
Western Public Health Unit Strategy

2022-2023



Acknowledgement of Country

The Western Public Health Unit acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of the land, and acknowledges and pays respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

We are committed to the healing of Country, working towards equality in health outcomes and the ongoing journey of reconciliation.



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The Western Public Health Unit (WPHU) is a local public health unit that sits within Western Health. We work within a network of nine local public health units (LPHUs) across Victoria and with the Victorian Department of Health (DH) to deliver public health interventions with the people of eight local government areas in central and west Melbourne.

COVID-19 response

The Victorian Government established LPHUs to strengthen the public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to improve place-based public health. At the height of the pandemic, WPHU employed intensive contact tracing and case management as well as outbreak responses across a range of settings including education, disability, health and aged care. WPHU's epidemiological analysis helped direct responses, testing requirements and vaccination efforts.

In 2022, with high COVID-19 vaccine coverage population wide, WPHU's focus shifted to public health action on COVID-19 focusing on those at most risk including residential aged care.

Health protection

WPHU aims to improve the health and wellbeing of our community. To achieve this, we collaborate with our local partners to co-design and deliver public health programs, as well as create healthier environments where people live, work, study and play. Guided by state-wide public health and wellbeing priorities, WPHU works with other LPHUs, partner organisations, local government and diverse community groups to increase local engagement with health promotion programs. Our commitment is to reduce health inequities and improve population health in our community.

Health promotion

WPHU has now expanded its health protection role to other communicable diseases including those requiring urgent responses like monkeypox and Japanese encephalitis virus. We work with the Department of Health and other LPHUs to provide local specialist support to prevent and reduce the impact of these communicable diseases. This involves surveillance and monitoring of communicable diseases, strategic health protection initiatives, and outbreak preparedness and response as well as education and training for healthcare professionals and communities.



Our people

WPHU comprises a multidisciplinary team with expertise in medicine and public health, data and epidemiology, infection prevention, health promotion, community engagement and bi-cultural work, communications, operations and administration. Many members of the team are registered health professionals such as nurses, doctors and allied health professionals, and many have specialist qualifications in public health.

Our team reflects our community. We actively recruit a diverse workforce to best represent the people we serve. Our team's broad range of experiences allows us to better understand the cultural nuances within our communities, helping to guide our public health practice.

WPHU has a strong philosophy of working with our local community to provide comprehensive public health. We span the municipalities of Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Melton, Moonee Valley, Merri-bek and Wyndham, and we value our relationships with each local government.

Our growing unit is proud to have strong relationships with a range of health providers and community organisations in the central and western metropolitan region of Melbourne.



Our community

The Western Public Health Unit services one of the fastest growing and most diverse regions of Australia. The catchment population exceeds 1.4 million people, and the birth rate and movement into this region means that strong growth will continue in the years ahead.

Our communities are culturally rich, with members speaking more than 200 different languages and dialects. 33 per cent of people across our catchment were born overseas, with the most common countries of birth other than Australia being India, Vietnam and China.

While proudly diverse, people from across our suburbs face significant challenges. Many experience substantial social and economic disadvantage, with higher-than-average unemployment, and a large proportion of our population experience financial hardship.



Where our strategic objectives came from

Our strategic objectives take influence from both Victorian Department of Health and Western Health strategic documents, as well as core public health principles.

Our mission

WPHU leads Victoria in protecting health, creating healthy environments, addressing health inequities and promoting wellbeing for our catchment.

We do this by:

- tackling broad public health challenges
- addressing health inequities
- developing an in-depth understanding of health in our community
- connecting, collaborating and engaging with our communities, their leaders and our partners using a place-based approach
- delivering adaptive, high-quality, evidence-based interventions that maximise value to the catchment
- building a workforce that is curious, nimble, multidisciplinary, diverse and experienced
- supporting and collaborating with other LPHUs in Victoria to deliver an agile public health network
- delivering on government's public health objectives.



Our culture statement

The Western Public Health Unit is a diverse and welcoming team who are passionate about public health. We value open and honest communication and work together to create a flexible environment of mutual respect, inclusivity and connection.

This is achieved by:

- recognising and maximising the unique contributions of our team
- clearly articulating expectations so that the team is supported to do their best work
- seeking opportunities to accommodate the diverse needs of our team
- providing a range of forums and opportunities for all staff to express their views
- communicating in a timely and inclusive manner that caters for different styles and preferences
- introducing ourselves to all new team members and showing a continued interest in the wellbeing of others
- creating opportunities for staff to interact socially and connect outside of work.

Our values

WPHU upholds 10 values that include the Western Health strategic values (CARES)

- **Compassion** – we consistently act with empathy and integrity.
- **Accountability** – we take responsibility for our decisions and actions.
- **Respect** – we respect the rights, beliefs and choice of every individual.
- **Excellence** – we inspire and motivate through innovation and achievement.
- **Safety** – we prioritise safety as an essential part of everyday practice.
- **Helpfulness, curiosity, and kindness** – we solve problems for and with the community and ask questions where we are unsure, always acting with kindness.
- **Fairness and equity** – we direct our effort where it is most needed and acknowledge the broad determinants of health and wellbeing.
- **Evidence** – we apply science and evidence to drive our actions.
- **Collaboration** – we work in a network of LPHUs and in partnership with other organisations and communities.
- **Innovation** – we try novel approaches and are willing to take risks to achieve our mission.



Department of Health strategy

The Victorian Government Department of Health has a vision that Victorians are the health people in the world¹.

This vision has three key long-term outcomes:

- the wellbeing of future generations is supported by safe environments
- intergenerational health outcomes are improved
- the health system is sustainable.

In turn, these are supported by medium-term outcomes:

- Victorians experience a public health system and wellbeing outcomes that they value
- every dollar we invest in public health delivers the best possible outcomes for the community.

Which are further supported by short-term outcomes:

- the environments where Victorians live, work, play and study are healthy and safe
- all Victorians are supported to live their healthiest life
- Victorians are connected with the right supports, at the right place, at the right time.

Department of Health Public Health Division view of LPHU development

The following table outlines the outcomes that LPHUs are expected to deliver on during the 2022-23 financial year².

Outcome Statements for FY2022 -23							
Delivered by Department of Health and LPHUs together in a place-based, networked approach	Robust and sustainable local public health systems			Prevention and Population Health	Health Protection		Emergency Management
	Communication	Engagement and Partnership	System Connectivity		Environmental Health	Communicable Disease	
	Individuals and groups from across the community are able to access appropriate and accessible information that enables them to improve their health and safety.	LPHUs establish trusted relationships with key community leaders and groups. Achieving the goals set out in their respective engagement plans.	LPHUs are actively looking for opportunities to improve system connectedness across the community.	Communities are empowered to live healthier lives through culturally appropriate, place-based initiatives that collaborate with local organisations.	LPHUs monitor local environmental health risks and provide local knowledge to support DH-lead responses wherever appropriate.	LPHUs collaborate to provide state-wide public health responses to Communicable Disease risks.	LPHUs are across local emergency health risks and provide local knowledge to support DH-lead responses wherever appropriate.

Our strategic aims

Taken from our mission, we have eight strategic aims which inform our work:

Aim 1 – we tackle broad public health challenges

We find public health problems and solve them proactively, working across health protection and health promotion to address the determinants of health. We advocate for widening our scope where possible. We provide a single point of contact for the community and cover as many public health problems as possible. We advocate for statewide public health policy that allows community focused, tailored interventions.

Aim 2 – we address health inequities

We prioritise interventions that achieve a differential improvement in the health of the most disadvantaged populations that we serve. We direct our effort to the populations most in need, tailoring our approach.

Aim 3 – we develop an in-depth understanding of health in our community

We strive for a detailed epidemiological and practical understanding of our population and their health. We use our relationships with the community to gain local knowledge.

Aim 4 – we connect, collaborate, and engage with our communities, their leaders and our partners using a place-based approach

We work closely with our populations, connecting with stakeholders and leaders. We co-design and collaborate across sectors to develop interventions that empower local action, value local knowledge and work for the community we serve.

Aim 5 – we deliver adaptive, high-quality, evidence-based interventions that maximise value to the catchment

We understand the evidence and prioritise prevention and early intervention. We have simple and clear guidelines and systems.



We undertake audit to drive quality improvement and are diligent in measuring, responding and reporting on performance and quality. We safely manage public health risk and outbreaks.

Aim 6 – we build a workforce that is curious, nimble, multidisciplinary, diverse and experienced

We have an inclusive approach that allows all situations to become a chance to learn, teach and improve. We prioritise training and teaching and provide a wide range of experience for our workforce. We understand change and manage it well. We reflect the community we serve at all levels of the team.

Aim 7 – we support and collaborate with other LPHUs in Victoria to deliver an agile public health network

Every part of WPHU connects with corresponding parts of other Victorian LPHUs. We surge and support other parts of the state when urgent needs arise. We provide public health responses that are consistent with state-wide policy. We share and promote approaches that work.

Aim 8 - we deliver on government's public health objectives

We steward our system and are effective regulators. We understand and meet our deliverables and the needs of WH and DH. In this way, we maximise trust in government and long-term investment in local public health units and systems.

Reference list

1. State of Victoria, Australia, Department of Health, (2022). *Department of Health Operational Plan 2022–23*. [online] 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne: Victorian Government. Available at: <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/department-of-health-operational-plan-2022-23> [Accessed Aug. 2022].
2. Strategy and Planning Branch Public Health Division, Victorian Department of Health (2022). *LPHU Outcomes Framework*.
3. Department of Health and Human Services (2019). *Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2019–2023*. [online] Available at: <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/publications/victorian-public-health-and-wellbeing-plan-2019-2023> [Accessed 2022].

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