

Quarterly Update

January to March 2020



"A new citizen, a new home, a new future"
Philip Dean

Strobe Health
Innovation Zone

RE A CHANGE

INTEGRIT

ROB
trusted
moving health





Jane Anderson, Latrobe Health Advocate

I am pleased to present this quarterly report from the Office of the Latrobe Health Advocate for the period January to March 2020.

As this goes to print, we are in the middle of the COVID-19 emergency response. At the end of March, it was clear that this significant public health issue was impacting Latrobe communities and it became a priority for my office.

As the Latrobe Health Advocate, I am here to listen and to help our health system and governments to understand and respond to the needs of local communities. This work continues throughout the COVID-19 emergency. I will touch on the early work done in relation to COVID-19 and I am also sharing with you the work we have been undertaking outside of the emergency.

In line with my priority that **Health is Everyone's Business**, I was approached about proposals for the Delburn Windfarm and Used Lead Battery Recycling Plant in Hazelwood North. I am looking to understand what is being done to communicate effectively with communities and how the health and wellbeing of communities is being considered within these proposals. I continue to monitor the progress of these projects.

My office undertook significant community engagement work in this quarter. I have been hearing about the health and wellbeing aspirations and concerns of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and LGBTIQ communities.

I hosted an innovation workshop that heard ideas from communities, doctors, practice managers, peak bodies, training services, school principals and local and state governments about how to improve access to doctors in Latrobe.

I have heard more from people in Latrobe about their experiences of end of life palliative care and I continue to work with services and governments to support the aspirations of communities in this regard.

I look forward to having more of you share your experiences with me as my work continues.

Please read on and if you have any questions contact my office by calling 1800 319 255 or visit and like our Facebook page where you can keep up to date with the events I'm attending and information on health and wellbeing issues that may be of interest to you. You can also follow me on Twitter and our website is where you can find copies of the reports we publish along with this quarterly update.



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 peoples of the Gunaikurnai nation and passes on respect to their Elders past and present, future and emerging.



www.lhadvocate.vic.gov.au

Activities January to March 2020

This quarter the Advocate undertook significant engagement work. It has been a time of much learning for her office and she is grateful to everyone who has come forward to share their experiences and concerns with us.

In response to increasing community interest in the Delburn Windfarm and in line with the Advocate's priority that **Health is Everyone's Business**, the Advocate met with people who approached her with their concerns about planning processes, community engagement and potential health impacts of the development.

The Advocate sought information from OSMI Australia and the National Wind Farm Commissioner, Andrew Dyer to better understand the processes for approval and to understand what was being done to communicate effectively with communities about how their health and wellbeing was being considered as part of this proposal.

People also approached the Advocate about the Used Lead Battery Recycling Plant in Hazelwood North.

Similarly, community members expressed their concerns around the transparency of the approval process and how the approval process itself may cause unintended psychological harm. The Advocate sought information from the developer Chunxing, and she and her staff attended public meetings.



The Advocate made a submission to the EPA with the following recommendations:

- The EPA satisfies itself that the proponent has provided sufficient opportunity for communities to be consulted about the proposal.
- That the EPA consider the cumulative impact of the release of stated emissions on the existing soil and air quality in Latrobe.
- That the EPA consider the psychological impacts of the approval process on those people who have raised concerns around the proposal and work to mitigate those impacts by maintaining a transparent process and evidence informed communication strategies to prevent unintended harm.

The Advocate continues to monitor the progress of these projects.

In response to the aspirations of local communities, the Advocate has identified **Healthy Lifestyles** as a priority for her office. Work on this project is being undertaken with the support of staff from VicHealth and in January, the Advocate hosted VicHealth CEO, Dr. Sandra Demaiio.



The Advocate and Dr. Demaiio held joint media interviews to emphasise the positive aspirations of local communities and highlight the underlying factors that can impact peoples' health including income, education, housing and environment.



At the invitation of Dr. Demaiio, the Advocate attended the first meeting of the VicHealth Taskforce on Childhood Obesity Prevention.

The Advocate and her staff also spent two days with VicHealth executive and key staff to identify opportunities to share research and work together in relation to the Advocate's priority project about healthy lifestyles in Latrobe.

During the last quarter the Advocate has continued to implement the **Inclusive Communities** project and has been engaging more with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The purpose of this engagement is to learn more about people's health and wellbeing aspirations and to better understand their engagement preferences.



Engagement to date has highlighted that in Latrobe, closing the gap will require a significant shift within health and social services, to demonstrate greater cultural awareness and inclusivity. There are people and families that, for a range of reasons, are not accessing services that should be available to them and their health is suffering as a result.

The Advocate has also been engaging more with LGBTIQ communities.

Engagement to date has highlighted the importance of health services and governments using language, signage and data collection approaches that are inclusive.

The Advocate has also heard that many LGBTIQ people want to know ahead of time, that the place they are going to visit for a health appointment is welcoming and friendly and understands their needs.

Concerns are being raised about the mental health impacts for LGBTIQ people who are accessing services or facilities where they do not feel safe to be themselves.



The Advocate presented her report, **Engagement Inspiration**, to share insights from people living with disability, people with a multicultural background and people living with chronic conditions about how they want to be engaged.

Those in attendance shared their views about how the draft government framework could be improved with suggestions including:

- using less jargon and more inclusive language,
- having less structure and more flexibility allowing for communities to engage with government in ways that are informal and more opportunistic,

- not relying solely on online technologies to hear from people, spending time with people face to face and providing more resources and
- providing regional department offices with more authority which would strengthen their capacity to engage.

The Advocate shared outcomes from the engagement and research completed to that point and workshop participants identified a range of potential solutions.



Following this workshop, the Advocate attended the National Medical Workforce Strategy consultation organised by the Commonwealth Department of Health.

This consultation focused on issues that Latrobe communities and doctors have been raising with the Advocate including the maldistribution of doctors with shortages in rural areas, the declining interest in generalist practice and the impact this is having on the health workforce and ongoing issues relating to doctor wellbeing and workplace culture.

The Advocate also held discussions with the National Rural Health Commissioner Emeritus Professor Paul Worley about the emerging issues and trends associated with access to doctors in Latrobe with the purpose of exploring opportunities to bring about long-term system change. These discussions have focused on major reform and long-term impact. The Advocate will continue to engage with the Commissioner and Latrobe stakeholders focusing on the following aspects of the system;

- the business model of general practices and utilisation of a multidisciplinary team;
- ways to redesign the system to reduce the number and cost of emergency department presentations;
- training and accreditation pathways for doctors;
- enhancing and promoting the liveability of Latrobe to attract more doctors; and,
- campaigns and resources to shift community expectations and experiences with doctors.

The Advocate and the Commissioner noted that COVID-19 is likely to accelerate and enable immediate changes to the way communities can access and interact with doctors. The Advocate will monitor these innovations

closely and incorporate this into the ongoing work associated with improving access to doctors in Latrobe.

Also, in February, the Advocate hosted a roundtable with the Chief Health Officer, Professor Brett Sutton and local decision makers in Latrobe. This was an opportunity to bring people together and progress discussions about responding to **climate change** and to consider strategies that could be implemented to protect the health and wellbeing of local communities, particularly those who are most vulnerable.



After the roundtable the Advocate and the Chief Health Officer visited Traralgon Secondary College to engage with VCE students about the impact of climate change on health and wellbeing, taking questions and encouraging them to continue to raise awareness with their peers.



The Advocate continues to hear from local stakeholders about **end of life palliative care** services in Latrobe and is seeking direct feedback from clinicians and services about changes that have been implemented since the release of her report in September 2019.

The Advocate attended a meeting of the Gippsland Regional Palliative Care Consortium to hear directly from service managers about the challenges and opportunities in implementing the Advocate's recommendations.

It is becoming increasingly evident that there is a need to use consistent language and achieve a shared understanding of what people are talking about when they use the words 'hospice' or 'palliative care unit'.

The Advocate is now working with government and service providers to prepare an update on the implementation of her recommendations and will share this work in coming months.

In March the Advocate joined the Minister for Education James Merlino at the opening of a new kinder hub in Morwell.

The Advocate was pleased to see the establishment of a one-stop shop that brings together kinder, school and family services at a single location. This **place-based approach** provides an opportunity to address many of the social determinants of health that impact children and families in Latrobe. The Advocate is interested in opportunities to encourage further innovations and placed-based activities within the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone.



On the 20th March, the Advocate released a statement about the impact of coronavirus (**COVID-19**) on Latrobe communities. In her statement the Advocate determined that COVID-19 was a priority project for her office.

The Advocate highlighted concerns for people who may feel the impact more than others including those that rely on community events and activities for their mental wellbeing, people living with



Engagement inspiration.

The Advocate told the group "I am yet to hear from anyone in Latrobe who doesn't want to live a healthy life... the fact is people aspire to be well." She posed this challenge to those present.



What might you do differently to engage with your community AND each other to value peoples' experiences?

The Advocate also hosted an innovation workshop focused on improving **Access to Services in Latrobe**. This workshop attracted a diverse mix of people including community members, doctors, practice managers, peak bodies, training agencies, school principals and government departments.

disability, chronic condition or mental illness, people who can't access food or housing and people who already experience isolation and loneliness.

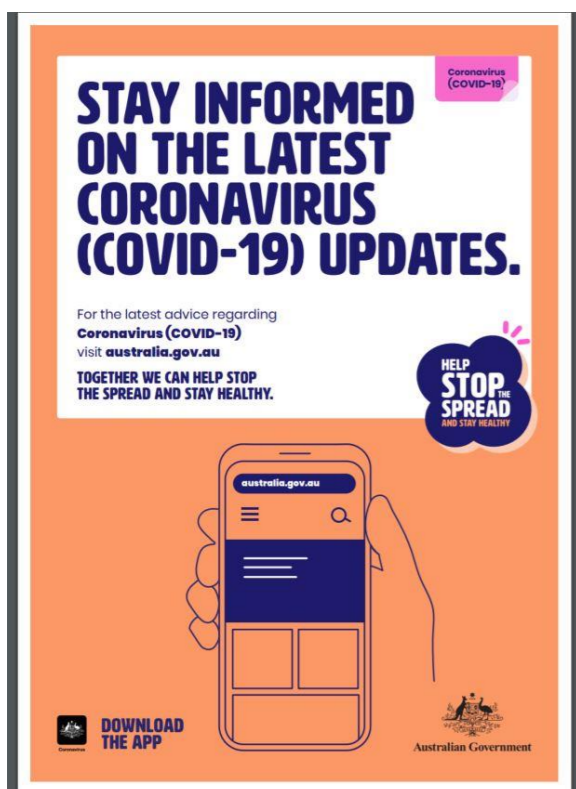
The Advocate made a commitment to continue to engage with people and to work closely with governments and health services in the weeks and months ahead.

Through her initial engagement with communities about COVID-19 the Advocate identified the potential for increased health inequities in Latrobe, noting that some people may become further disconnected from their society and support services.

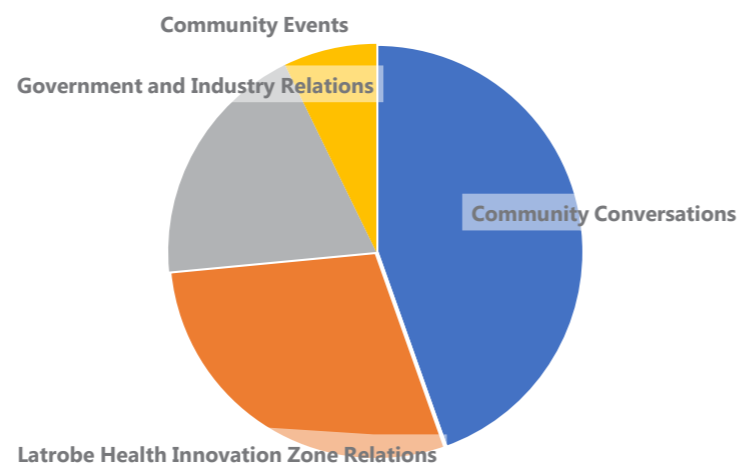
The Advocate heard that many people rely on local buses and public transport to access food and essential services.

The Advocate expressed concerns that some people in Latrobe were not hearing, understanding or responding to COVID-19 messages, noting that they were not changing their behaviours and may need more support and information.

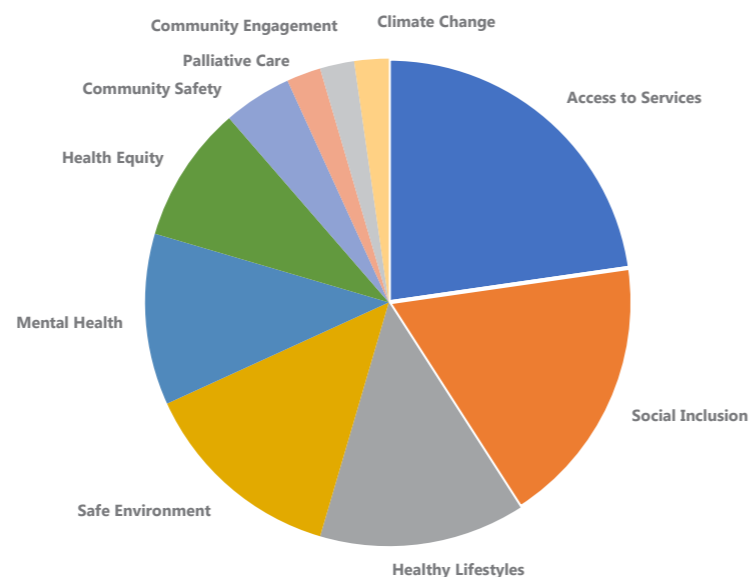
The Advocate continues to hear from people across communities, service providers and government as the COVID-19 emergency response continues. Each week she reports directly to the Minister for Health and the Chief Health Officer on the impact of COVID-19 in Latrobe, as well as the innovations she is seeing and the questions she is asking



Breakdown of Activities Jan - Mar 2020



Community Voice Jan - Mar 2020



The Top Five Aspirations

1. Access to services
2. Social inclusion
3. Healthy lifestyles
4. Safe environment
5. Mental health



Better access to health services in Latrobe

People in Latrobe want to build trusted relationships with health services and professionals. Access to health services goes beyond government funding, locations and opening hours. It comes down to approachability, inclusivity and trust. When health services get this right people in the community are empowered to achieve their health and wellbeing goals.

Accessing local health services is not entirely about availability, physical access or opening hours. Often it comes down to the experience communities have with a health service, how approachable a service is from a patient's point of view and whether they can have trust in the service and the people that work there.



Communities have said that if health services can demonstrate an openness, willingness to learn and ways of working together with others, this will help to build trust. People have said that when this doesn't exist it can significantly impact the patient experience, impact health outcomes and result in unresolved anger or frustration.

Health services in Latrobe contribute to stronger health and wellbeing outcomes when they find ways to walk alongside people in the community, reaching out and working together with others at a grassroots level.

People suffering from chronic disease have talked about how important it is for them to have a consistent relationship with their doctor in order to receive the continuity of care that they need. They have said that without this their health is not as good as it can be.

People from LGBTIQ communities have talked about the importance of knowing that health services are inclusive and can understand and show empathy for their needs.

They have suggested that inclusivity should be visible and obvious, to send a message that the health service and its staff are safe to approach and trust.

People from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have shared their aspirations for a community health hub, where they can access a team of doctors and health professionals who know them and don't leave.

People living with disabilities have shared their aspirations for better access to public transport. They need to be able to get to health services in Latrobe and in Melbourne. People have talked about the detrimental impact on their health when they cannot access an appointment in Melbourne due to trains being replaced by buses that cannot accommodate wheelchairs. They have said that they can't rely on trains and want to be able to access other transports that can help them to achieve their health and wellbeing goals.

People have talked about the complexity of online systems such as My Aged Care. They have said that without having a knowledge of technology or access to the internet they are vulnerable and at risk of being told what to do. Providing greater supports and flexibility to people in the community can empower them to access the services they need to improve their health and wellbeing.

Some people have talked about illnesses that are invisible or silent in nature. They have specifically mentioned lung cancer, mesothelioma and amyloidosis.



People have described occasions where health professionals have struggled to provide support or accessed the expertise that they need to help patients, due to being unfamiliar with a particular illness.

They have suggested more education and access to simplified information to help patients and health services act early.

They have also suggested increased screening for cancers in Latrobe.

People in Latrobe have talked about the impact of health conditions becoming worse and, in some instances, leading to early or avoidable deaths as a result of patients not accessing health services early enough or at all. One person from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community has expressed their sorrow that a whole generation of their peers has gone.

You need good people to work together in Latrobe Valley and the place will boom



Better mental health for people in Latrobe

People in Latrobe share a common goal to enjoy good mental wellbeing. They want hope and healing. However, their needs are vastly different, and everyone has their own story and context. Supports and services need the flexibility and understanding to help all communities achieve their mental wellbeing goals.

People in Latrobe have talked openly about mental health and wellbeing and discussed the barriers they face within themselves and within society. They have shared their aspirations to continue to see hope in life, have a reason for being and to achieve harmony.

They have said in order to participate in society they need to be acknowledged. People want to be able to pursue their interests, sleep well, enjoy exercise and spend time with likeminded people.

The Advocate has heard that sport is good for mental wellbeing, but the costs of transport, membership fees and uniforms can be a barrier, especially for young people. Empowering young people, providing them with leadership and personal development opportunities may help them to build resilience and experience good mental wellbeing into the future.

There are health services and community activities that can help people achieve their mental health goals, however these supports need to be accessible.



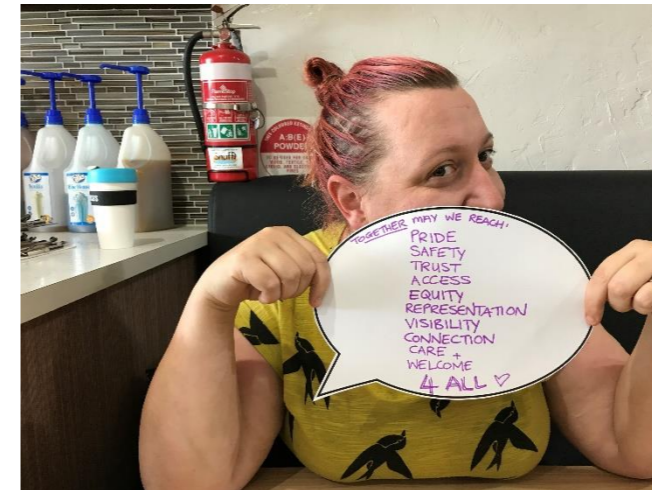
The Advocate has heard stories about people avoiding mental health discussions with their doctor because they were told it would require a double appointment. The message they took from this was that their doctor didn't have the time or interest to learn more.

Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People have said that their mental health and how they are feeling depends on the hour and the day. They know that healing is important and have said that you need to start with what is hurting you and then connect with your culture in whatever way works.

They have talked about the importance of an aligned spirit and shared their aspirations for Aboriginal aged care services supporting community Elders. They have said that cultural connection is at the centre of their mental health and wellbeing.



LGBTIQ communities have shared their aspirations for people and services to be more inclusive to help them achieve good mental wellbeing. They are concerned about the high rates of suicide and homelessness amongst their peers. They have recognised that their mental health can be impacted by many aspects of their life, including their job, finances, marriage, family, and accommodation.



It's awesome when people don't make assumptions



Human connections in Latrobe

When people living and working in Latrobe are aware of how they can be more inclusive of others and commit to doing this, everyone in Latrobe has the opportunity to enjoy good health.

People have talked about the value of local sporting clubs, gyms and exercise groups. They provide opportunities for people to be included and to connect with others. One local exercise group realised during the summer break that three weeks was the maximum time it could go without running a class without having a negative impact on the mental health of its participants.

People living with disabilities have said that gyms and recreational groups can help them to achieve their healthy lifestyle goals, however their experience and first impressions are not always positive.

They want to be treated as a customer and not a person with a disability.

The complexity and limitations of the NDIS system is not always supportive of people living with disability. People want the NDIS to be an enabler that helps them to further develop their skills and to participate in society. They have said that NDIS is best when it helps people to achieve their goals and move away from the status quo.



People from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities want to see greater alignment between the way government resources are being directed and the way they want to achieve their health and wellbeing goals. They want government to realise the true effect of people coming together, feeling safe and comfortable.

They know this can have positive social benefits and want to create opportunities for good people to work together. Like many who are reliant on these supports, they have had enough of hearing "Yeah, but..."

People from LGBTIQ communities have said that awareness and education is central to everything and needs to be at the forefront of any change. They have described LGBTIQ as an invisible disability and said that some people don't understand that comments discriminate. The local hospital, community health service, Quantum, Aussie Broadband and Youth Space have been praised for the ways they openly demonstrate and promote inclusivity for LGBTIQ people.

LGBTIQ people have suggested that more unisex and disability toilets throughout Latrobe City would help them to feel safe and to stay physically and mentally healthy.

They have also suggested that health services, community and business questionnaires and surveys need to be more inclusive.

This can be achieved by asking about gender at the end rather than the beginning and by using an open text box. Some LGBTIQ people have said that their safety must come first before they can start to think about equality and equity.



Volunteering is important to people in Latrobe. It gives them an opportunity to utilise their skills and connect with others. It can be good for their health. However local volunteers have expressed their frustrations about the behaviours of paid staff who can unknowingly bring poor workplace culture and politics into their discussions with volunteers. This impacts the volunteer experience and numbers can decline as result.



In relation to COVID-19, there are many people in Latrobe who already experience disadvantage or social isolation. The Advocate has heard that these people may become further disconnected from their society and support services.

The usual places for social connection and access to technology and resources such as libraries and other community settings have been closed, leaving some people who depend on them for their health, further isolated.

Animals and land are connected to wellbeing for me as Aboriginal person



Safe environment for people in Latrobe

Protecting the health and wellbeing of communities is a priority for people in Latrobe. Communities want to contribute to decisions about economic and industrial developments. When industry and governments engage with communities in meaningful and transparent ways it can lead to stronger outcomes, harness the goodwill of local communities and prevent unintended harm to their mental health and wellbeing.

Latrobe Valley communities are experiencing an economic transition. There is a commitment from governments to provide ongoing employment and economic benefits to the region. There is also the designation of the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone, a commitment from the Victorian Government to engage with local communities to prioritise and improve health and wellbeing outcomes.



Two major industrial developments have the attention of local communities and whilst there is support for the employment and economic benefits they may bring, there is an increasingly strong voice that community health and wellbeing should not be compromised.

There is significant local community interest in the proposed development of a lead battery recycling plant in Hazelwood North. People have raised concerns about the potential for lead emissions and proximity to a local primary school. Communities have an expectation that governments and industry will engage with them in transparent and meaningful ways.



They have shared their feelings of distrust and the impact that the proposal and associated decision-making processes are having on their own mental wellbeing. Local communities are looking for assurances about the validity of data and information that is presented to them and want to have piece of mind that the development will not be harmful to their health and wellbeing.

Some people from Boolarra have raised concerns about a proposed wind farm development. They are worried about the potential impacts of noise and vibrations and have doubts about the proposed size and scale of the turbines. People have shared their frustrations about the engagement that has occurred to date and want to see more timely follow up and for communities to be afforded the opportunity to understand the potential impacts and to ensure that health and wellbeing is not comprised by industry and government decision makers.

Latrobe communities were impacted by significant levels of smoke during the recent bushfire season. Some people have expressed their concern that smoke is a part of life now and described it as something that they can taste and smell.

They have raised concerns about smoke in water tanks and want governments to provide more timely and consistent information about the impacts of this. Communities are wanting to truly understand the impacts of smoke and their health and believe more research can be done to achieve this.

Healthy Lifestyles for everyone in Latrobe

People in Latrobe share a common goal to stay active and enjoy the physical and mental health benefits of exercise. For some this is harder to achieve than others, however with COVID-19 there may be an opportunity to help communities re-prioritise how they spend their time.

People in Latrobe have shared their goals to live a long and healthy life. They want this for themselves and their families. Many people in Latrobe enjoy looking after their health through regular exercise and know that this can help to prevent existing health conditions from getting worse.

Before the impact of COVID-19 was felt in Latrobe, there were a number of examples within the community where participation in local groups and activities was on the rise. Among these was the Yinnar Community Exercise Group which indicated that local doctors were referring patients to their activities and it was pleasing to have this recognition.



Some groups and activity providers, however, have reported that it can be hard to engage with participants.

They have said that people may come and go from programs and may experience social anxiety or there may be other circumstances that prevent them from participating. It can be challenging to promote the message that achieving a healthy lifestyle may involve long term change and commitment. Not everyone is ready for what seems like such a big shift.

Community programs and activities are often dependant on external funding and there is a desire and need in Latrobe to offer inclusive options that are free or low cost to participants.

This dependency on external funding can be challenging and may limit the sustainability of healthy lifestyle programs and activities.

It is important for local and state governments to recognise the value of these programs and the inherent risks to community health and wellbeing when they are impacted by external funding arrangements.



People from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have reflected that some people can let their health go and that it might be difficult for men to talk about their health. Nonetheless, they share the same aspirations to live a long and healthy life.

Listen to your body and get it checked out

Interestingly, before the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, people in Latrobe talked about wanting to have more time to look after their physical health. They described the challenges associated with busy lifestyles and the difficulty of prioritising time for exercise amongst other competing priorities. Someone suggested that in order to look after their health, they may need to take a step back and manage their time differently.

Fair opportunity for everyone in Latrobe
Communities and health experts across the globe recognise that there are social conditions in which people are born, grow, work and live that influence health and wellbeing. For some people in Latrobe these conditions are not favourable and there is a risk that the impacts of the COVID-19 emergency will make things worse.

People have shared their concerns with the Advocate about how even some of their most basic goals are not able to be achieved. The Advocate has heard about a community member's aspiration to grow fruit and vegetables in public housing gardens and how they feel that no matter what they ask for they are told no. They have talked about their own mental health concerns and the increased anxiety they experience when they think about contacting their housing officer. They feel that the housing officers often say no without giving any thought to their requests.

A person living with disabilities who uses a wheelchair has said they sometimes feel like a burden on their friends and family. They want to be able to access the same health services and community activities as everyone else but have limited transport options in Latrobe. They are looking for greater support and more wheelchair accessible vehicles to help them achieve their health and wellbeing goals.



People from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have identified that for them, there is an imbalance across all the social determinants of health.

They have said that some people are scraping by only in one area. They have suggested it would help to have more groups of people coming together and doing it themselves.

Groups like men's groups, Koori and non-Koori groups, women's groups, supports for young kids. They have shared their dream of using the social determinants of health to measure changes in hearts and minds.



People in Latrobe are looking for a commitment to providing more support where more support is needed and in ways that are appropriate for people in Latrobe. When this happens, opportunities open up for these social conditions to change.

It doesn't take much to make lives easier

Some people in Latrobe are not hearing, understanding or responding to COVID-19 messages. They are not changing their behaviours. There is a risk that the impacts of COVID-19 will expose more people to additional financial stress, mental illness, social isolation, food insecurity, homelessness or violence.

