

Executive summary

The *Western Public Health Unit (WPHU) Population Health Catchment Plan* (the catchment plan) sets out the health priority areas and proposed actions for place-based population health promotion in the catchment for the next 6 years. Informed by a comprehensive and consultative health needs assessment, the catchment plan sets out our commitment to working in partnership with 8 local government areas and all local partners to improve the health and wellbeing of our community.

Our approach

Our approach to improving population health considers the wider determinants of health with an explicit health equity focus. Guided by the WPHU strategic aims (Figure 1) and consistent with the Victorian Government’s public health vision to ‘make Victorians the healthiest people in the world’, WPHU will begin with a focus on primary prevention and commit to addressing health inequalities by developing an in-depth understanding of our community and the health challenges they face. We aim to build on the strengths of existing systems in our catchment to make the everyday environments in which we live, work, play and study, the healthiest they can be. Our approach is based on systems change, collective impact and value-based methodology and will deliver evidence-based interventions to the catchment. We are guided by partner and community consultations combined with extensive analysis of data from our own local populations.



Figure 1: Western Public Health Unit strategic aims

Our population

Characterised by its growth corridors and high birth rates, the WPHU catchment is home to many families with young children and youth from diverse cultural backgrounds, with a large proportion of the community speaking a language other than English at home (44.8%). Across the WPHU catchment, we have strong and thriving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Additionally, communities in WPHU are also socio-economically disadvantaged relative to Victoria and Australia, owing to lower income, lower levels of education or lower skilled occupations. Geography and land use within the catchment also pose challenges that affect health, with large industrial areas offset by only small areas of parkland in some regions.

Of significant concern in our catchment is the clear identification of high levels of avoidable chronic conditions such as coronary heart disease, diabetes, dental caries and cancers, and associated higher rates of premature mortality, as well as low rates of participation in cancer screening programs.



Photo: Werribee Park, Wyndham

Our focus areas

WPHU is required to target at least 2 focus areas of action drawn from the *Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2019–2023*, as a first phase. WPHU acknowledges the breadth of significant health issues facing our catchment. After engaging in consultations with stakeholders and conducting a needs assessment and thorough data analysis, it was evident the following 3 priority areas held greatest potential for initial action:

- Improving healthier eating and food systems (healthier eating and food systems)
- Reducing vaping and tobacco-related harm (vaping and tobacco)
- Tackling climate change and its impact on health (climate change and health).

We have also proactively adopted a co-benefits approach that attributes benefit to mental health if these areas are addressed. We will additionally explore opportunities to increase participation in cancer screening programs.

Addressing risk factors early and reducing health inequities

WPHU is committed to achieving the best value for primary prevention efforts and resources, to reduce health disparities, and promote cost-effective strategies for chronic disease prevention. Addressing risk factors early in life in children and young people will maximise the potential for long-term health benefits over the life course. In addition, we will make sure consideration is given to economic disadvantage, gender equity, and cultural and diverse populations to ensure actions taken are inclusive and will reduce disadvantage and stigma.

Amplifying and innovating

We will work strategically with our local partners to leverage existing opportunities to promote, amplify and embed existing state-wide interventions into LGAs and community health practices and systems such as the INFANT program, and Cancer Council Victoria's vaping resources. We will also work to innovate and value-add through the co-design, implementation, scale-up and adaptation of initiatives to meet the targeted needs of our population.

Working in partnership

With a collective impact model, we will bring partners and other service providers together to align inter-organisational resources, skills and knowledge for the achievement of catchment priorities. Alignment and coordination will be supported through a formalised partnership structure – the WPHU Population and Preventive Health Network (the network). The network will be composed of a population and preventive health reference committee (PPHRC) and 3 action groups dedicated to the initial health priorities. The action groups will be open to all catchment stakeholders and will provide a dedicated space to share insights and evidence-based initiatives, co-design interventions and boost collective action across the catchment.

Evaluating impact

Each initiative, intervention and action led by WPHU will be monitored and evaluated using short-term (<12 months) and long-term (>12 months) outcome indicators. Short-term outcome indicators encompass areas such as capacity building, stakeholder engagement, implementation, innovation and community awareness, and will be applied across priority areas where relevant. Long-term outcome indicators have been identified specific to each priority area, and are guided by the *Victorian public health and wellbeing outcomes framework*⁽¹⁾. We will identify relevant short and long-term indicators for each initiative at the planning stage. Our approach to evaluation is value-based with a focus on health equity. We aim to put an economic value on chronic health conditions avoided using data from our own catchment.

We look forward to our ongoing work with our partners and community in strengthening and building systems to tackle chronic disease prevention and contribute to healthier and more resilient communities in our catchment.



Photo: Yarra River, Melbourne