



Latrobe Health
Advocate

Quarterly Update

April to June 2021





I am pleased to present this update from the Office of the Latrobe Health Advocate for the period April to June 2021.

COVID-19 continued to impact Latrobe communities as Victoria endured another lockdown. The most recent outbreak has reminded us we are living through a period of extraordinary change but has shown us how quickly we can adapt and adjust to a new way of life.

My office partnered with the Gippsland Primary Health Network to produce *COVID-19 Impact and Recovery in Latrobe*. The report includes an analysis of conversations and engagements I had with Latrobe communities throughout 2020 and GPHN's analysis of mega trends, opportunities and risks. The report identifies system gaps and considers broader opportunities for health system reform including; more support for people to access technology and data, greater collaboration between health services, a whole of government approach for bolstering digital infrastructure, patient-centred care, and community-led recovery.

Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, there was a lot of activity around my office this quarter. The National Rural Health Commissioner Ruth Stewart attended an Access to Services stakeholder forum hosted by my office in May and remarked on the value of the collaborative work occurring in Latrobe in response to community voice.

During this quarter I have seen several systems changes that can provide opportunities for better health and wellbeing across Latrobe. Gippsland Regional Integrated Cancer Services (GRICS) is implementing a project that seeks to understand health literacy in the community and develop case studies to inform the design of interventions with the help of community. Latrobe City Council is developing a deliberative participation process to hear from as many people as possible to produce outcomes that are informed and shaped by community voice.

I have had many conversations this quarter, and we have highlighted some of them in this report. As always, I look forward to hearing from more of you in coming months and encourage you to contact me on 1800 319 255 or via email at info@lhadvocate.vic.gov.au at any time.

Remember you can follow my work on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. You can find copies of all the reports we publish along with this quarterly update on our website.

Jane

@LHAdvocate



Activities April to June 2021

As recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System are rolled out in Latrobe, the Advocate continues to offer to bring together stakeholders and government to build a shared understanding, strengthen relationships and create the conditions for collaboration. Stakeholders in Latrobe are eager to ensure that the response to the Commission aligns with the needs of Latrobe communities and considers opportunities that exist in the region.

Throughout April, the Advocate held discussions with Latrobe City Council, the Latrobe Health Assembly and the Gippsland Regional Partnership about the importance of involving local communities in discussions that directly impact their futures.

The Advocate's office observed the severe weather and flooding event that impacted Latrobe communities in June. Residents, businesses, local groups, clubs and homes were directly affected by the floods and severe weather, warranting an emergency response from all levels of government. The Advocate will continue to monitor the impacts on Latrobe communities in a bid to identify opportunities for systems reform as they relate to emergency response and recovery, climate change adaptation, health equity and infrastructure planning.

The Advocate met with the CEO of Maryvale Private Hospital to share insights about what Latrobe communities are saying and to understand the strategic direction of the hospital. There is interest from the hospital in working together with the government and other health services to strengthen the local system, establish public-private partnerships and offer services that are responsive to the needs of local communities.

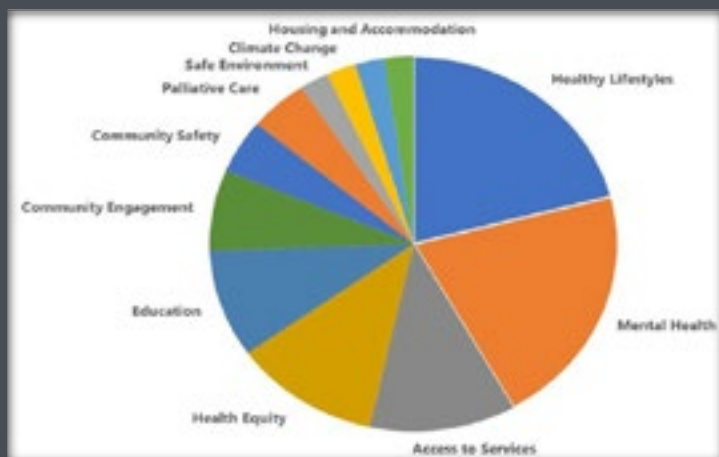
The Advocate continues to hear from people about their concerns surrounding end of life palliative care services in Latrobe. This is coming from multiple perspectives including families, carers, local nurses and health professionals. People have expressed concerns about the lack of a dedicated palliative care facility and suggested that the few allocated beds at the hospital are inadequate. Workforce shortages, skill deficits, high staff turnover, an absence of spiritual care and the need for work to be done to help health services to listen to and understand the experiences of patients and their families, have all been mentioned.

Human Connections in Latrobe

The Advocate, along with partners involved with the Human Connections in Latrobe project, has drafted community engagement insights that will be used to inform advice to government about ways to improve social connectivity in Latrobe. Insights focus on; understanding the value and health impacts of community connection; connection to place, people, animals and music. Community events, activities and experiences in Latrobe connecting to the online world.

The Advocate is testing these insights and attended a Gippsland Social Inclusion Forum as a guest panel member. At this forum the Advocate highlighted the three important aspects to digital inclusion; access to hardware, access to data and being confident in the skills required to use technology. Gippsland Primary Health Network has identified the value of bringing together community engagement insights with population health data, and the unique opportunity in Latrobe to establish a way of working that could inform what occurs in other regions.

Community Voice Apr – June 2021



Healthy Lifestyles



Some people over the age of 60 have shared what it means for them to live a healthy lifestyle. They talked about keeping physically fit, appreciating what they have, enjoying the company of others, staying connected and living pain-free. Some of the barriers to a healthy lifestyle identified by these people include conditions such as arthritis, dementia, gambling, caregiving responsibilities and negative attitudes (of self or others). People have suggested they may be more likely to achieve a healthy lifestyle if they stay connected to others, learn to embrace change, maintain their fitness, avoid negativity and make a conscious effort to keep well.



Mental Health

People have spoken about the importance of designing mental health strategies in a way that considers local social demographics such as housing and education. People have talked about the importance of young people having resilience to address their concerns and anxiety. They have shared their wishes to be able to access mental health services when they need them. Some people have said that they want to stay healthy and not get worse.

Some of the challenges people talked about include a lack of access to mental health services in the region and the disconnectedness they experience between mental health and other health services. People have described the challenges of not being able to access mental health support since they must first visit a GP but cannot see a GP as the “books are closed”. Others have said their mental health can decline if they don’t eat proper food, dwell on the past, don’t take notice of their own triggers or watch too much television.

Suggestions from communities include designing solutions with local people and service users, establishing relationships with patients prior to offering telehealth appointments, empowering people to be assertive and to understand which questions to ask of health services.



Access to Services

People have shared their aspirations to live long and healthy lives, and in order to do this they need reliable access to health services.

People have spoken of ongoing concerns surrounding wait times to see GPs in Latrobe, and the dependence on GPs as gateways for referrals to other services. Some people have described poor experiences where they have left appointments with health professionals feeling overlooked and not informed.

People said they have been encouraged to visit the Emergency Department to access healthcare, despite the fact the problem they are experiencing is not an emergency. They have said that some health problems such as mental illness or Alzheimer’s are not easily visible and that it is hard to look after your own medical conditions at the same time as caring for someone else.

I am a big one for actions
speak louder than words
and a smile is worth a
thousand words

It would be good to
have communication
between doctors and
nurses

I live on my own and
can go days and days
without seeing
anyone

We need to know
who our neighbours
are

Bureaucracy moves too
slow compared to the
disease

Once you reach a certain
age you lose the right to
health protection



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