

DRAFT Buloke Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025-2035

(Working Document)

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VERSION CONTROL

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Acknowledgement of Country

Buloke Shire Council acknowledges the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagalk, the Dja Dja Wurrung and Wamba Wemba people as the Traditional Owners of parts of the land now known as Buloke.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and value their ongoing contribution to our heritage and our community

Mayor's message

We are excited to present the Buloke Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025–2035. The Plan has been developed with careful consideration of the factors that influence the health and wellbeing of our community, and it reflects our vision for building a Better Buloke - a healthy connected, inclusive and prosperous community.

Central to the Plan is its connection to the Council Plan, which outlines our strategic direction and key priorities for the next 4 years. The Health and Wellbeing Plan supports the Council Plan by identifying health and wellbeing needs in our community and identifying what Council and its partners will focus on to address those needs and strengthen health and wellbeing outcomes for our community.

Good health and wellbeing underpin quality of life for individuals, families and communities. When we are healthy and well, we can do the things which bring us happiness, allow us to connect with family, friends and neighbours, and have a sense of purpose and wellbeing.

We know our community is experiencing some critical health and wellbeing challenges including high rates of overweight and obesity, low physical activity levels amongst adults, poor access to specialist health services and essential infrastructure, concerns about mental wellbeing, and the social, economic and health impacts of our changing climate. These challenges are real and significant, and require Council and its partners to pursue new approaches which will fundamentally improve health and wellbeing outcomes for our community

Together with our partners and the broader community, we are committed to strengthening the health and wellbeing of all community members in Buloke, supporting them to lead healthy, fulfilling and meaningful lives.

Our Health and Wellbeing Plan

The Buloke Health and Wellbeing Plan is a strategic, evidence-based document which in partnership with the Council Plan and Community Vision guides Council's planning, policy and strategic direction. The Plan incorporates the Disability Action Plan and meets the requirements of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 and the Disability Act 2006. It ensures Council and its partners:

- demonstrate they understand the health and wellbeing needs of the community, are clear about the priorities for improving health and wellbeing, and are committed to improving health outcomes for everyone in the community
- support the rights and needs of people living with disabilities, ensuring they receive fair treatment, can access high quality services and supports and promoting inclusion and participation in the community.

Council has responsibility for developing and implementing the Buloke Health and Wellbeing Plan but to do this effectively, we need to partner with agencies, organisations and our community. Key partner agencies and organisations include:

- Neighbourhood houses and community centres
- Primary, secondary and tertiary education providers and enablers of education and training pathways
- Health services and agencies
- Local businesses, industries and associations
- Community service providers
- Crisis support agencies
- Government agencies
- Community organisations
- Sport and recreation organisations
- Arts and cultural organisations
- First Nations organisations.

The Buloke Health and Wellbeing Plan is underpinned by:

- **Research about the health and wellbeing profile** of our community.
- **Analysis of the policy framework** influencing the development of the Plan.
- **Consultation and engagement** with our community and with internal and external stakeholders who have a role in supporting the development and implementation of the Health and Wellbeing Plan. We have engaged extensively with our community on a range of issues and projects in the last two years and built upon this by consulting with the community about the Council Plan and Health and Wellbeing Plan, and with health and wellbeing partners.

Health and wellbeing priorities

1 Active and healthy

Our community is more physically active, has equal access to healthy food and has a healthier diet.

2 Inclusive and connected

Our community is welcoming of everyone, and people are connected to each other and to their local community.

3 Respectful and safe




Our community is respectful and supportive, and everyone feels safe and is free from harm.

4 Growing and liveable

Our community is growing and has access to the services, infrastructure and opportunities which support them to be healthy and well.

Buloke's health and wellbeing profile

Decreasing and aging population¹

 <p>6,201 IN 2016 6,178 IN 2021 5,881 BY 2031</p>	 <p>52 MEDIAN AGE UP FROM 48 (2011) much higher than regional Vic. (43) 60-64 YRS LARGEST AGE GROUP (536 people)</p>	 <p>High % of couples without children 51% regional Vic. 28% High % of lone person households 34.6% regional Vic. 27.5%</p>
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More disadvantaged²

<p>Higher socio economic disadvantage SEIFA of 975 compared with 985 for regional Vic.</p>	<p>Lower tertiary education attainment Fewer people with vocational, diploma or degree qualifications</p>	<p>Low digital inclusion 65.6 compared with 73.2 for wider Vic. Significant improvement since 2020 (55)</p>	<p>High % of low-income households 33.2% regional Vic. 26.7% – less than \$800 per week</p>
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Disability and health conditions³

<p>High % with a need for assistance 8.3% regional Vic. 6.9%</p>	<p>High % with at least 1 long term health condition 38.5% regional Vic 37.2%, wider Vic. 31.4%</p>
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Diversity⁴

<p>Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population 1.5% in 2021 up from 1% in 2016</p>	<p>Low cultural diversity 5.9% born overseas, regional Vic. 12.4%</p>
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Gender equity⁵

<p>More females have a Bachelor or Higher Degree 412 v 189</p>	<p>Fewer females are managers or professionals 479 V 661</p>	<p>Females undertake more unpaid care than males</p>	<p>More females earn less than \$800 per week</p>
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¹ ABS, Quickstats, Buloke Shire, 2021, 2016 and 2011

² ABS, Quickstats, Buloke Shire, 2021; Australian Digital Inclusion Index, The national picture – ADII score comparison Vic, Buloke, 2022

³ ABS, Quickstats, Buloke Shire, 2021

⁴ ABS, Quickstats, Buloke Shire, 2021

⁵ ABS, Quickstats, Buloke Shire, 2021

Children and young people⁶

A high % of children in their first year of school are vulnerable on 1 or more developmental domains 37.5% wider Vic. 22.3%	A high % of children and young people identified as being in the bottom quarter of Socio-Education Disadvantage in schools across Buloke e.g. 45% Donald Primary School, 40% Charlton College, 37% Donald High School 36% Birchip P – 12 and Wycheproof P - 12	Children and young people in Buloke are most concerned about mental health, boredom, body image, friendship problems and bullying
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Family violence⁷

Low levels of reported incidents of family violence 1164.4 per 100,000, Vic avg. 1465. Reported incidents decreased in 2023 but increased in 2024	80% of people impacted by family violence are female
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Housing⁸

Home ownership is high 56% 28.1% regional Vic.	23.2% of household's experience housing stress 14.2% of renters, 9% of homeowners
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Physical activity and nutrition⁹

High participation in community sport 29.3% BUT high % of adults do NO moderate to vigorous physical activity 26%, Vic avg. 16.8%	Very high % of adults are overweight or obese 70.1% Vic avg. 54.4% Buloke is the highest in Vic.	Very high % of adults consume sugary beverages 44.2% Only Hume and Campaspe LGAs are higher	8% experienced food insecurity Consistent with wider Vic.
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Drugs and alcohol¹⁰

High % of adults smoke tobacco 16.2% Vic avg. 10%	High % of adults at risk of harm from alcohol related disease or injury 18.7% Vic avg. 13.1%
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Mental wellbeing¹¹

Lower % of adults reported experiencing loneliness 20.9%, Vic avg 23.3%	Lower % of adults reported experiencing high or very high psychological distress 16.8%, Vic avg 19.1%
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⁶ Australian Early Dev. Census, Community Data Explorer, 2024; Aust. Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, My School, 2024; Buloke SC, The State of Buloke's Children and Young People Report, 2020

⁷ Victorian Crime Statistics Agency 2023 and 2024

⁸ ABS, Quickstats, Buloke Shire, 2021

⁹ Victorian State Government Department of Health, 2023, Victorian Population Health Survey

¹⁰ Victorian State Government Department of Health, 2023, Victorian Population Health Survey

¹¹ Victorian State Government Department of Health, 2023, Victorian Population Health Survey

What influences our health and wellbeing planning

Social determinants of health

There are many factors which influence the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. We make decisions every day about what we eat, whether we exercise, drink alcohol or smoke tobacco. While these impact on our health and wellbeing, there are many other factors which may be beyond our control. These are known as the social determinants of health, and are shaped by the distribution of money, power and resources and are mostly responsible for health inequities – the health inequalities that are unfair and avoidable.

Key social determinants are



Other social determinants include:

- Transportation
- Psychosocial risk factors
- The social environment
- Social support networks
- Community and civic engagement
- Social and civic trust
- The physical environment, including the natural environment.¹²

¹² Victorian Department of Health, Your Health: Report of the Chief Health Officer, Victoria, 2018, Social Determinants of Health

State and regional planning framework

Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan

The Victorian Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023 - 2027 identifies high level priorities for improving the health and wellbeing of the Victorian community. These must be considered by each Council when developing their public health and wellbeing plan.

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|---|---|
| 1. Improving sexual and reproductive health | 6. Reducing harm from alcohol and drug use |
| 2. Reducing harm from tobacco and e-cigarette use | 7. Tackling climate change and its impacts on health |
| 3. Improving wellbeing | 8. Preventing all forms of violence |
| 4. Increasing healthy eating | 9. Decreasing antimicrobial resistance across human and animal health |
| 5. Increasing active living | 10. Reducing injury. |

Key elements underpinning the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan are:

- collaborative action across all levels of government, health sector partners, organisations and communities
- supporting safe and health-sustaining environments
- promoting the health and wellbeing of all Victorians, with targeting action towards those who need it most to advance health equity.¹³

Population Health Plan Loddon Mallee¹⁴

The Loddon Mallee Population Health Plan 2023 - 2025 aims to support delivery of state-wide public health and wellbeing priorities in the Loddon Mallee region in alignment with associated planning cycles. It reflects and supports implementation of existing Victorian and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans and provide a basis for action in Loddon, Mallee and Murray sub-regional areas.

Regional priorities	Sub-regional priorities	Priority groups
Healthy food systems Climate change and health	Mental wellbeing	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Communities experiencing systemic disadvantage CALD communities Young people Farmers People with disabilities Older persons LGBTIQA

¹³ Victorian State Government, 2023, Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023 - 2027

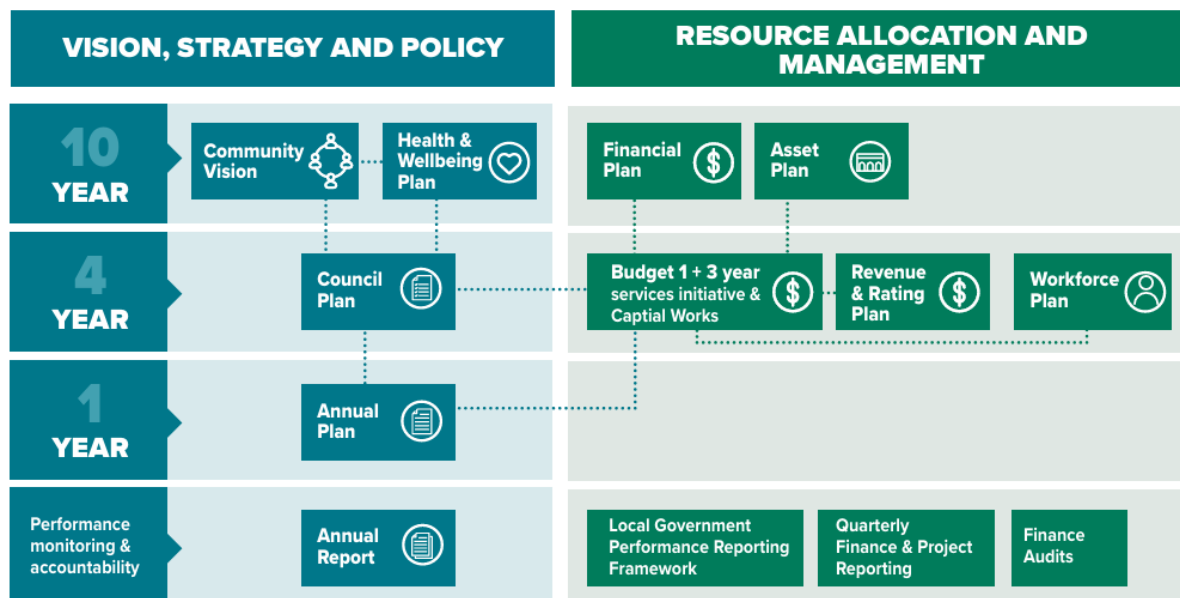
¹⁴ Bendigo Health, Population Health Plan 2023 – 2025 Loddon Mallee Region

Council's planning framework

The Council Plan and Community Vision are key to shaping the Health and Wellbeing Plan. The Council Plan 2025 – 2029 outlines Council's and the community's vision for the future, what Council will focus on for the next 4 years, and how it will measure progress as it strives towards that vision.



How the Health and Wellbeing Plan fits into our planning framework



Council's role in health and wellbeing

Council supports the community to live healthy and well lives by:

- working in partnership with other organisations and agencies to improve the health and wellbeing of our community;
- enabling our community to access services and supports;
- promoting inclusion and encouraging community members to be involved in and connect to their local community;
- planning neighbourhoods and spaces that are safe and accessible, encourage our community to be physically active, providing places for people to meet and participate in community activities, and will support our community as our climate changes;
- taking a leadership role in facilitating equitable access to services and facilities, and growing our community's understanding of what it means to be equitable, respectful and inclusive of all;
- advocating to other levels of government about changes that are needed to reduce harm and improve the health of our community.

We also have some statutory responsibilities for improving health outcomes including:

- developing and enforcing public health standards and intervening if the health of the Buloke community is affected;
- coordinating immunisation services; and
- maintaining Buloke in a clean and sanitary condition.¹⁵

Every day Council delivers more services to the community and manages and maintains community assets such as recreation and leisure facilities, local roads, bridges, footpaths, drains, parks, playgrounds, community buildings and much more. Each of these services and assets contributes to the health and wellbeing of our community. Key service areas are outlined below.

Community development	Public health	Local laws
Libraries	Recreation and aquatics	Finance
Emergency management	Flood recovery	Governance
Environmental compliance	Asset planning and delivery	Community facilities
Immunisation	Engineering	Roads
Maternal and child health	Planning and building	Waste and environment
Youth development	Urban and parks	Economic development and tourism

¹⁵ Victorian State Government, 2008, Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act

Our health and wellbeing priorities

Summary of key considerations

The following information provides a summary of the key considerations for identifying priorities for the Buloke Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025 – 2035.

Key data priorities	Key community concerns and priorities	Key partner concerns and priorities	Relevant State priorities	Regional priorities
Declining and aging population High% of lone person households Low tertiary ed. attainment High developmental vulnerability amongst children High % of low-income households High % of disability Increasing ATSI population Family violence and gender equity Low physical activity rates High% of overweight and obesity High smoking rates High % at risk of harm from alcohol Low digital inclusion	Community connections and mental health Preventing violence in all its forms Reducing alcohol and drug use Increasing physical activity levels Transport availability and connectivity Support for young people Access to health and early intervention services Accessing fresh, affordable food Lack of employment	Mental wellbeing Eco. determinants of health Safety Access to services e.g. childcare, health specialist, emergency services, culturally appropriate and safe services Limited housing options Isolation because of distance Public transport disadvantage Reduced volunteering Limited tertiary education and employment pathways Active transport routes / paths Lack of affordable, quality fresh foods Vulnerability to emergencies	Reducing harm from tobacco and e-cigarette use Improving wellbeing Increasing healthy eating Increasing active living Reducing harm from alcohol and drug use Tackling climate change and its impacts on health Preventing all forms of violence	Healthy food systems Climate change and health Mental wellbeing

Health and wellbeing priority areas

Council will focus on four health and wellbeing priority areas:

1. Active and healthy	Our community is more physically active, has equal access to healthy food and has a healthier diet.
2. Inclusive and connected	Our community is welcoming of everyone, and people are connected to each other and to their local community.
3. Respectful and safe	Our community is respectful and supportive, and everyone feels safe and is free from harm.
4. Growing and liveable	Our community is growing and has access to the services, infrastructure and opportunities which support them to be healthy and well.

Priority population groups

Although health is important for our whole community, not everyone has the same access to opportunities, knowledge, skills, or resources to achieve good health and wellbeing. For this reason, the Health and Wellbeing Plan highlights specific 'priority population groups' to be considered alongside our main health priorities.

This approach will help to ensure their needs and potential obstacles are recognised and addressed, with tailored programs, projects, and services designed to support these groups and help them reach the same level of health and wellbeing as the broader community.

The priority population groups are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
- Communities experiencing systemic disadvantage
- CALD communities
- Young people
- Farmers
- People living with disabilities
- Older persons
- LGBTIQ

1. Active and healthy

Goal	Our community is more physically active, has equal access to healthy food and has a healthier diet.
Outcomes we are working towards	<p>1.1 Creating towns and places that make it easy for our community to be physically active. *</p> <p>1.2 Encouraging our community to be physically active.</p> <p>1.3 Increasing the accessibility and availability of healthy food.</p> <p>1.4 Improving our community's understanding about how healthy food and drink is good for their health and good for the environment.</p>

* Indicates outcomes Council is working towards to support the rights and needs of people living with disabilities

Why it is important

Being physically active and eating healthily is important for good health and wellbeing. Together they help to improve our physical, social and mental wellbeing, reduce our risk of chronic disease and mitigate the impacts of our changing climate.

Food insecurity is an issue of increasing concern. It occurs when people do not have access to safe, affordable and nutritious food and often results in poorer physical and mental wellbeing outcomes. Buloke is particularly impacted by this because of its isolated location, the high cost of accessing food locally and impacts of our changing climate on food supply systems.

We need to focus on encouraging our community to be more physically active and supporting initiatives which deliver equal access to food and support healthy eating.

Key information about our community

70.1% of adults are overweight or obese, the highest in Victoria	38.5% have at least 1 long term health condition
26% of adults do NO moderate to vigorous physical activity,	8% experience food insecurity
44.2% of adults consume sugary beverages, only hume and Campaspe LGAs are higher	1 third of households are classified as low-income households (earning less than \$800/week), a risk factor for food insecurity.
Agriculture , is the largest industry in Buloke, and will be significantly impacted by our changing climate	Our community is aging and remaining physically active and having access to healthy and affordable food is key to aging well

What is important to our community and our partners

The natural environment, parks, playgrounds, recreation and sporting facilities are seen as key strengths of the Buloke community, along with the high level of involvement in community sport with clubs being welcoming of people of all abilities, free access to the local swimming pools, and the walkways between local towns and the lakes.

Key barriers to being healthy and well in Buloke are accessing quality and affordable fresh food, the increasing cost of participating in sport, the lack of active transport routes and paths, and the limited child / youth friendly spaces e.g. pump track, basketball court etc.

Increasing physical activity levels is a key priority for the Buloke community, and healthy food systems and climate change and health are key priorities in the Loddon Mallee Population Health Plan. Increasing healthy eating and increasing active living are two of the top ten priorities in the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan.

2. Inclusive and connected

Goal	Our community is welcoming of everyone, and people are connected to each other and to their local community.
Outcomes we are working towards	<p>2.1 Welcoming and celebrating diversity in all its forms and removing the barriers which drive discrimination and make it harder for people to participate in community life. *</p> <p>2.2 Increasing participation in community activities, groups and volunteering, particularly for new residents and people who experience social isolation. *</p> <p>2.3 Strengthening connections and the sharing of knowledge, information and resources between communities.</p> <p>2.4 Increasing our community's understanding of mental wellbeing and what supports people to have good wellbeing.</p>

* Indicates outcomes Council is working towards to support the rights and needs of people living with disabilities

Why it is important

Having good mental wellbeing is key to living a full and meaningful life, benefitting individuals and the wider community through their contribution to the social, cultural, environmental and economic life of a community.

Being socially connected to others and feeling like we belong is important for mental wellbeing. We feel like we belong when people are welcoming and supportive and we build connections through being involved in activities such as volunteering, social groups, recreation, sporting and cultural activities, environmental programs and community events.

We need to focus on supporting our community to be welcoming of everyone and supporting their connections to each other and to their local community.

Key information about our community

34.6% of households are lone person households , much higher than wider regional Vic.	Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population 1.5% in 2021 up from 1% in 2016
20.9% of adults reported experiencing loneliness, lower than the Vic. average	Low cultural diversity 5.9% born overseas, regional Vic. 12.4%
16.8% of adults reported experiencing high or very high psychological distress, lower than the Vic. average	8.3% have a need for assistance daily due to disability , notably higher than regional Vic.

What is important to our community and our partners

The sense of community and belonging, and participation in events and activities are seen as key strengths of Buloke, along with community organisations and the level of volunteering, the compassion individuals and communities show to each other, and the connections within communities.

The community identified not feeling valued and connected as key barriers to being healthy and well, while children and young people are most concerned about mental health, boredom, body image, friendship problems and bullying.

Health and wellbeing challenges identified by Council and its partners are the lack of communication and sharing of knowledge between towns, reduced volunteering levels, mental wellbeing.

Community connections and mental health are key priorities for the Buloke community, while the relevant priority in the Loddon Mallee Population Health Plan and the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan is improving mental wellbeing.

3. Respectful and safe

Goal	Our community is respectful and supportive, and everyone feels safe and is free from harm.
Outcomes we are working towards	<p>3.1 Demonstrating leadership about equity and respect is and encouraging our community to embrace this in all parts of their life. *</p> <p>3.2 Preventing violence in all its forms and improving access to information, services and programs for those impacted by family violence.</p> <p>3.3 Supporting the community to prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergency situations.</p> <p>3.4 Increasing understanding about the harm caused by alcohol, tobacco, vaping and other drugs and how to access support services.</p>

* Indicates outcomes Council is working towards to support the rights and needs of people living with disabilities

Why it is important

The physical social, mental, and emotional wellbeing of communities and individuals is impacted by how respectful and safe a community is and feels. When we feel safe and respected, trust, social connections and mental wellbeing are strengthened in communities.

Buloke is generally a safe place, but has some challenges related to our changing climate, being reliant on volunteer emergency responders, harm from alcohol, tobacco and drugs, and family violence. We are fortunate to have low levels of reported family violence, but this may be masked due to factors such as the remote location and the limited police presence.

The regional nature and topography of our communities means access to emergency services is more challenging and we are at higher risk of experiencing emergency situations such as flooding and fire.

Promoting gender equity, reducing family violence and discrimination, and strengthening the capacity of the community to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergency situations are key priorities.

Key information about our community

Low levels of reported incidents of family violence 1164.4 per 100,000, Vic avg. 1465	80% of people impacted by family violence are female
Females undertake more unpaid care than males	More females have a Bachelor or Higher Degree , but fewer females are managers or professionals
High % of adults smoke tobacco 16.2% Vic avg. 10%	High % of adults at risk of harm from alcohol related disease or injury 18.7% Vic avg.13.1%
Nearly a ¼ of household's experience housing stress i.e. spending more than 30% of their household income on housing	Each of the police stations in Buloke are single member stations and often not staffed

What is important to our community and our partners

The volunteerism by community members in emergency situations is recognised as a key strength of the Buloke community, along with our young people, and the sense of community and belonging.

Key areas of concern are the lack of police presence, and the high rates of smoking and vaping and the increasing number of vape shops opening.

Preventing violence in all its forms and reducing alcohol and drug use are important health and wellbeing priorities for the Buloke community, and these also form part of the top priorities in the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, along with tackling climate change and its health impacts.

4. Growing and liveable

Goal	Our community is growing and has access to the services, infrastructure and opportunities which support them to be healthy and well.
Outcomes we are working towards	<p>4.1 Improving the availability of and access to key services such as public transport, health and disability services, emergency services, and strengthen local training and education pathways. *</p> <p>4.2 Increasing the diversity and supply of housing to assist in attracting new and retaining existing residents.</p> <p>4.3 Increasing connections, and shared ways of working with partner organisations and agencies to reduce the fragmentation and uneven distribution of services. *</p> <p>4.4 Increasing access to information about services and supports available in our community and what it means to be healthy and well.</p>

* Indicates outcomes Council is working towards to support the rights and needs of people living with disabilities

Why it is important

There are many factors which influence the health and wellbeing of our community including financial circumstances, the accessibility of services, education and employment opportunities and the availability of key infrastructure such as housing.

Buloke has a number of critical challenges impacting the health and wellbeing of the community including a declining and aging population, low-income levels, limited housing availability and choice, limited access to transport, health, early intervention or crisis services, and to education and employment pathways.

We need to focus on increasing the liveability of our communities through working with partners to grow housing supply and diversity, advocating for and facilitating improved access to services and supports, and strengthening education and employment pathways.

Key information about our community

A declining and aging population. The median age in 2021 was 52, much higher than regional Vic.	Higher socio-economic disadvantage than wider regional Vic.
Low digital inclusion rates compared with wider Vic. i.e. not having access to or knowledge about how to use technology	33.5% of households are low-income households , much higher than regional Vic.
37 % of children in their first year of school are vulnerable on 1 or more developmental domains	High % of children and young people are in the bottom quarter of Socio-Education Disadvantage in schools across Buloke
Hospital / health services in Wycheproof, Donald, Birchip, Charlton, and Sea Lake	Primary and secondary schools in Charlton, Wycheproof, Donald, Birchip, and Sea Lake

What is important to our community and our partners

The improved access to childcare, having health services in major towns, and having great primary and secondary schools are seen as key strengths of Buloke.

Key barriers identified by the community to being healthy and well in Buloke are accessing essential services including health and early intervention services, limited transport, financial stress and lack of employment. Population decline was identified as a key challenge by the community.

Health and wellbeing challenges identified by Council and its partners are the retention and recruitment of staff for key services, housing availability and affordability, limited access to childcare, lack of tertiary education options, public transport disadvantage, lack of access to specialist medical services, womens health, and the limited availability and high cost of accessing the internet.

Transport availability and connectivity, support for young people, housing availability and affordability are key priorities for the Buloke community.

Monitoring progress

The outcomes of the Buloke Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025–2035 will be monitored through regular networks and forums with health and wellbeing partners and will be reported annually to Council. Adjustments will be made as needed in response to the emerging health needs of the Buloke Shire community, and as Council and its partners identify opportunities to better support our community to be healthy and well.