



# Latrobe Health Advocate

## Annual Report 2021-22



## Foreword from the Advocate



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Along with other communities internationally and locally, Latrobe is a community that is transitioning to a new future. It is important for me that everyone has an opportunity to benefit from and influence our future vision.

Adjusting to changes in our lives may bring opportunity and excitement, as well as anxiety about the unknown. I acknowledge the impact these changes and that of COVID-19 have on the health and wellbeing of the Latrobe community. Supporting communities to transition in a way that protects their physical and mental wellbeing is a priority.

Over the last year, I focused on ensuring equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines. Drawing on advice and feedback I received directly from the community, I collaborated with local services who implemented various vaccination outreach activities for people.

I continued to build on the work occurring to improve access to technology and data for everyone in Latrobe and ensure this support is reaching the people who need it the most. Access to technology and data for people in Latrobe will help improve health equity and social connections.

In February 2022, I worked with the Environment Protection Authority's (EPA) Chief Environmental Scientist to travel on local buses and hear from community members about their health and wellbeing goals and aspirations.

While access to services has been a priority for my office, a considerable amount of work has gone into other priority areas informed by my [2021-22 Statement of Intent](#).

I have continued to work with the Latrobe Health Assembly to establish and implement a joint operating model within the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone. This model aims for a strong, healthy and inclusive Latrobe community supported by leading health and wellbeing systems that are based on innovation, collaboration and the voice of the community.

I have continued to engage with people who may not ordinarily have their voices heard, about their health and wellbeing concerns and aspirations, and what matters most to them when it comes to engagement.

I and my office are midway through a five-year plan that intends to enable an environment for self-advocacy.

The focus in 2022-23 is to apply the social determinants of health through the production of a report card; advocate for existing and new recommendations to improve health and wellbeing, and review engagement approaches to support self-advocacy in Latrobe.

This Annual Report for 2021-22 provides an update of my continuing work and highlights a number of priority areas where systems change has progressed.

I will continue to advocate on behalf of Latrobe communities and encourage you to share your experiences with me.

*Jane*

# Engagement statistics 2021-22

A summary of the Advocate's engagement over the course of the 2021-22 year is provided below.

## Total number of events

329

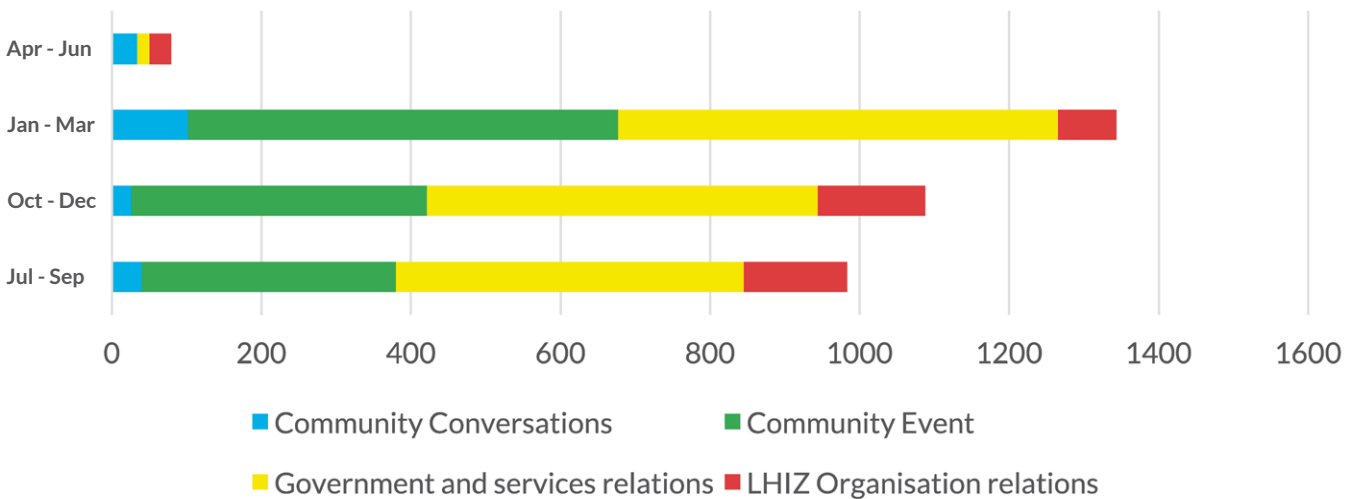
## Total number of people engaged

3,495

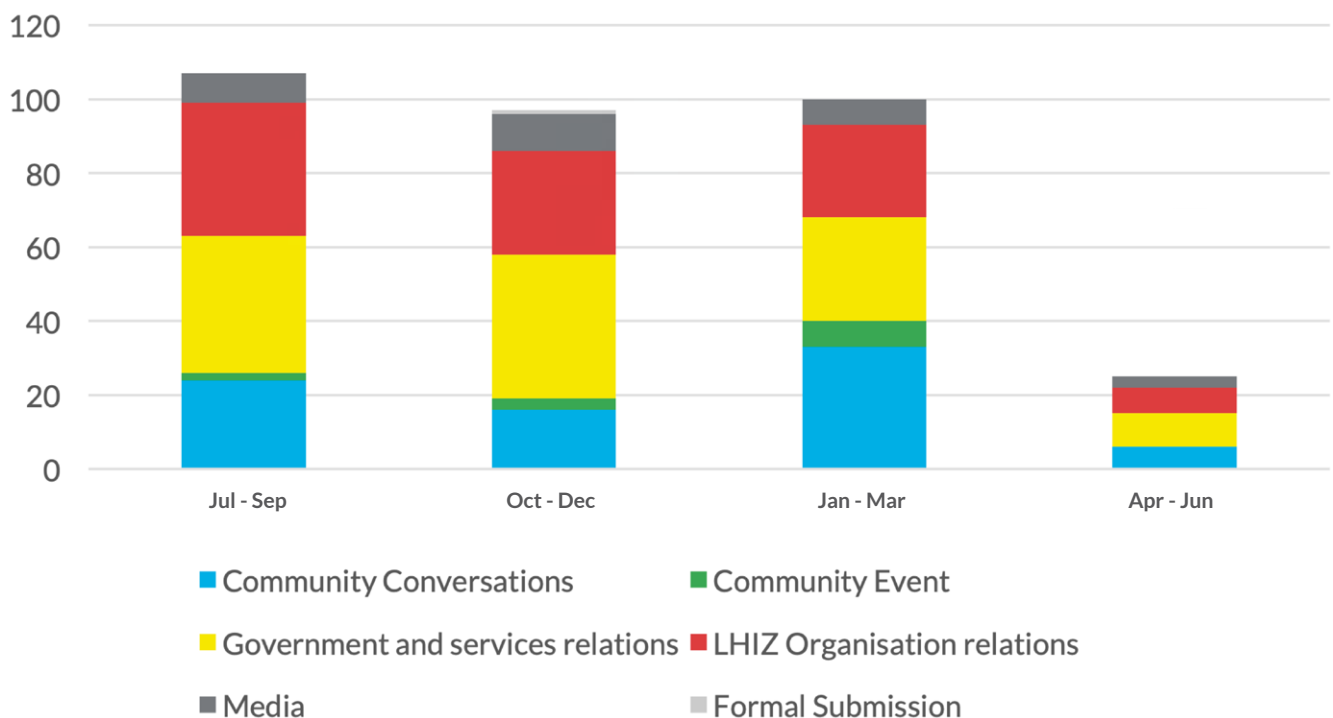
Including community conversations, community events, government and services relations, Latrobe Health Innovation Zone organisation relations, media and formal submissions.



## Number of people engaged (per quarter)



## Office activity breakdown (per quarter)







## Advocacy priorities

The Latrobe Health Advocate and her office focused activities for the last year on the priorities listed in the [Statement of Intent 2021-2022](#).

These priorities were determined based on engagement with, and feedback from, a range of regional stakeholders including community members and health consumers, Traditional Owners, service providers, health professionals, government departments and agencies, the Latrobe Health Assembly and others.

### Maintain and build on the established profile of the Latrobe Health Advocate and the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone (LHIZ)

- Develop a system whereby the Advocate can measure own impact in achieving change and engagement with communities.
- Support the development of a governance structure in the LHIZ to clarify roles and accountabilities that enable collaboration and empower the Advocate to be a system change agent.
- Be an active leader in the LHIZ partnership and formalise new ways of work in accordance with the Deloitte Evaluation Report of the Zone.

### Elevate the voice of our community and deliver priority campaigns

- Actively participate and influence regional COVID-19 pandemic recovery efforts based on the needs of the community.

- Develop priority campaign programs in partnership with Zone partners, the community and relevant key stakeholders.
- Expand on 'issue' based engagement and research the methodology that enables introduction of 'place-based' consultative groups.
- Further build the reputation of the Latrobe Health Advocate's work through social media and communication channels.
- Introduce expert panel and peer review of priority campaigns to increase credibility of work.

### Advocate for and influence health and well-being outcomes and system change

- Strengthen connections with government and key stakeholders to reorient focus towards understanding the social determinants of health and system change.
- Undertake a collaborative project with partners in the LHIZ to design an innovation architecture for advocacy and systems through application of the social determinants of health.
- Introduce a framework that supports skills for self advocacy of the community.
- Advocate for the implementation of endorsed priority recommendations.
- Pilot a process for immediate advocacy opportunities within the LHIZ.



# Priority achievements and activities

This annual report highlights the key achievements over the course of the last year linked to each of the advocacy priorities in the [Statement of Intent 2021-2022](#).

## Maintain and build on the established profile of the Latrobe Health Advocate and the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone

### Inclusive communities

Continued advocacy for inclusivity resulted in a number of positive developments over the course of the last year.

This included a commitment to delivering inclusive performances at the new Gippsland Performing Arts Centre and the development of an Access Key for the Gippsland Regional Aquatic Centre and other facilities in the region. While many of these initiatives may seem small, they can make a significant difference to the ease and likelihood of access by those who benefit from them.

The Advocate also engaged with Victoria's new Chief Accessibility Advocate Tricia Malowney OAM who was appointed by the Victorian Government in December 2021 to provide expert advice to the government on how it can improve accessibility across all modes of transport. This meeting provided an opportunity to highlight the engagement insights from the [Human Connections in Latrobe](#) project, including how public transport can enable people in the community to connect when it is affordable and staffed and managed adequately with good Protective Service Officers and friendly drivers.



*Despite COVID-19, the Advocate has continued to engage a broad range of stakeholders*

The Advocate has continued to engage with the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, and asexual (LGBTIQA+) community to understand their unique health challenges and needs. The past year saw the Advocate contribute to the design of, and participate in, an online event run in partnership with Thorne Harbor Health to connect local, LGBTIQA+ people over 50.

### Latrobe Health Innovation Zone directions

The Advocate and her office have continued to work with the Latrobe Health Assembly to establish and implement a joint operating model within the LHIZ.

In April 2021, the Latrobe Health Assembly launched its 'Triple Diamond' operating model. Designed to encourage collaboration on refined areas of opportunity, the 'Triple Diamond' operating model has provided the Latrobe Health Assembly with a sophisticated approach to managing perceived health problems within the Latrobe Valley, identifying the actual opportunities and bringing together subject matter experts along with community.

Over the course of 2021-22, The Advocate has been working with the Latrobe Health Assembly Board and staff to implement the agreed joint operating model. A particular focus for the Advocate has been on embedding the voice of local communities and advocacy for systems change into the various stages of the Assembly's Triple Diamond model.



*The Advocate has worked to deliver engagement that is accessible and inclusive to a wide audience*

The Advocate continues to support the work of the Latrobe Health Assembly including:

- Promoting and raising awareness of Assembly work during advocacy conversations with government.
- Participating in Assembly forums and working groups.
- Promoting Assembly initiatives to the local community and encouraging and facilitating participation.
- Inviting the Assembly to participate in Advocate-led projects.
- Presenting community voice data and insights to the Assembly Board on a quarterly basis.

The past year has also seen the Advocate support the implementation of several Latrobe Health Assembly programs and initiatives that will have a positive impact on health and wellbeing within the region including:

[Looking Forward Latrobe](#) which aims to develop a range of design principles and interventions that can be used across organisations to improve wellbeing in the Latrobe Valley. The project envisions the Latrobe Valley as a place where wellbeing is embedded at the start of all major projects through a joined-up, coordinated, integrated and creative approach across multiple organisations.

The [Mental Health Cafe](#) which has been developed as a way to provide a safe and welcoming space for mental health consumers to seek peer support and advice after hours. The model has been developed based on extensive local consultation and is being implemented throughout 2022.

[Social prescribing](#) sometimes referred to as community referral, is a way that enables clinical professionals such as GPs, nurses, nurse practitioners and other primary care professionals to refer people to a range of local, non-clinical services. The social prescribing project has received broad support from a range of stakeholders and is currently developing connections with potential organisations that might host a dedicated worker and service providers that would like to be involved when patient referrals commence.

### Ongoing media commentary

The Latrobe Health Advocate continues to advocate for key issues and provide expert commentary to media outlets.

Over the course of the last year, a total of 28 media engagements were undertaken, helping to build awareness of key health priority areas and to elevate the voice of local communities.



*The Advocate and other key regional health stakeholders visit a metropolitan end-of-life palliative care facility*

## Elevate the voice of our community and deliver priority campaigns

### End-of-life palliative care

The Latrobe Health Advocate has continued to raise awareness of the need for improved end-of-life palliative care services and facilities within the region.

Over the course of the last year, the Advocate and her office hosted several forums to explore and better understand some of the challenges and opportunities related to palliative care within the region. Participants engaged in open discussions about what is working well, where the challenges are and what more needs to occur to bring about change.

These forums highlighted:

- The need to establish a dedicated space; a palliative care unit or hospice for the region.
- The disparities that exist between metropolitan and regional palliative care services.
- The systemic gaps in the workforce and environments for end-of-life care.
- The need to build the capacity of the local health workforce to be able to provide high-quality palliative care services.





A key focus of the Advocate's work was connecting with a diversity of communities regarding COVID-19 directions and vaccines

September 2021 saw the Advocate release her second [progress report](#) to the Minister for Health providing an update on the implementation of the 12 recommendations in the [Achieving Victoria's best end-of-life experience for people in Latrobe](#) report. The report highlights the significant and measurable progress that has been made in implementing the 12 recommendations.

Collaboration regarding how the region may be able to improve its palliative care offering has been strong. In May 2022, the Advocate, along with representatives from the Gippsland Primary Health Network and Latrobe Regional Hospital visited a number of metropolitan palliative healthcare sites and met with key stakeholders to understand the benefits a dedicated palliative care facility or hospice can offer. These visits provided an opportunity to strengthen relationships between regional and metropolitan services, see first-hand the difference a dedicated environment for end-of-life can make, and explore how such a facility may be able to be secured for Latrobe.

### Impacts of COVID-19 in the Latrobe Valley

The first quarter of 2021-22 saw the region placed in COVID-19 lockdown, as the vaccine rollout started to gather pace. The Advocate continued to engage with key regional stakeholders during this period including the Department of Health, Chief Health Officer and the Gippsland Region Public Health Unit. The Advocate was particularly focused on providing direct, local feedback and advice on how communications regarding stay at home orders and vaccinations could be tailored to better meet the needs of people in different contexts or communities. In September 2021, the Advocate chaired an online community forum with a number of other agencies to reinforce this messaging and answer any questions people might have.

In the second quarter of 2021-22, the Advocate focused on ensuring equitable access to COVID vaccines. Drawing on advice and feedback directly from the Advocate, local services implemented various vaccination outreach activities for people experiencing homelessness, people with mental illness, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, elderly people, people who are not digitally connected, people with a disability, and people who are dependent on public transport.

The Advocate also worked to contribute to the state's economic recovery from COVID-19 and was invited to attend the Victoria Summit 2021 alongside other thought leaders from industry groups, unions, the community sector, governments, and educational and research institutions. This event was designed to create a shared bold vision for Victoria and a path for the state's economic recovery and long-term prosperity. The Advocate shared community voice and advocacy insights relating to digital inclusion, human connections, the social determinants of health and the implementation of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health system.

### Mental health reforms

The Advocate heard from many people experiencing mental health issues in Latrobe over the last year. Common amongst many of them were the challenges associated with accessing support, driven largely by a perception that an appointment with a GP was a pre-requisite to accessing appropriate mental health support services.

Over the last 12 months, a broad range of issues have been raised with the Advocate that are contributing negatively to mental health and wellbeing locally.



Some of these are unique to the region such as recent bushfires and emergency events as well as localised COVID-19 lockdowns, while others are more widespread national issues such as constant media fatigue, anxiety and loneliness. The LHIZ presents a real opportunity to engage with the local community to develop new, tailored approaches to addressing mental health issues and the Advocate has continued to explore ways to progress these.

In October 2021, the Advocate released the [Human Connections in Latrobe](#) report and [desktop research](#) report in partnership with the Latrobe Valley Authority, Latrobe City Council, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and Latrobe Health Assembly. The report includes 5 themes and 10 insights with advice to the Victorian Government about digital inclusion and exclusion, public transport systems in Latrobe, events, arts and cultural activities in the region and the overall health impacts of human connections.

The Advocate has also actively supported the ongoing implementation of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System recommendations in Latrobe.

### Access to services

The past year saw the release of the Advocate's revised 2021-22 [Improving access to services in Latrobe](#) action plan. The development of the revised plan was informed by extensive local engagement and was recognised by the National Rural Health Commissioner as having a deep level of community, consumer and clinician engagement and an opportunity to shift from a system that treats people who are ill to a system that keeps people well.



*The Advocate has forged strong connections with healthcare workers*

Access to GP services locally continues to be an issue raised by many to the Advocate. A stakeholder forum hosted by the Advocate in March 2022 provided an opportunity to discuss training and accreditation pathways for doctors and GPs in Latrobe. There is a significant amount of work being done by Latrobe Regional Hospital, Eastern Victoria GP Training, Monash Rural Health and the Department of Health to streamline and improve pathways from training into employment within the region and to retain these health professionals once trained.

The need for increased after-hours care also remains a priority to help reduce the overburden on the local emergency department. Over the last 12 months, the Advocate has been working with the Victorian Department of Health and other local stakeholders and service providers to discuss and explore potential models for improved and increased after-hours care services within the region.

Over the longer term, two new health degrees in physiotherapy and occupational therapy being offered locally at Federation University in Churchill will provide much needed improvements to health service access in the region and secure a pipeline of skilled health workers into the future.







The Latrobe Health Advocate has continued to serve as Chairperson of the Latrobe Valley Asbestos Taskforce

## Advocate for and influence health and well-being outcomes and system change

### Supporting the Latrobe Valley Asbestos Taskforce

The [Latrobe Valley Asbestos Taskforce](http://www.asbestostaskforce.net) was established by the Victorian Government in 2019 to undertake a review of how asbestos is managed in the Latrobe Valley. The Latrobe Health Advocate is the Taskforce's independent Chair.

In November 2021, the Taskforce [released the findings from its third benchmarking survey](#). Pleasingly, the survey results show that there continues to be high levels of awareness of asbestos and asbestos-related issues in the Latrobe Valley, coupled with a continued decline in people who are confident in their ability to identify asbestos-containing materials.

The last year also saw the release of a [report](#) that for the first time estimates the total volumes of legacy asbestos in workplaces, shops, hospitality venues, health centres and hospitals, community and government buildings, and light-medium industrial properties including farms. The report estimates there are 1.9 million square metres of legacy asbestos-containing material across the Baw Baw, Latrobe and Wellington municipalities.

As well as this, a [matrix](#) was released to help the community understand the roles and responsibilities of relevant parties when it comes to asbestos management and removal and whom they can go to for help.

### Providing a health perspective to the Gippsland Regional Partnership

The Gippsland Regional Partnership is one of nine Regional Partnerships across Victoria established by the Victorian Government. The Regional Partnership model recognises that local communities are in the best position to understand the challenges and opportunities faced by their region. The Latrobe Health Advocate serves as a member of the Gippsland Regional Partnership.

Over the last 12 months, the Advocate has continued to contribute her knowledge and expertise, as well as the feedback she has heard from community members, to ensure positive overall health outcomes remain at the forefront of planning for the region's future and in identifying and selecting regional priorities.

### Maintaining relationships with the Health Minister's office

The Latrobe Health Advocate has continued to maintain a positive and productive working relationship with the Victorian Health Minister and ministerial staff.

The Advocate provides a monthly report to the Minister's office highlighting key achievements and activities to progress priority initiatives as well as information regarding any emerging issues.

In addition, the Advocate has also continued to engage with other relevant government ministers with portfolio responsibilities relevant to her work.

During 2021-22, the Advocate met with the Hon. Jaala Pulford MP, Minister for Employment, Innovation, Medical Research, the Digital Economy, Small Business and Resources. With many health services rapidly shifting to an online model of delivery over the last several years due to COVID-19, this meeting provided an important opportunity to discuss with the minister the need for digital connectivity and inclusion to be able to access these services.

The Advocate also met with the then Parliamentary Secretary for Mental Health, Steve Dimopoulos MP and shared insights from her COVID-19 Impact report and Human Connections in Latrobe report. The Advocate shared details about the cumulative effect of bushfires and the pandemic, fatigue from constant media, people feeling overwhelmed with loneliness, anxiety about the future, and concern about long-term impacts on mental health and wellbeing. There was agreement in this discussion that there is an opportunity in the LHIZ to engage with local communities and to trial new approaches to mental health initiatives.

## Health is everyone's business

Recognising that there are many factors that contribute to and influence an individual's overall health and wellbeing, the Advocate continues to work with relevant government departments, ministers and other key stakeholders to raise awareness of and progress solutions to these issues.

Of particular interest to many within Latrobe is the link between environmental health and physical health, as well as the potential psychological impacts associated with industrial development within the region.

In February 2022, the Advocate teamed up with the Environment Protection Authority's (EPA) Chief Environmental Scientist to travel on local buses and hear from communities about their health and wellbeing goals and aspirations.

This was a valuable opportunity to raise the profile of the EPA locally and to build trust in government, as well as understand some of the key health concerns related to environmental issues in the region.

The Chief Environmental Scientist was able to talk about the actions that the EPA is taking in response to concerns that have been raised by community members about the used lead acid battery recycling plant in Hazelwood North.

In November 2021, the Advocate presented her submission and research as part of the Delburn Windfarm Environment Effects Statement (EES) Panel. The Advocate shared the views of local community members, the importance of meaningful community engagement, the potential psychological impacts of government decision making processes and the importance of health protection.

The Latrobe Health Advocate has also worked collaboratively with key regional stakeholders and agencies working to ensure a positive future for the region including Federation University, Latrobe City Council and the Latrobe Valley Authority (LVA). This work has sought to ensure that health remains a key priority in their future planning for the region.

In 2021-22, the Advocate provided input into the implementation of Federation University's vision, highlighting that education, skills and employment are key determinants of health.

*The Latrobe Health Advocate and EPA Chief Environmental Scientist Professor Mark Patrick Taylor*







## Priorities for 2022-23

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The Office of the Advocate is midway through a five-year plan that intends to enable an environment for self-advocacy.

The focus in 2022-23 is to apply the social determinants of health through the production of a report card; advocate for existing and new recommendations to improve health and wellbeing, and review engagement approaches to support self-advocacy in Latrobe.

There is a deliberate commitment to building on the engagement we have had through our inclusive communities work addressing the inequities that exist for some communities, including people living with disabilities, chronic conditions, people experiencing financial stress, family violence, LGBTIQ+, culturally and linguistically diverse people, younger people, people over 60 and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Continuing to work with local services and stakeholders to enhance end-of-life palliative care services, build a specialised workforce and advocate for a dedicated facility will remain a priority.

The Office of the Advocate is also committed to continuing work with the Gippsland Primary Health Network, Latrobe Regional Hospital and others to develop and innovate multidisciplinary models of care to improve community access to services.





Latrobe Health  
**Advocate**

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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.