



Latrobe Health
Advocate

Engagement Inspiration

From People Over 60 in Latrobe





Latrobe Health Advocate

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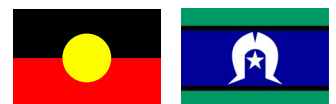
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The Latrobe Health Advocate respectfully acknowledges Aboriginal people as the Original Custodians of the land we walk on today – the land of the Braiakaulung people of the Gunaikurnai nation and passes on respect to their Elders past and present, future and emerging.

The Latrobe Health Advocate thanks all the people who shared their time, experience, wisdom and ideas with us. It is their lived experience that we share in this document so that we might all learn to better connect, communicate with and support one another.

Foreword from the Commissioner

Thank you to the Latrobe Health Advocate and to everyone who shared their views, experiences and insights for this important report. As the report points out, ‘the people in Latrobe have something to say and they want their voices to be heard’.

As Commissioner, I highly value this insightful report, and that the voices and ideas of Latrobe seniors are elevated and heard. We can see that many people over 60 in Latrobe enjoy being active through regular exercise and walking and sporting clubs. Activities like working in the garden bring a lot of joy and benefits for both body and mind and while spending time with family and friends, having positive social interactions and opportunities for mental stimulation is also critical. We heard that volunteering with community groups or joining clubs also strengthens purpose and meaning in life.

There is no doubt the pandemic has been challenging. To ‘age well’, and continue to participate in opportunities and community life, people over 60 need the right supports, access to services and opportunities to take care of their health and wellbeing, to stay connected to their families, friends and communities, and to maintain their independence.

Through this report, people over 60 share their ideas for improving access to health services, information, transport, technology and more – all enablers of ageing well that support people over 60 to pursue their aspirations and live the life they choose.

By working together, we can address these issues, change community attitudes about ageing and ensure people over 60 enjoy positive health and wellbeing. Thank you to Latrobe seniors for taking part and for your important contributions. I look forward to continuing to work with the Latrobe Health Advocate in my capacity as Commissioner.

Gerard Mansour

Commissioner for Senior Victorians



Letter from the Advocate

I want to acknowledge the contributions of the people over 60 who shared their insights with me to produce this report. I was struck by the number of responses from people who wanted to participate in this important work, and it is clear that people have something to say and they want their voices to be heard.

This report captures the voices of people aged over 60 in Latrobe, highlighting the barriers and enablers of good health and wellbeing and what matters to them when it comes to engagement. This delivers on my 2020-21 Statement of Intent and promise to the Victorian Minister for Health and Latrobe communities to learn about ways to engage with people over 60 and support improvements to the system to meet their needs.

The people I met with talked about a broad range of issues affecting people over 60 and they wanted to share their ideas about solutions and challenges. Many people felt what they had to contribute could help others address some of the issues facing younger and future generations, and they wanted to share the wisdom they have gained over many decades.

People talked about what it means for them to live a healthy lifestyle and the factors that contribute to their overall health and wellbeing. They talked about keeping physically fit, appreciating the good things in life, enjoying the company of others, staying connected with family and friends and engaging in recreational activities.

I heard that health conditions such as arthritis and dementia can be barriers to a healthy lifestyle, as can negative attitudes, reliance on others and care-giving responsibilities. Some people spoke about inconsistencies in home care services, the challenging impacts of social distancing measures and how these things can be harmful to their health and wellbeing.

The impacts of COVID-19 throughout 2020 and 2021 have highlighted how lack of technology and online connectivity can impact the health of some people over 60 in Latrobe. I heard that while some have embraced and engaged with technology, others are reluctant or feel they don't have the skills or know-how to use smart phones properly. These issues with technology extend to accessing the My Aged

Care system, and there are suggestions from people over 60 that there is a need for a helpline to assist with the general functions of a phone, tablet or computer to help combat the exclusion that some experience as the world moves online.

People said there are simple and effective ways for governments, services and communities to truly hear them, including communicating through age-appropriate channels and using technologies of past and current generations. I also heard that the process of directly inviting people to share their views is important, as is reaching out to them in places where they are already connecting.

Through my engagement with people over 60 I have been reminded of the complexity of people's lives and the fact these complexities may not be met with adequate supports in a complicated health system. Hearing directly from people with such vast lived experience can lead to better design and delivery of services, increased awareness of the supports that are available to help people to enjoy a healthy independent lifestyle and ultimately reduce pressure on strained health services. It also provides an opportunity to understand more about complex health and social challenges that may be multi-generational, harnessing the genuine care that people over 60 have for their friends, family, and younger members of their community.

I want to again acknowledge the contributions of the people I spoke with to produce this report and thank them for sharing their stories with me.

I will continue to work with the Victorian Government and services operating within the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone to listen to and address the needs of people over 60 in Latrobe to ensure they can realise their goals for health and wellbeing and be met with empathy, understanding and appropriate supports.



Jane Anderson
Latrobe Health Advocate



Considerations for good engagement

Invite and give meaning to participation

There are people who want to share their views and contribute to society but may not express their opinions without first being asked. It is important to openly invite participation in formal and informal engagement activities.

We have heard that it helps if there is clear information upfront about the purpose of engagement; who is listening and why, what will happen with the information that people share and how will they know this has occurred?

As part of our approach, we published an advertisement in the local newspaper inviting people over 60 to share their views about health and wellbeing in Latrobe. We were struck by the number of responses from people who wanted to participate in our work. People told us that they appreciate the mutual exchange of information and the focus on change.

Appreciate the wisdom and experiences people have to share

The people we heard from talked about a broad range of issues facing communities and wanted to share their ideas about solutions and challenges. Many of them felt that what they had to share could help others to address some of the more complex issues facing future generations. They wanted to share the wisdom and experiences they have gained over many decades.

We heard that engagement works best when people can openly share their ideas and know that what they have to share will be valued and acted on. This was not described as an expectation that everything they ask for shall be given, but rather that their contribution will be considered and debated and in some way form part of what happens next.

People said that engagement works best when there is an agenda, agreed and shared between those who are organising the engagement and those who are participating.

Learn from and work in with the ways that people already engage with each other

There are numerous social networks and activities for people over 60 in Latrobe. We had the opportunity to interact with and hear about local exercise groups, netball groups, walking groups, planned activity groups, senior citizens groups, men's sheds, neighbourly catch ups, café catch ups and friendships that exist. We also heard about the value of family connections and visits from relatives.

People talked to us about the value this brings to their lives. We heard that these opportunities to connect with others in the community can help with physical and mental wellbeing and provide direct access to information. Word of mouth is a significant source of information and helps people in Latrobe to know about opportunities to have their say.

We were encouraged to work in with these existing network and activities for our engagement and to reach out to people in places and groups that they are already involved with. People shared positive examples of when others had sought out the views of their group and how it helped them to feel even more valued as a group. When people over the age of 60 can see their peers involved in engagement activities and included in their community it can make it easier for them to be part of the conversation.

We heard that planned engagement activities can have a dual benefit in that people are invited to share their views and be provided with an opportunity to connect and engage with each other. It has been suggested that creating opportunities for people to experience positive social interactions is even more important in light of the ongoing impacts of COVID-19.

Communicate through all forms of technology

Advances in technology can change the way we communicate with each other. People over 60 in Latrobe have experienced different technologies during their lifetime. Some people are in a position to embrace new technologies as they are developed, and others are not.

Either way, it is important to utilise a range of technology and communication channels that can be relied upon to reach communities. Technology can be both an enabler and a barrier to engagement depending on the individual.

The more common and traditional forms of technology people mentioned to us were radio, television and telephones. We heard that these technologies along with local newspapers and word of mouth are easily accessible and can be a reliable source of information.

Some of the newer technologies people mentioned were smartphones, social media, SMS (short messaging service, commonly referred to as text message) and video meetings. We heard that keeping in touch with friends and family can be a reason to use newer technology.

We know that some people are unable to use technology due to lack of access to data, the technology itself or lack of support in developing the skills to know how to use it.¹ One person shared that navigating websites is difficult when their hand gets shaky and as their eyesight deteriorates. We heard that some people are hesitant and do not trust social media. Some people said that if the only form of communication and engagement is through modern technology, they may be excluded from the opportunity to participate.

Practical suggestions from people over 60 years

We were reminded that although people can have their age in common, they may all have their own individual suggestions about the activities they like to be involved in and preferences about how they like to participate.

People showed interest in have your say surveys, community forums, town hall meetings, informal activities such as walking or exercise groups, small group or one on one catch ups.

We heard that it is important to promote activities through local newspapers and radio and to ensure both the invitation and information about the activity is easy to understand.

¹COVID-19 Impact and Recovery in Latrobe.

Time of day, venue accessibility and proximity to public transport are all important things to consider.

We also heard that some people may not recognise or have the skills needed to participate in all activities. We were encouraged to be inclusive and to have someone available to assist people in understanding how they can contribute.



Barriers and enablers of good wellbeing

Staying fit and well

People have shared what it means for them to live a healthy lifestyle. They have talked about keeping physically fit, appreciating the good life we have, enjoying the company of others, staying connected with family, living pain free, spending time in the garden or on the golf course and having a good attitude towards life.

Some of the barriers to a healthy lifestyle include health conditions such as arthritis, dementia, gambling, care-giving responsibilities, negative attitudes (of self and others), reliance on other people or services. Some people have talked about inconsistent quality of home care services and the impacts of last-minute changes to service delivery. COVID-19 lockdowns, hygiene and social distancing measures have created barriers for some people.

People have suggested they may be more able to achieve a healthy lifestyle if they can stay connected to others, learn to embrace change, receive more reliable home help, receive hard copy bills, continue to maintain their fitness through gardening, swimming, walking, going to the gym, social netball or ballroom dancing. They have said it's important to avoid negativity and make a conscious effort to keep well.

Independence, connection and preparing for older adulthood

We heard from people about their experiences in reaching or moving towards older adulthood. Many people shared their goal of maintaining as much independence as possible for as long as possible. They recognised that to achieve independence it was necessary to stay connected with friends, family and services.

People described independence as staying safe at home, being able to maintain their relationships, remaining in control of decisions that affect them, having options about changes to accommodation and housing, staying ahead and being in charge.

We heard that it can be hard to stay independent if your mental or physical health starts to deteriorate. Some of the barriers people talked about included fear of change, costs of retirement and aged care living and caring responsibilities for others. We also heard about the challenges of caring for a lifelong partner who may be experiencing Alzheimer's or Dementia and the impact this can have on others. It was suggested that some people feel conflicted in that they don't want to be a burden but are fearful of being on their own in case something happens.

Some of the suggestions people had to help themselves and others maintain independence included being supported and consulted on major decisions, housing and accommodation options that allow people to move between assisted care and full support all in the one location and transport services for older single people. Visits from friends and family and staying in touch with relatives also helps.

We heard that it is important to recognise that it may not be possible to do everything, particularly as you get older and that it is OK to ask for help.

Timely access to services to prevent ill-health

Access to healthcare services is recognised as a social determinant of health and for the people that we spoke with, it goes hand in hand with maintaining independence and a healthy lifestyle. People want to avoid being dependant on services through experiencing timely and inclusive access on the occasions that they do require healthcare, preventing further ill health, physical or mental deterioration.

For many people, getting older leads to more complex health conditions that need to be managed well. Some of the problems people face in trying to access services as they get older include long wait times, cost of appointments,

difficulty finding specialists, lack of awareness about what services are available, insufficient information about their health conditions and what they should or shouldn't do, impacts of memory loss and dementia and the impact of falls, difficulty in knowing how to navigate My Aged Care and NDIS, and COVID-19 restrictions.

There are other barriers that can impact how people access health services. These can include lack of transport, limited awareness about services, lack of support such as having someone to accompany you to a hospital or other appointments and a lack of financial security.

We heard that reliable and timely access to a doctor can make a significant difference, helping people to receive coordinated care and to learn more about what services are available. We heard that access to quality health care can assist people as they adapt to getting older. Some people said they appreciate the opportunity to receive a second opinion when they are unsure. It was suggested that further guidance and assistance in accessing My Aged Care would help.

Mental stimulation and contentment

Through many of our conversations we observed contentment. People talked about the importance of maintaining a positive outlook and being satisfied with their ability to keep going. Some people described being happy the way they are and their enjoyment in living day by day. We heard about how a good attitude and gratitude towards life, with all its ups and downs, can have a positive impact on health and wellbeing.

People talked about maintaining their mental wellbeing through companionship and connection to others. We heard that it was important to make a conscious effort to keep well and to learn to overcome challenges. We heard that spending time with other people can be a way to take your mind off your own body. We heard for some though it was hard to get used to what was described as a shrinking circle of friends and social activities that can beset people as they age. It is important to stave off loneliness wherever you can.

Some of the challenges that can get in the way include reduced capacity to volunteer as you get older, not being taken seriously by others, the invisibility and impacts of mental illness, COVID-19 restrictions, dwelling on the past, not paying attention to triggers and early warning signs, side effects of medication, managing your own health at the same time as caring for others, negative people and lack of spark or motivation.

We heard from some people that the process of being invited to share their opinions and have their voices heard was good for their health and wellbeing.



Barriers and enablers of good wellbeing (continued)

What really matters

I have happiness inside me

Life has ups and downs. Getting older and the effects of ageing can be hard. It is important to stay interested in life, take the good with the bad and live in the joy of today.

Learning and working

Education and employment are essential and can provide mental stimulation, connection to others and a sense of purpose throughout life. Reflecting on your career and past jobs can help you to understand the journey you have been on and how your employment has impacted your health and self-identify. Education is a foundation for young people and provides a platform that helps people to take the next step after school. Without education and skills training, young people may struggle and go down the wrong path.

Staying together

Maintaining connection to partners, family, friends, and society provides a sense of security and is good for physical and mental health. Lifelong relationships provide companionship and peace of mind. Being separated from a lifelong partner is something that people are fearful of and when this occurs, it can have significant impacts on their health. Having the support of others helps people to rely less on services. People are more aware of their need for a sense of security as they get older.



Past and future generations

Some people reflected on their childhood and recognised the strong impact their parents and upbringing has had on them. This informed how they see future generations including young people in their community and their grandchildren. Some people expressed concerns for young people and what the future might hold. Some talked about the joys and challenges of being a grandparent.

Living in rural Victoria

Some people shared their views of living in rural Victoria. We heard that rural living can help people to stay grounded and to see a different side of life. People said that life isn't equal and rural communities can do it tougher. It can be harder to access health services and specialists that are more available to people in the city. We heard about the importance of farming and looking after the welfare of animals. We heard that some animals can be a food source and others can offer company and stimulation.

The welfare of others

We witnessed a real concern for the welfare of others, particularly those who may have experienced trauma, are suffering from mental illness, experiencing poverty or homelessness. Some people questioned the results of government investments on addressing these complex issues.





Insight 1 Valuing decades of lived experience

People over the age of 60 carry at least six decades of life experience and can offer diverse and insightful perspectives of what it means to be healthy, as individuals and as a community. We heard about the frustration people can experience when their views are not sought out or listened to. This frustration was stronger for people who felt that they could contribute their wisdom to a particular issue or conversation, yet they were feeling overlooked.

We found that when we promoted the opportunity for people to share their views with us there was a high number of people who wanted to participate and contribute to our work. It was not hard for us to achieve significant levels of in-depth engagement in a short period of time. This confirms for us the insight we developed three years ago that people in Latrobe have something to say and they want their voices to be heard.

There are simple and respectful ways that governments, services, and communities can hear from people over the age of 60. These include communicating through age-appropriate channels and using technologies of past and current generations, directly inviting people to share their views and engaging in ways and places where people are already connecting.

Hearing directly from people with such vast lived experience can lead to greater design and delivery of services, increased awareness of the supports that are available to help people to enjoy a healthy independent lifestyle and ultimately reduced pressure on strained health services. It also provides an opportunity to understand more about complex health and social challenges that may be multi-generational, harnessing the care that people over 60 have for their friends, family, and younger members of their community.

The Office of the Advocate is now reflecting on...

How can we continue to hear from the people that have generously shared their wisdom and experience with us?

How can we connect these people and their networks with other organisations and activities within the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone?

What if...

Ageism did not exist, and people were feeling more valued and respected by people of all ages?

It became standard practice for governments and services to ask people; what do you think we should do for communities?

“As an older person we are not listened to and we are not being given our full rights.”

“It is nice to know that people do listen and take account of what you say.”

“I live alone, am very isolated and find it hard to interact with people and make friends.”

“Having a voice is important because you feel you fit in and belong and are taking responsibility.”

“Being ignored in stores is not unusual for me.”

“You can go days and days without seeing anyone.”



Insight 2 An ageing population and a digital future

Technology will continue to evolve and as it does there will be ongoing changes to ways people communicate, access services and look after their health. What was once a bank in the main street, is now an application on a smart phone. What was once an invitation in the post is now an event on social media. What was once a visit to the doctor's clinic is now a brief consultation over the phone or perhaps a virtual meeting with the face of a health professional on a computer screen. This begs the question; does Latrobe have the digital infrastructure required for the future of health care and more importantly, who is responsible for supporting and upskilling an ageing population who may be dependent on access to digital healthcare into the future?

The impacts of COVID-19 throughout 2020 and 2021 have highlighted how lack of access to technology and online connectivity can impact the health of some people in Latrobe and the very urgent need to look beyond investment into infrastructure. There are some people over 60 who are highly skilled in using technology and have the confidence and means to do so. However, we heard that some people are fearful of technology and don't feel that they know how to use phones properly. Some people are worried that they might do something wrong or break the technology. We have heard about the difficulties some people face in accessing the My Aged Care system and their suggestions for an IT helpline to assist with the general functions of a phone,

tablet or computer and the exclusion and stigma that some people experience as the world is moving online. This has been described by others as the digital divide.

Our engagement methodology itself demonstrates that for many people in Latrobe, face to face interactions, written communication, word of mouth, local newspaper and radio announcements remain entirely relevant. There are people that will continue to depend on these tried and tested ways of interacting with others, staying informed and accessing healthcare. It is essential that as governments and services design themselves for the future, they hold onto what has been effective in the past, to prevent the unintended consequence of health inequity for those who are not online.

The Office of the Advocate is now reflecting on...

How can we improve our own communications and engagement approaches to ensure that we don't contribute to the digital divide? What do we need to do differently to ensure that we are inclusive for people who have the means and desire to use technology and for those who do not?

How might we raise awareness about the digital inclusion and exclusion in Latrobe?

What if..

...more people were trained and supported to engage in a digital world?

...those who prefer to engage outside the digital world could continue to be supported to pay their bills, communicate, be informed and interact with health services through more traditional hard copy and in person methods?

“To be part of society you need to know how to use things.”

“Many over 60s do not have internet access.”

“Everyone wants you to correspond with them via computer.”

“I want someone to ring and make an appointment and help me to navigate it.”



Insight 3 Wellbeing, independence, self-worth, and healthcare

We have heard that people want to achieve and maintain good physical and mental wellbeing, they rely on connection to others to live independently and their outlook on life matters, as does the availability of age-appropriate healthcare services. We have heard about the inter-dependence between these four dimensions of health and wellbeing and the impacts of ageing when the brain and body may struggle to do what was once possible. We also heard that some people experience feelings of guilt, regret and shame about asking for help from others.

Through our engagement we have been reminded of the complexity of people's lives that may not fit seamlessly within a complicated health system. We have heard from people who have reflected on the physical and mental deterioration that can occur as they age and if you are unwell and the negative feelings of self-worth that someone may experience if they do not have the right supports around them. Some people have highlighted what it felt like to have no help around them when COVID-19 restrictions have been in place.

We heard about the power of a positive outlook and the difference this can make for individuals and those around them. We have seen the willingness from people in Latrobe to share their views and contribute to the design of a health system that caters to their needs. This presents an invaluable

opportunity to address these dimensions of health and wellbeing to support people in Latrobe as they adapt and plan for their changing circumstances. An opportunity to enable people to achieve their health goals, remain as independent as they can and to have peace of mind knowing that the people and systems are in place to support them as they age.

The Office of the Advocate is now reflecting on...

What aspects of health services can be reoriented to enable people to feel more empowered to maintain their independence and to feel confident in seeking help when they need it?

What if...

...people were supported to better identify when they can self-manage and when they might need help, in a way that enables them to feel comfortable that asking for help is not about letting go of independence?

“Actions speak louder than words and a smile is worth a thousand words.”

“Staying with your community and staying connected is important.”

“What happens when we no longer drive?”

“I am at a point in my life that I am starting to worry about things and what will happen.”

“I can feel age coming upon me, I am not as quick as I used to be.”

“You start to think about your roots and the influences that have shaped your life.”

“We are dependent on each other and that’s not a bad thing, we are home bodies.”

“What is going to happen on the last days of the journey - where do I get help if my wife is sick and what does my wife do if I am sick.”

“Needing help is not a bad thing or a threatening thing.”

Active reflection

Questions that might get you started...

If you are a **decision maker** consider;

- How aware is your organisation of the digital divide, and what might you do to increase digital inclusion and reduce digital exclusion?
- Are there people over the age of 60 in your workplace and what more can you do to recognise and embrace the experiences and skills that they have to offer?
- How accessible and inclusive are your services for people over 60 in Latrobe?

If you are a **staff person, family member or friend**, consider;

- What assumptions might you make about people over the age of 60?
- If you couldn't rely on technology, how might you communicate your message to someone else?

If you are a **community member**, consider;

- Who in your life is over the age of 60 and what might you do to help them achieve their health and wellbeing goals?
- Is there anyone you can share this report with and what might this mean for you and them?

If you are **someone over 60**, consider;

- What are your health and wellbeing goals and who can help you to achieve them?
- How comfortable are you in using technology and who can you go to for help with this?
- What do you like to do independently and when do you need the support of others?





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