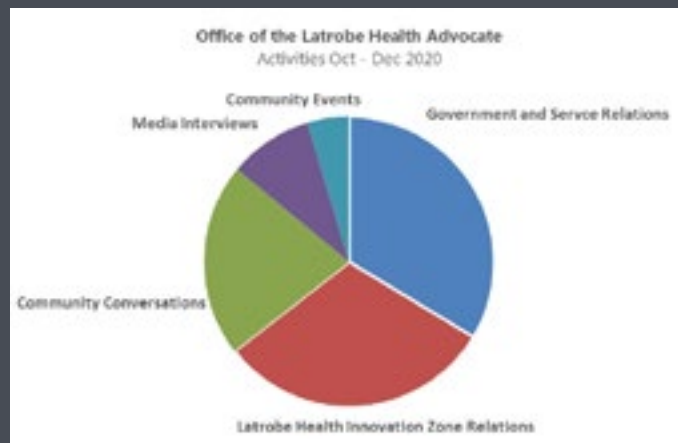
It is a difficult subject for people to talk about and can have far reaching effects for all family members. I want to understand how people experiencing such trauma can be supported to have their voice and gain the support they need so that they can experience better health and wellbeing.

If you would like to share your experiences with me please contact Kylie on 1800 319 255 or email info@lhadvocate.vic.gov.au. You can also direct message me on Facebook @LHAdvocate

I hope you all managed to catch up with family and friends over the festive season and like us you're ready for an exciting 2021! Stay safe

Jane

Highlights of activities and events



Latrobe Health Innovation Zone:

The Advocate attended a virtual Gippsland Health Forum with the Federal Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government Mark Coulton MP. This forum was organised by Regional Development Australia and focused on regional health priorities and the strengths, opportunities, and gaps across Gippsland's health services. The Advocate talked about the opportunity to support and learn from the work occurring in the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone, emphasised the importance of governments and services listening and responding to community voice and asked about what opportunities there are to embed community engagement into every aspect of the health system. The Advocate highlighted the need to ensure that the COVID-19 recovery effort maintains an appropriate emphasis on health and wellbeing outcomes across all the social determinants of health.

The [Hazelwood Health Study](#) released information about the mortality effects of 2014 Hazelwood Mine Fire. The research has shown that there was not an overall increase in mortality but a shift in the types of deaths and an increase in injury related deaths. Data shows that after the event there was an increase in deaths that relate to cardiovascular issues. The Advocate is asking governments and services to utilise this important research to inform planning for the future and to ensure that emergency responses take in to account the health needs of everyone in the community. There is an important and ongoing role for people in the community to look out for each other during emergency events.

Access to Services:

The Advocate met with Professor Ruth Stewart, National Rural Health Commissioner to discuss the [Improving Access to Services in Latrobe](#) action plan. The Advocate and the Commissioner discussed the maldistribution of GPs and other health professionals, including allied health workers, and the value of creating models of practice that enable full utilisation of multidisciplinary teams and support every practitioner to work to their full scope of practice. The Commissioner is interested in the work occurring in Latrobe to address the important issue of access to primary health care services for communities.

The Advocate has held discussions with lead agencies involved in the delivery of the [Access to Services in Latrobe joint action plan](#). These discussions have centred on ways agencies and governments can work together, innovations that have occurred through COVID-19, Federal Budget announcements, and implementation of the Rural Generalist Training Program.

The Advocate contributed to discussions and investment logic workshops with Federation University and local stakeholders about the development of a community health hub and clinic in Latrobe. In doing so the Advocate highlighted the importance of recognising the role of communities within local governance structures and creating the conditions in which community views can be heard. There is an opportunity through the creation of the health hub to innovate flexible models of care that develop and utilise a multidisciplinary team of health professionals.

There is alignment between the objectives of the proposed community health hub and clinic and the actions within the joint action plan for access to services in Latrobe. Specifically, utilising a multidisciplinary approach to primary care, building system capacity to enable innovation, responsiveness to community voice, and social prescribing.

The Advocate participated in a Gippsland Regional Partnership meeting that was attended by Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development Danielle Green. In this discussion the Advocate raised the strength of the Gippsland Regional Plan with health and wellbeing at the centre, the value of lived experience being incorporated into social housing design, the value of a contemporary multi-disciplinary approach to primary healthcare and the community need for a hospice in the region.



Representatives from the National Broadband Network (NBN) have met with the Advocate to discuss connectivity issues in Latrobe and what can be done to lift digital capability.

The Advocate has highlighted the impacts of COVID-19 and the importance of increasing access to data and technology, building skills and confidence for people to connect online, and the need to address equity and affordability issues.

The Advocate met with Andrew Eastcott, Regional Director, Department of Education and Training (DET) to discuss opportunities to strengthen links between the education sector and the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone. The Advocate highlighted the opportunity for the DET in the implementation of the [Improving Access to Services in Latrobe](#) action plan and sought to further understand the impact of COVID-19 on students and the education sector.

Health is Everyone's Business:

There has been significant interest in the work and recommendations of the [Latrobe Valley Asbestos Taskforce](#) (LVAT). The Advocate has presented at a range of forums including whole of government briefings and online community webinars. LVAT members are raising awareness of: the risks of removal of asbestos in residential settings; the need for more safety and awareness training for specific occupations; and stronger protocols regarding demolition and reporting.

The Advocate met with Victorian Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change Lily D'Ambrosio to discuss the

Year 1 recommendations from the Latrobe Valley Asbestos Taskforce.



Healthy Lifestyles:

The Advocate attended an Early Years Nutrition Roundtable hosted by VicHealth aimed at developing a 3 – 5-year roadmap for early years nutrition in Victoria. This was an opportunity for the Advocate to put forward the importance of involving local communities in the work and to identify ways that the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone could contribute.

Human Connections:

The Advocate met with the CEO of Mental Health Reform Victoria to discuss the ongoing response to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and the Advocate's recommendations about improving mental health outcomes in Latrobe.

During the discussion the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone was identified as a place to fast track testing of new systems and to engage with communities.

Inclusive Communities:

The Advocate held discussions with the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) to highlight the insights and evidence in her report [Engagement Inspiration](#) from people experiencing financial stress in Latrobe and to discuss the impacts of COVID-19. The Advocate has agreed to continue to work with VCOSS to highlight inequities and identify ways of improving health and wellbeing of people in Latrobe.

The Advocate met with Gerard Mansour Commissioner for Senior Victorians to discuss upcoming work within the Advocate's Statement of Intent including engagement with older people in Latrobe and the Human Connections in Latrobe priority project. The Advocate and the Commissioner have identified a number of opportunities to share engagement outcomes and influence systems change together during 2021.

While attending a tour of the new Federation University Innovation Centre the Advocate took the opportunity to share feedback from LGBTIQ people in Latrobe about the importance of designing buildings with non-gendered toilets.

While meeting with Mental Health Complaints Commissioner and Disability Services Commissioner, Treasure Jennings, the Advocate shared insights regarding mental health, the impacts of COVID-19 and opportunities to improve health outcomes for people living with disability.

Prior to finalising the report, Engagement Inspiration from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Latrobe, the Advocate sought feedback from local Elders and community groups about the themes and insights that have been identified through her engagement with communities.

This feedback process confirmed and strengthened the content within the Advocate's report.

The Advocate has heard about the importance of connection to the land, community spirit, health, and healing. People have told the Advocate the listening is one thing and acting is another. Aboriginal people have expressed a view that engagement without genuine and visible action can lead to mistrust and does not enhance health and wellbeing outcomes.



The Advocate met with the Commissioner for Children and Young People Liana Buchanan to discuss the Inclusive Communities in Latrobe priority project and upcoming engagement with young people. The Advocate and the Commissioner identified ways to promote participation in the Victorian Government survey for young people and agreed to work together in the months ahead to support the Government to achieve enhanced health and wellbeing outcomes for young people.

The Advocate has been engaging with young people in Latrobe to understand their health and wellbeing aspirations and preferred ways of having their voice. The data and insights from this engagement informed the Advocate's submission to the Victorian Youth Strategy consultation.

The Advocate has heard that it is important for young people to be heard and to see that their contributions make a difference to policy and program outcomes; that mental wellbeing, exercise and fitness are important and that young people can struggle with the weight of expectation they feel from themselves and others.



Prior to engaging directly with young people, the Advocate sought the advice and support of Latrobe Street Games, the Centre for Multicultural Youth, Latrobe Headspace, the Latrobe Valley Ladder Program, and Latrobe Youth Space.

COVID-19

During this quarter the office continued to support Latrobe communities, local services, and the Victorian Government in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Towards the end of 2020 Latrobe communities alongside the rest of Victoria were able to experience significant easing of restrictions. The Advocate continued to operate remotely and engage largely via online methods however some face to face interactions were able to take place within COVID safe guidelines.

The Advocate presented at the **Gippsland Social Inclusion Forum** to share what Latrobe communities are saying and to provide insights from the Inclusive Communities work occurring within the Advocate's Office. The forum was an opportunity for the Advocate to hear directly from a variety of social services about the impacts of COVID-19 and the ways that some services had adjusted their approach to provide support to communities.

The first lockdown was hard. I am embracing living in the country.

Snapshot of community voice



Better mental health in Latrobe

People have expressed concerns about the lack of mental health services and supports for LGBTIQ communities and in particular for people who may be afraid to come out and people who are geographically isolated. They have made suggestions about increasing LGBTIQ visibility in small towns and at the same time ensuring that people's privacy is respected.

Young people in Latrobe recognise that it is important to look after their mental wellbeing and have shared their aspirations to achieve happiness and an appropriate balance in life. They believe that to achieve this balance it helps to have a constructive outlook and a holistic approach to health that includes physical, mental, and spiritual care.

The Advocate consistently heard that it makes a difference when young people feel a sense of belonging, can spend time doing things that they enjoy and importantly have goals to focus on. Young people have these goals for themselves and others and talked to us about their intentions to spread love and positivity and stay in contact with friends.



Healthy Lifestyles for everyone in Latrobe

Young people have said that it is important for them to be fit and healthy. The Advocate heard about the importance of being able to access nutritious and sustainable food.

People said that they want to consume less alcohol, energy drinks and processed foods.

As COVID-19 restrictions eased a local exercise group for older people was able to re-commence classes in person. Group leaders observed a notable decline in the physical and mental health of participants resulting from the impacts of COVID-19.



There are people in Latrobe who are eligible for support through My Aged Care and want to experience a coordinated approach to the support that they are offered to enable them to benefit from a healthy lifestyle. The Advocate has heard about the disjointedness of some services and long waiting lists. They have shared their goals to stay involved in local walking groups and exercise programs and their hope that there may be a streamlined and integrated approach to the support available to them.

I am feeling past my use by date. I have achieved things in my life and managed and now feel helpless.

The Advocate heard about the importance of sport for young people, as a good way to socialise with friends, participate in their community and to be physically fit. Young people also talked about meditation and daily relaxation, noting that there is a connection between physical health and mental health.

I could live outside for the rest of my life if I need to



Better Access to services in Latrobe

People have expressed frustration about the impact of not being able to see a GP of their choice. They can feel conflicted between wanting to maintain a consistent and trusted relationship with their GP and making appointments with alternate GP in order to be seen.

The Advocate has heard that telehealth is a great feature of the system but is not appropriate for every health issue.

The Advocate has heard suggestions that a Disability Action Group could be established to work with local government to enable greater engagement with people living with a disability with the aim of improving access to a range of services in community.

The Advocate has heard about a potential gap in the provision of sexual and reproductive health supports and medicines in Latrobe and heard feedback that local pharmacies may not have staff with the appropriate training and that there may not be enough demand from communities. It has been suggested that greater awareness raising, and education may help in addition to creating more accessible health hubs.

The Advocate has heard about the negative impacts of screening services that use gendered language and paperwork. LGBTIQ people who need to access these important services can feel left out and isolated when language is focused on male and female. They are less likely to access support as a result.

Much of this screening is done in women's health services, it is off putting for trans men and you have outed yourself as soon as you go there.



A more socially connected Latrobe community

Young people have said they want reassurance that their needs will be met and that others will be there for them when they need them. Young people said that there needs to be equality and a world without discrimination.

Some young people pointed out that they have no control over the world or circumstances that they have been born into and want others to have greater awareness of someone else's context.

Young people talked about the importance of helping others and knowing that this help may be returned one day when they too are in need. The Advocate heard that safe and supportive environments can be created by teachers who are able to put rules or boundaries in place that enable respect and listening. When young people feel that their community is inclusive and when they have a support network around them, they are more able to be healthy.

I want a world where everyone is cared for, has their human rights respected and we look after each other and our planet



Safe environment for people in Latrobe

Latrobe communities remain concerned about the proposed Used Lead Battery Recycling Facility in Hazelwood. They have expressed the view that planning approval processes are biased towards industry, that

there is a lack of appropriate national standards. Communities are seeking greater research into the connection between pollution and health and want to see more rigor from the EPA in relation to assessments, communication, and enforcement.



Better end of life experiences for people in Latrobe

The Advocate has heard about the importance of offering spiritual care as part of a comprehensive suite of bereavement

services for communities.

Spiritual care has been described as something that is inherently part of human life and it may be relationships with people, earth, religion, or connection to sense of meaning. It has been suggested that spiritual care is not visible within local end of life care services and this could be addressed through adequate oversight, training, and supervision.

Observed systems change

The Advocate works towards better systems of health and wellbeing in Latrobe Valley and has adapted the Water of Systems Change model which identifies 6 conditions of systems change. When considering systems change as a result of elevating community voice, the Advocate looks at these distinct areas:

- Better relationships
- Better services
- Better mental models
- Better supports
- Better policy and
- Integration of community voice in decision making

Better relationships: The quality of connections and communication happening among services in the system, especially those with differing histories and viewpoints.

Federation University has committed to working with the Advocate and demonstrated interest in working with local communities to help them achieve their goals.

The working relationship between the Advocate and the Latrobe Valley Authority (LVA) continues to strengthen with a commitment to a shared approach and ways of working.

The Advocate and the Latrobe Health Assembly Board are progressing discussions about sharing infrastructure and ways to create two-way approaches to share and respond to the voice of Latrobe communities.

In discussions with Latrobe Regional Hospital the Advocate has heard about the effective working relationship and commitment to working together with the Gippsland Mental Health Alliance.

Better services: Espoused activities of institutions, coalitions, networks, and other entities targeted to improving social and environmental progress. Also, within the entity, the procedures, guidelines, or informal shared habits that comprise their work.

Latrobe Regional Hospital (LRH) is designing telehealth services in a way that enables multiple services and support staff to come together to help patients navigate the system and to benefit from a more holistic approach to care.

During COVID-19 lockdowns Gippsland Multicultural Services continued to engage with communities by adapting their morning tea events into a delivery service and by offering one on one walking groups.

LRH has made minor upgrades to a sub-acute ward and created a small dedicated space for end of life care with access to a garden, family room and reflection area.

Better mental models: Habits of thought – deeply held beliefs and assumptions and taken-for-granted ways of operating that influence how we think, what we do, and how we talk.

The Advocate met with three diverse young women choosing to stand for local government. These candidates showed that they felt able to express their views and demonstrate their leadership.

Latrobe Community Health Service (LCHS) continues to demonstrate openness to hearing from the Advocate and share updates about how it is designing and implementing a new approach to embed ongoing community experience and advice as part of everyday work and positioning that advice as solution finders.

Following the establishment of the Latrobe Valley Asbestos Taskforce (LVAT), the Victorian Government has shown a willingness to openly listen and consider recommendations developed from a local perspective.

LRH is acknowledging the importance of prevention for mental health, reducing stigma, and incorporation of the lived experience.

Financial counsellors involved with the Gippsland Regional Network of financial counsellors have shown a desire to be able to provide services with a focus on prevention and capability building wherever possible. Access to digital technology can support people to access education programs and additional support.

Digital connection can be more comfortable but there is digital poverty

Better supports: How money, people, knowledge, information, and other assets such as infrastructure are allocated and distributed.

With COVID-19 restrictions easing the Advocate has heard about the return of face to face exercise activities for older people, who experienced a decline in mental and physical health when this service was not available to them.

Thorne Harbour Health are attending community groups following feedback from the Advocate about the need to support the LGBTIQ community by reaching out to people where they are.

Federation University organised a workshop in which an Investment Logic was applied to enable a collaborative approach with local services to design options to respond to the issue of health workforce shortages.

Hazelwood Health Study data and insights are being shared with the Latrobe Health Assembly and the local service system to inform ongoing design and delivery.



Better policy: Government, institutional and organisational rules, regulations, and priorities that guide the entity's own and others' actions.

LRH has introduced a new initiative called Wellness Wednesdays aimed at checking and monitoring staff wellbeing. LRH has indicated that pets are permitted on the sub-acute rehabilitation ward and are often used as part of treatment and therapy for patients.

Integration of community voice: The distribution of decision-making power, authority, and both formal and informal influence among individuals and organisations.

LRH is actively listening to community voice through analysis of complaints and compliments, ringing clients, reporting to executive and having this as a focus in its rainbow group.

Three local government candidates sought the voice of communities via the Advocate to inform their priorities.

NBN have an awareness of connectivity issues and are looking at what they can do to provide accessible services to people experiencing vulnerability. They have expressed a desire to respond to community needs.

Summary of advocacy priorities

Inclusive Communities:

Financial stress is a health and social issue that requires appropriate treatments and interventions to minimise or prevent the devastating impacts of living with little or no income.

Young people in Latrobe have described a pressure that they feel to succeed and the impact this can have on their wellbeing. It is important for governments and services to be aware of, understand and respond to the factors that influence this.

End of life palliative care:

The establishment of a dedicated space, palliative care unit or hospice for the region. Improving access to end of life medicines.

End of life care as a priority within the Latrobe Regional Hospital 2020-21 Statement of Priorities.

Access to doctors:

Joint State and Commonwealth support for implementation of access to services in Latrobe action plan to address shortages of general practitioners in the region.

Health is everyone's business:

Local communities want to be informed about industrial developments that are occurring in the region, they want to know about potential health and environmental risks, and they are seeking reassurance from government and industry that their health and wellbeing will be protected.

Latrobe Valley Asbestos Taskforce:

The Latrobe Valley Asbestos Taskforce, Chaired by the Latrobe Health Advocate has drafted recommendations based on its first year of research and engagement.

Recommendation 1:

Provision of an Asbestos status certificate/report compulsory on the sale or rental of a residential property built before 1990.

Recommendation 2:

Notice of intent to undertake demolition work to be made compulsory.

Recommendation 3:

Compulsory asbestos awareness training for specified occupations.

Recommendation 4:

Asbestos removal only permitted on residential properties in prescribed circumstances.

COVID-19: Localised supports and adequate staffing for people experiencing loneliness, anxiety, or financial stress.

Access to technology and data for everyone in Latrobe to promote health equity and social connections.

Ongoing support for a regional or place-based approach to the COVID-19 emergency response and recovery efforts.

Friends are
important to keep
close for bad and
good

Nature is a very
healing place and a
great way to connect
with family and
friends

When we respect the
planet, we need to respect
the cultural heritage as
well.

**Change the way
you view success**

Knowledge is
power



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