



Sharing the voice of Latrobe Communities

January to March 2020





Jane Anderson, Latrobe Health Advocate

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

As this update 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 on 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 towards the end of March in relation to COVID-19 and I also want to share with you the work we have been undertaking outside of this emergency.

In line with my priority that Health is Everyone's Business, I was approached about the Delburn Windfarm and Used Lead Battery Recycling Plant. Communities were concerned about the health impacts of these projects and the ongoing emotional and physical impacts of the approval processes being undertaken. I met with several people who raised their concerns with me. I sought information from each of the proponents and Local, State and Federal Government agencies to better understand the processes for approval, what was being done to communicate effectively with communities and how health and wellbeing was 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 and LGBTIQ communities.

I hosted an innovation workshop that identified 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 needs of communities in this regard.

I have much to report on this quarter and so while this update provides you with a snapshot of the work my office has undertaken, a more detailed report is available on our website for your information. I encourage you to go to www.lhadvocate.vic.gov.au for more details.

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

Jane Anderson

Activities January to March 2020

In response to the aspirations of local communities, the Advocate has identified Healthy Lifestyles as a priority for her office. Work on this project will be undertaken with the support of VicHealth and in January, the Advocate hosted a visit from VicHealth CEO, Dr. Sandra Demaio. The Advocate and Dr. Demaio emphasised the positive aspirations of local communities and overall factors that can impact peoples' health including income, education, housing and environment.

In February the Advocate hosted a roundtable with the Chief Health Officer, Professor Brett Sutton, and local decision makers about the impacts of climate change on health and wellbeing. Professor Sutton also addressed VCE and VCAL students at Traralgon Secondary College, responding to questions and encouraging the students to continue to raise awareness with their peers.

The Advocate was invited by VicHealth to participate as a member of the Taskforce on Childhood Obesity Prevention and attended her first meeting in February.

In March the Advocate attended the opening of the new kinder hub in Morwell. This place-based approach brings together kinder, school and family services at a single location, supporting families to access the supports they need as they require them.

The Advocate identified COVID-19 as a priority for the office and began engaging with communities on the impacts being experienced by people in Latrobe.

The Advocate reports directly to the Health Minister and Chief Health Officer each week on how COVID-19 is impacting Latrobe communities

Community Voice Jan to March 2020



Better Access to Health Services in Latrobe

People in Latrobe want to build trusted relationships with health services and professionals. Communities have said that when health services demonstrate an openness, willingness to learn and ways of working together with others, it helps to build trust.

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. Without it there is a risk that people will wait or not seek out support until it is too late.



Better Mental Health 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.

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. LGBTIQ communities have shared their aspirations for people and services to be more inclusive to help them achieve good mental wellbeing.



Human Connections in Latrobe

There are many people in Latrobe who already experience disadvantage or social isolation. As the COVID-19 emergency response has developed the Advocate has heard that these people may become further disconnected from their society and support services. Libraries and other community settings have been closed, although they would usually offer social connection, access to technology and resources that some people depend on for their health.

If 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 will have the opportunity to enjoy good health.



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.



Healthy Lifestyles for Everyone in Latrobe

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.

For some this is harder to achieve than others, however the experience of making changes during the COVID-19 emergency may give communities an opportunity to re-prioritise how they spend their time.



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 COVID-19 will make things worse. People currently struggling may be exposed to more financial stress, mental illness, social isolation, food insecurity, homelessness and violence.

But, with risk there is always opportunity and with a commitment to providing more support where it is needed and in ways that are appropriate for people in Latrobe, these conditions can change.

Some people express that they are barely scraping by and they are looking for a change in people's hearts and minds.

It doesn't take much
to make lives easier

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

It's awesome when
people don't make
assumptions

Listen to your body
and get it checked
out

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

We step out of the silos,
do great work and then
step back