



# Latrobe Health Advocate Annual Report 2018/19



## Message from the Advocate



When I commenced as the Latrobe Health Advocate in June 2018, I set out to create the Office of the Advocate and a profile to enable me to work as a trusted voice for Latrobe communities. I established priorities in my initial Statement of Intent which identified issues that were important to Latrobe communities

and enabled my office to focus on strategic outcomes and systemic change related to improving health and wellbeing for communities across Latrobe.

First was the priority to enable inclusiveness of marginalised communities within Latrobe. There are groups of people in Latrobe who experience exclusion for a range of reasons. My objective is to give those people, whose voice may otherwise not be heard, an opportunity to participate as fully as possible in the process and amplify their voice with health service providers and governments alike.

I partnered with TACSI (The Australian Centre for Social Innovation) to better understand the health benefits of engagement for communities and how best to influence government and others to improve health and wellbeing outcomes in Latrobe.

Secondly, I have promoted the position that Health is Everyone's Business. I have been encouraged by the willingness of businesses within Latrobe to consider and prioritise the health and wellbeing of communities as they develop new enterprises and consider how long-standing businesses can change their practices to support their workforce with good physical and mental health.

During the year I participated in the States of Change program with staff and members of the Latrobe Health Assembly and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). It is a six-month international learning program, based in Australia, designed to support public servants to develop their skills in innovation and problem solving, develop their advocacy and storytelling skills and prepare their organisations for change.

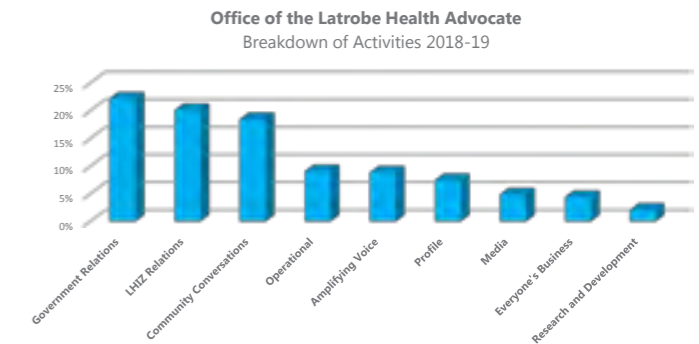
The training provides participants with opportunities to explore real projects in alternative ways, encouraging reflection and strengthening collaborative relationships between team members. My involvement has strengthened relationships and collaboration within the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone and provided an environment where community voice is heard, acknowledged and acted upon.

During the year my office undertook project work looking at the conditions that hold a problem in place and what could be done to assist in the delivery of change. I considered the issues of alcohol and other drugs, mental health and palliative care.

I am looking forward to the coming year and the work that will be undertaken in response to my 2019/20 Statement of Intent.

*J. Anderson*

## Activities 2018/19



The Latrobe Health Advocate has had an exciting and productive first year, establishing the office and engaging with communities across Latrobe. She has found that while there is a diversity of opinion and culture there is also much common ground. In the main, people in Latrobe aspire to be well and healthy and are looking for improvements in the delivery of health and wellbeing services that meet their needs.

Relationships in the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone have been strengthened and partnerships encouraged with members of the Latrobe Health Assembly, DHHS and the Advocate.



Community conversations have been a consistent priority for the Advocate, having interacted with more than 800 people across the year. The Advocate's aim is to hear from people about their aspirations, barriers and suggestions related to health and wellbeing for themselves and for their communities.

In the early stages of this year, the focus was on introducing the role of the Advocate and encouraging participation. More recently, it has been about hearing and responding to the voice of communities and amplifying that voice to governments and service providers in the region, working towards improving the health and wellbeing of people in Latrobe.

Early in 2019 the Advocate was appointed as Chair of The Latrobe Valley Asbestos Taskforce. The Taskforce consists of business, governments and communities working collaboratively to bring about consistency and improved community engagement and awareness for the safe handling and disposal of asbestos in both the commercial and residential sectors. Regular meetings have been established and administrative and communications support is provided by DELWP (Department of the Environment, Land, Water and Planning).

## Learning about engagement

In December 2018, the Advocate sought to give people an opportunity to have their say and increase her profile in the community, so she travelled on local buses and spent time at bus terminals engaging with community members.

This unique approach to community engagement proved to be invaluable enabling the Advocate to hear from 70 people in four days. People shared their stories, raised concerns and talked about their health and wellbeing aspirations for themselves and Latrobe.

Number of conversations in 4 days				
MON 10 DEC	TUE 11 DEC	THU 13 DEC	FRI 14 DEC	TOTAL
20	19	18	13	70

Estimated age of community members (in Years)						
0 - 17	18 - 25	26 - 35	36 - 45	46 - 55	56 - 65	65+
13	3	10	8	10	13	13

Conversations occurred both on the bus and at the bus stops, individually and in small groups when family and friends were travelling together. Each conversation was different and unpredictable. Most conversations were issue based and not about systems, however each issue raised provided some insight from a community perspective into what is working well and what could be improved within the broader health system.

The most frequently raised issues were access to services, social inclusion, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and alcohol and other drugs.

In her report on this engagement method the Advocate encouraged governments and local organisations to:

- Engage with purpose and an awareness of the context in which people live their lives
- Be authentic, approachable, reaching out to communities at times and locations convenient to them
- Demonstrate a willingness to truly hear from people, free from a predetermined agenda.



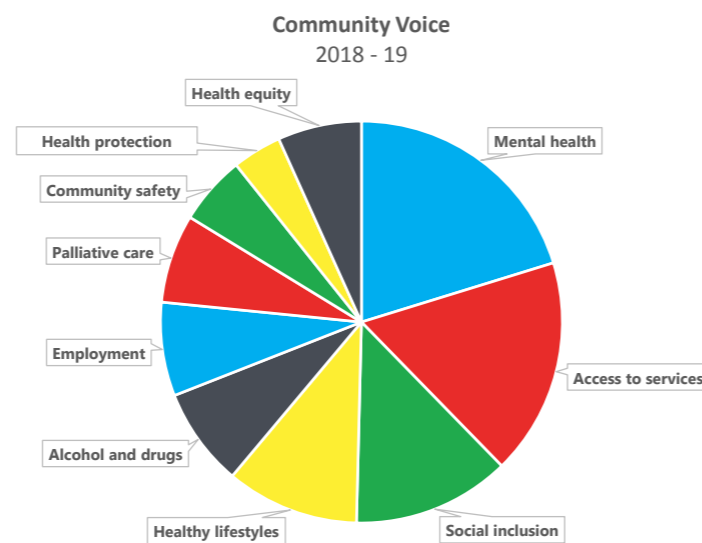
Travelling on the buses is not the only method of engagement that is available and so the Advocate sought to develop a model of engagement that would meet the expectations of people in Latrobe.

As a result of the work the Advocate has developed an engagement model including engagement principles, tools and resources that will now be used to engage with a range of people so a better understanding of their needs and aspirations can be achieved. Among the communities the Advocate sought to engage in 2018/19 were:

- People living with a disability
- People living with chronic illness
- People from a multicultural background



## Community Voice



## The Top 5

### 1. Mental Health



In the Advocate's conversations with people in Latrobe, mental health and wellbeing is the most common issue raised. Most of the time, concerns about mental health are associated with other factors such as violence, alcohol and drugs or the broader determinants of health such as employment and education. Concerns for the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people have been raised on several occasions.

### 2. Access to Services



People have shared their experiences of trying to make an appointment with a GP, calling clinics in all the major towns in Latrobe before having to travel to another area to see a doctor. Communities are looking for consistency in their relationships with GPs and consistency in the treatment they receive.

### 3. Social Inclusion



Social inclusion is often discussed when people talk about improving mental wellbeing in Latrobe. People have talked about the benefits of community activities where there is a common interest that brings people together alongside an opportunity to connect and socialise. People have talked about the benefits of Neighbourhood Houses, Men's Sheds and U3A (University of the Third Age), suggesting that they provide good opportunities to bring people out and help them to connect.

### 4. Healthy Lifestyles



People talked about the benefits of exercise and eating well. They have recognised the physical and mental health benefits of recreational activities. Latrobe communities have shared their aspirations for more opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to participate. There is a consistent message from communities that activities need to be designed to cater for specific ages and needs, and a desire for activities to be available in all towns.

### 5. Alcohol and other drugs



People in Latrobe are looking for a broader range of supports and services to assist those who are experiencing alcohol and drug addictions. They have expressed concerns about gaps in the system and want to see better coordination and availability of ongoing supports for communities.

## Priority Project Campaigns

In 2018/19 the Advocate used a project/campaign approach to identify the conditions that hold a problem in place and thus enable the change that communities are seeking, she focussed on three distinct areas:

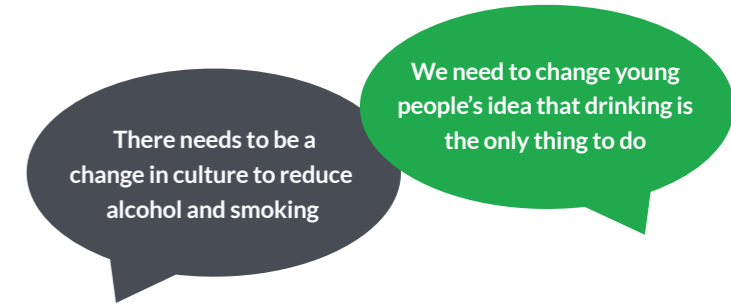
### Alcohol and Other Drugs



Shortly after establishing the Office of the Latrobe Health Advocate, the Victorian Government announced the construction of a rehabilitation centre in Latrobe. The Advocate has been working with DHHS staff to enable community contribution to be recognised and incorporated into planning for the youth rehabilitation service. This has included attendance at and promotion of local, community led alcohol and drug forums, attendance at DHHS community forums and attendance at a Latrobe City Community Safety forum discussing people's concerns about drugs and the community response.

People have shared their aspirations for services that are available to help transition from addictions and to empower people to be able to participate more in employment and in their community. They have identified the risk of people feeling isolated when they leave an intensive support service. They have suggestions about mentors and professionals who can help people to develop the skills to enjoy good health and wellbeing.

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### Improving Palliative Care and the End of Life Experience for people in Latrobe



Latrobe communities have shared their palliative care experiences and have identified a gap in the service system between home and hospital. They have described limitations on beds, nurses, volunteers, service collaboration and hours of operation.

People have shared their aspirations for a palliative care experience that feels caring and nurturing, with consistency of nurses and supports for families. They have talked about the importance of having a peaceful nurturing environment where patients can have their privacy.

The Office of the Advocate engaged with palliative care nurses, social workers and volunteers from Latrobe Regional Hospital and Latrobe Community Health Service to hear their views and suggestions and explore feedback from

communities more deeply. The Advocate also asked people to share their stories through an online survey and facilitated a workshop where communities, health professionals and governments came together to share their experiences and suggestions to improve palliative care services in Latrobe.

At that workshop the Advocate heard from people directly impacted by the palliative care system in Latrobe. There were stories of gratitude and despair. Stories that reflected what is working well and what is not working in the system, and the changes that could be made to improve the system and offer people in Latrobe a better palliative care end of life experience. Participants in the workshop were asked to share courageously and listen with generosity and that's exactly what they did.

Already, improvements are being made, including:

- Efforts are underway to establish a shared database that can be utilised across both the hospital and community health services.
- There has been a commitment made to pilot a palliative care medicines program in Latrobe.

Latrobe communities have been clear in what they are asking for and why it is important to them. At the heart of it, their aspirations are about respect, dignity and kindness. They are looking for services that work together as one, to provide a model of care where quality of life and death is possible and where the impact of death is lessened through care and support available for and from the community.

It has gone backwards... we used to share care... with limited resources and it was good

There is nowhere for younger adults to be cared for... an acute hospital bed is not the right place

## Mental Health



During 2018/19 it became clear that good mental health is an aspiration for people in Latrobe. It is the number one issue raised with the Advocate in community conversations across the year.

When people in Latrobe talk about mental health, they talk about the importance of having mental health support services that are approachable, professional and sympathetic. There is a common concern for the mental health and wellbeing of younger people and recognition of the importance of the home and school environment.

Latrobe communities have identified the barriers that the stigma associated with poor mental health can create. They have expressed their desire to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness through awareness campaigns and community events. They have described their vision for mental health to become an everyday topic of conversation that is talked about as openly as physical health issues such as the common cold or flu.

In 2019 the State Government announced a Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System (Royal Commission). Also, the Australian Government Productivity Commission sought submissions for their inquiry into the effect of mental health on people's ability to participate in and prosper in the community and workplace, and the effects it has more generally on our economy and productivity.

The Advocate sought input from communities, using both face to face conversations and online platforms to enable people to contribute their thoughts on the questions being asked by these inquiries.

The Advocate attended roundtable consultations to contribute to the Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission and hosted a roundtable meeting in Latrobe with Commissioners, the Latrobe Health Assembly and local Aboriginal Services.

In her submissions she has called for a reorientation of the mental health system with greater emphasis on prevention.

She has recommended a place-based approach where communities, services and governments can utilise the expertise of communities with lived experience and bring the context of how people live their lives to the discussion.

The Advocate has also emphasised the need for strategies to address social isolation and better enable people to participate in society. She has been persistent in seeking out opportunities to amplify the voice of Latrobe communities in these forums.

The Office of the Advocate continues to participate in the DHHS Mental Health Forum and supports and promotes the Hello campaign activities sponsored by the Latrobe Health Assembly and We Are Latrobe.

- Reduce the stigma. People need to educate themselves around mental illness and all it involves
- Invite people in for a cuppa, share a meal... check on their neighbour regularly to see how they are...
- Physical wellbeing by being productive and active. Mental wellbeing by having a sense of purpose
- You are certainly reaching a lot of people and are navigating the health issues very effectively

## Indicators of System Change



Several organisations complimented the Advocate on the approach to engaging with communities on the buses and suggested it has prompted them to think differently about their own approaches to engagement.

The EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) was one agency that sought to engage differently when it asked the Advocate to join Victoria's Chief Environmental Scientist, Dr. Andrea Hinwood at a local café where community members asked questions about environmental safety and health matters.

- It had such a positive effect on people when you took the time to listen to them share their story
- I loved the interactive building and working together. Meeting new people from all over.



Feedback from communities about access to General Practitioners gained momentum with local media and triggered discussion amongst local health services. It resulted in one local clinic initiating recruitment of a Nurse Practitioner as well as additional General Practitioners.

Enquiries are being made about the training and accreditation requirements that result in General Practitioners and locums relocating every three to six months and the impact this has on communities.

Additional services have been made available in the Yallourn North area and other service providers are now regularly informing communities about the level of service they are able to provide as the need for more General Practitioners is being highlighted.



Based on feedback from drivers and communities about community safety, enquiries were made to increase the number of Multi Modal Authorised Officers (MMAOs) on Latrobe buses. An increase in the numbers of MMAOs and Protective Security Officers occurred, and the feedback received from Latrobe Valley Buses is that there have been significant improvements in passenger and driver safety as a result.



In the most recent evaluation report of the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone by Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu, the Advocate has been assessed as meeting all expectations in its first year. In particular the Advocate has established a trusting relationship with communities across Latrobe.

The Advocate is a focal point for health and wellbeing leadership within Latrobe

- Community and targeted survey results indicate approximately half of Latrobe Valley organisations and Latrobe Valley community members (46% and 47%, respectively) think the Advocate can improve health and wellbeing in the Latrobe Valley (May-18 to May-19 collection).

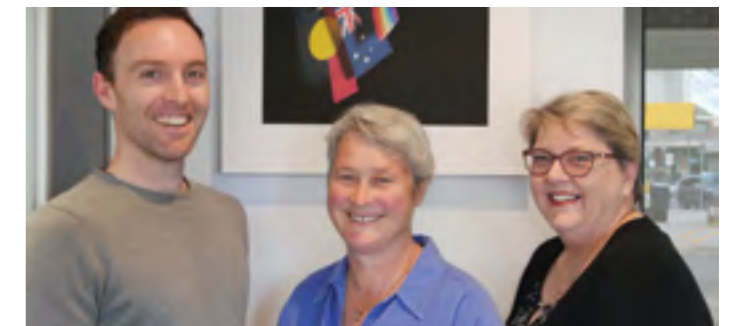
Latrobe Valley communities feel empowered and enabled to advocate for their health and wellbeing

- Community survey responses indicate the majority of Latrobe Valley community members feel they:
  - » Can speak out when they disagree with what everyone else has agreed on (51%)
  - » Have power to make important decisions that change the course of their life (78%)
  - » Contribute to making their community a better place to live (54%).

Latrobe Valley communities' health and wellbeing needs are communicated

- The Advocate's focus on collaborative research means she is constantly sharing information with Latrobe Valley communities.
- The Advocate produces her findings on platforms identified in existing and emerging research as being accessible to a wide audience.
- Between June 2018 and May 2019, the Advocate has engaged with approximately 200 representatives from local health services and Government and 500 Latrobe Valley community members and groups.

Evaluation of the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone, Latrobe Health Assembly and Latrobe Health Advocate (© 2019 Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu)



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