

Connected and supportive communities

VicHealth Local Government Partnership



This module covers:

Impact stream

- Co-designing with children, young people and families for community wellbeing
- Building proud and inclusive communities
- Addressing social determinants of mental wellbeing

Partners

We would like to thank our development partners for co-authoring this module:



We would like to thank our development partners for contributing to this module:



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Overview

Improving social connection is critical to improving health and wellbeing. The 'Connected and supportive communities' module outlines practical, effective actions that councils can take to improve social connection in the local area and highlights the enablers and barriers that should be addressed as a priority.



These are:

- co-designing with children, young people and families to enable program planning and delivery
- removing barriers to social inclusion by working within council and with partners
- planning a cross-sector, evidence-informed approach to improving mental wellbeing.

This module will help councils contribute to health equity by ensuring that children, young people and their families have access to social connection and community support that is designed for people of every age, gender, sexuality, ability, ethnicity, culture or faith. It will equip councils to work in partnership with the many diverse teams and agencies that can influence mental health and wellbeing, to improve outcomes for council and for communities.

What are the benefits for councils?

This module will support your council to:

- contribute to the goals of its Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, especially the increasing mental wellbeing priority area
- co-design initiatives with children, young people and their families to improve their connection to community
- build a foundation of inclusive council practices for key populations that experience extra barriers to community participation
- provide enhanced policy and program practices that celebrate diversity and increase inclusion for children and all people across age, gender, sexuality, ability, ethnicity, culture and faith
- increase social connection opportunities for children, young people and their families
- assess and develop partnerships with local stakeholders to improve social connections and develop supportive communities.

The policy context for connected and supportive communities

- Councils can contribute toward [Victorian](#) and national frameworks through community-level action that increases social connection, reduces discrimination, and promotes inclusion and good mental wellbeing for children, young people and their families.
- The [Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2019–23](#) identifies ‘improving mental wellbeing’ as one of 10 priority areas and highlights the role of local government in driving community-level action.
- Following Recommendation 2 of the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System (RCVMHS), the Victorian Government has established a [Mental Health and Wellbeing Promotion Office](#), which will oversee the development of a statewide mental health and wellbeing promotion plan.
- Australia’s [National Children’s Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) provides a national framework and the foundations for lifelong mental health and wellbeing to be built during childhood (ages 0–12). Family and community is one of four focus areas of the Strategy.



Impact stream:

Co-designing with children, young people and families for better community wellbeing

To complete this impact stream, councils will select from:

Quick win: *Understand and prioritise social connection*

Step up: *Co-design social connection opportunities with young people in your community*

Step up: *Showcase local opportunities that promote mental wellbeing for families and young children*

Ambitious: *Implement a project to improve social connection*

This impact stream focuses on planning and delivering programs that will increase social connection among children, young people and families. It enables councils to build or enhance their knowledge about the concept of social connection and its application to mental health and wellbeing initiatives. It also supports councils to gauge current opportunities to improve social connection for young people in their local area.

There is strong evidence of the positive association between social networks or social support and health, including mental health, for children and people of all ages.¹ Importantly, this impact stream guides councils to work directly with children, young people and families to plan and deliver programs. This will ensure their voices, needs and priorities are at the centre of this work.

All children should experience positive social conditions in their first 2,000 days to ensure they have the best start to life, and to provide them with a strong foundation for good health and wellbeing throughout childhood and adulthood. Experiencing positive social support and connections are key aspects of positive social conditions that promote good mental wellbeing for young children and families.²

1. For example, see Kawachi I, Berkman LF (2001) Social ties and mental health, *Journal of Urban Health*, 78 (3), 458–461; Ferguson KM (2006). Social capital and children's wellbeing: a critical synthesis of the international social capital literature. *International Journal of Social Welfare*. 15(1), 2–18; Thoits PA (2011). Mechanisms linking social ties and support to physical and mental health. *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour* 52, 145–161. doi:10.1177/0022146510395592; Goldsmith DJ and Albrecht TL (2011). 'Social support, social networks, and health,' in *The Routledge Handbook of Health Communication*, eds TL Thompson, R Parrott, and JF Nussbaum (New York: Routledge), 335–348.
2. Moore TG (2019) Early childhood, family support and health care services: An evidence review. Prepared for the City of Port Phillip. Melbourne, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health and the City of Port Phillip. doi: 10.25374/MCRI.8312768.

Young children need positive time that is spent with family and friends, and doing activities they enjoy. Most of all, they need time to be children, which includes opportunities to build connections and play with other children in the community.

Children bring many joys for families, but this period can also be an isolating and challenging time for parents and carers. They may experience shifts in familiar social dynamics, and take on challenging mental loads and demands. They may be managing poor sleep, the needs of babies and young children, work and other responsibilities in their lives.

Living in connected and supportive communities supports the mental wellbeing of children and families during these years. Having positive social support reduces the likelihood that parents and carers will experience stress and depression, helps them maintain mental wellbeing when they encounter challenges, and can help them build their parenting and caring knowledge and skills. It also helps them access family and early childhood services that provide important advice and support.

Having positive social networks has a significant positive influence on all aspects of children's and families' lives, including their emotions, relationships, behaviour, health and wellbeing.³

Preparing for a co-design process

Co-design is a social connection process that brings the voices of lived experience, communities and professionals together to explore ways to develop community solutions. It also brings the knowledge and wisdom from families into a collaborative space to develop positive solutions for other families. Remember to create ways for families to be a key part of the research process by seeking the views of many others.

Building genuine partnerships with children, young people and families with lived experience will bring great value to your organisation. However, developing authentic and mutually beneficial partnerships can only be ensured where:

- they are supported by a whole-of-organisation approach, guided by robust policies and procedures
- the intent, purpose and limitations of every partnership are clearly explained, transparent and reviewed
- the contribution of child, young people and family partners is consistently recognised through remuneration, reimbursement and other appropriate ways
- power differences are diligently considered through careful planning to ensure the respect, safety and wellbeing of child, young people and family partners
- children and young people are recognised and respected for their unique insights, ideas and solutions, and for the role that they can play in ensuring services, organisations, policies and other outcomes are relevant and appropriate for them
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Advocates are engaged in reciprocal relationships, using culturally responsive practices
- diversity is ensured through the recruitment of child, young people and family partners with a range of diverse experiences and backgrounds
- an ongoing commitment to evaluation leads to continual improvement in outcomes for both projects and child, young people and family partners.

Crossover opportunity

Actions in this impact stream focus on school-aged children and young people. It builds directly on the *Leading the Way – Engaging young voices for change foundation module* and assumes that councils have already established a mechanism or partnership arrangement to support the engagement of young people in planning and delivery. In this impact stream, councils can build on that engagement to introduce a focus on social connection and deliver co-designed programs for children, young people and families. It can also deliver a specific, ready-made program with proven outcomes for social connection.

3. Moore TG (2019) Early childhood, family support and health care services: An evidence review. Prepared for the City of Port Phillip. Melbourne, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health and the City of Port Phillip. doi: 10.25374/MCRI.8312768.

Recommended resources

[Child and Family Partnerships Toolkit](#)

This toolkit is designed to support authentic, safe and respectful collaborations between organisations and child, young people and family partners (people with lived experience). It will help you to maximise the benefits to your organisation, your clients, and your child, young people and family partners.

Councils are the leaders in creating connected and supportive communities that support children, young people and families' mental wellbeing. Councils already provide many meeting places, services and activities for children and young people. They can promote and support families to access these opportunities to build their social support networks in the community.

This impact stream focuses on identifying, promoting and increasing opportunities in the community for children, young people and families to form social connections and access positive social support, to enhance their mental wellbeing.

Intended outcomes

Councils undertaking this impact stream can expect to:

- be ready and equipped to lead and advocate council-wide and external activity to improve social connection for children, young people and families
- use their existing youth engagement mechanism to introduce a focus on social connection as a key factor in promoting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people
- initiate or build on programs that are specifically designed to increase children, young people and families' social connections.

Minimum deliverables

To complete the impact stream 'Co-designing with children, young people and families for better community wellbeing' councils will have:

- enhanced understanding of social connection opportunities and gaps for children, young people and families in their local communities
- documented increased opportunities for social connection for children, young people and families
- demonstrated leadership and commitment to co-designing with children, young people and families to improve community wellbeing
- demonstrated succession planning that outlines how the activity will contribute to the outcomes of their current and future Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans.



Quick win:

Understand and prioritise social connection

It is important to have a strong understanding of how young people experience social connection. This intervention will help your organisation understand existing evidence and prompt critical discussion about young people, social connection and resilience.

Engaging with these topics will also help councils identify existing areas and programs within your local community to promote and prioritise social connection. For this quick win, councils will:

- identify relevant evidence-informed insights on young people, social connection and resilience
- summarise and present key evidence on social connection and young people to internal colleagues and discuss priorities
- understand social connection and list priorities for their local government area.



How-to guide to:

Understand and prioritise social connection

To understand this topic, read the review titled: [The benefits of social connection for mental health and wellbeing in young people](#). This is an evidence review produced for VicHealth by The Centre for Adolescent Health. The review presents a summary of the existing evidence on the relationship between social connection, mental health and wellbeing in young people aged 12–25. The authors have collated research from 87 different studies to provide key findings and recommendations.



Assess

This task can be led by a staff member who is working in the population health, social policy or youth services space. Read through the review and think critically about its key messages.

- How do you understand the concepts of social connection, social support and wellbeing as they are currently addressed by your council?
- What are the key messages?
- How might they relate to the work of your council?
- How could your council use this information to inform policy and programming?
- What are the challenges and opportunities for your organisation and community?
- What else do you want to know about this topic as it relates to your community?

Based on the information and key messages, is there any other information you need on this topic to help your understanding?

- Consider finding some more published information on this and related topics by searching VicHealth's website for the terms [Loneliness](#), [Resilience](#), [Young People and COVID-19](#).
- When finding research, remember to consider the context of the information (for example, what is the setting? How similar or different is it to your local area?).
- Is there any local council data or previous work that might help you understand how young people experience social connection in your local area?

You can also talk to people who work alongside young people in your council and other local services, or schools. Document their perception of social connection, challenges and opportunities. See how their insights align with or extend what you learnt from the evidence review.

Summarise what you have learnt, as well as any questions you have on this topic. Collate this information into a presentation that you will share with your organisation and any youth advisory panels.

Presentation tips:

- Begin by outlining the topic, key terms and some background information and statistics about young people and social connection
- Then present each key insight. A key insight is a broad finding or conclusion statement. Below each insight you might want to add a few dot points or examples of studies that support the insight. Insights can be taken from the evidence review or your own further research
- End the presentation with some key messages or recommendations specifically for your council. This is where you present your interpretation of the data. For example, this could be things you want to know more about, or different areas council programs could focus on to improve social connection and resilience.

Involving council leaders and teams

Gaining buy-in from relevant council leaders and teams is essential for progressing action after your presentation. When inviting people to the presentation, consider the teams in your council who currently work with or impact young people such as youth services, community development and community engagement, population health and social policy. It is also important to consider any teams who do not work with young people but have the potential to contribute to future activities with young people (for example, art engagement, library services, recreation services and communications).

Deliver

Present your insights to your council colleagues. At the end of your presentation ask what opportunities they see in their work to create moments of social connection for young people in your community. Circulate a copy of the presentation to colleagues.

Provide your colleagues with a mechanism to provide feedback on the presentation. Document the opportunities and challenges in improving social connection for young people they identify.

Involving young people

Also consider presenting to young people from your existing Youth Advisory Groups (refer back to the foundation module *Leading the Way – Engaging young voices for change*). Get their input on the evidence you have put together. Remember, some topics covered in the evidence review are highly sensitive (such as anxiety, stress, suicidality and self-harm).

You could ask young people about their experience of social connection in your local community. Do they feel involved in and connected to the local community? Are there any specific challenges they face around social inclusion and community participation? What do they think of these insights?

Remember to tell them why you are interested in this topic, what it is for and how you will report back and keep them updated on the project. Document their feedback by writing down some notes and any key quotes.



Review and embed

Using what you have learnt from the process, create a document that identifies key learnings that includes questions you have about the experience of people in your community.

Using what you have learnt from the process, update your presentation with local insights: What do these insights and evidence mean for your council?

- How could you prioritise or extend the work you are currently doing with young people to build social connection and resilience?
- Are there gaps in your planning, funding or implementation? What would you need to make social connection among young people more of a priority?
- What steps will you take going forward to build?



Step up:

Co-design social connection opportunities with young people in your community

Co-design involves bringing together lived experience, communities and professionals to work together on opportunities or challenges. The participatory and creative activities that make up the process of co-design itself support young people to have their voices heard and build confidence, social connection and community networks.

Co-design means designing unique and local solutions with young people from your community.

This activity requires councils to build capability and capacity in conducting co-design with young people to create social connection opportunities in the community. To complete this activity, councils will:

- be equipped with the capability to conduct co-design on social connection with young people
- allocate resources to implement a co-design project
- initiate a co-design process with a group of young people from their community to identify their own strengths, challenges and social connection solutions.



How-to guide to:

Co-design social connection opportunities with young people in your community



Plan

As a starting point, complete 'Quick win: [Understand and prioritise social connection](#)'. The planning of this activity can be led by a key individual or a dedicated team. Consider any existing teams or working groups that might be engaging with young people within council already and look for opportunities to see if this work can be embedded within existing priorities.

Crossover opportunity ↗

Learn about co-design

Read through the foundation module *Leading the Way – Engaging young voices for change* on what co-design is and how you can partner with young people, professionals and community members to co-design social connection solutions and programs. Have discussions within your council about undertaking co-design, funding and partnerships that might be required.

Define the topic and context

The theme of this co-design is social connection. Use what you have learned from your research and discovery process in the quick win to guide your approach. Think about the area that the program will take place in and who the program is for. Identify important stakeholders and partners as well as strategies to engage young people most in need.

Create a design brief

A [design brief](#) identifies the key challenge as it relates to your community. It summarises what we know from the evidence and puts it into context with a key challenge to solve. It poses an open question that is used to bring people together to generate ideas. A good brief takes into account the voice and views of young people in how the problem is defined. See examples in the Recommended resources section.

You can write your own or use 1 or more of the attached briefs to start a co-design process with young people and professionals in your community. If you are creating your own design brief remember to come up with some 'How might we...' questions to define the problem. For example, 'How might we use art and creativity to bring young people from our community together and build meaningful connections?'.



Assess & Design

Involving young people and council staff

Reach out to young people through multiple channels. You can advertise the co-design project opportunity through social media, local groups, services and organisations that work with and are for young people. Remember to think about confidentiality, safety and consent when reaching out and engaging young people.

Ensure you bring together a team of key people from your council who can support the project. Consider key staff who work with young people or are in roles that have the impact to support and influence young people.

Assemble a team

Bring together a team of 6 to 8 partners, program designers and young people. Remember to assemble a diverse team and cater to individual needs. Clearly explain to each young person exactly what is involved in participating. Give them space to think about it and ask questions.

Co-define shared goals and rules

Work together as a team to define a goal that captures everyone's interest. This goal should be about improving social connection for young people in your local community. Coming up with a clear goal can be done through discussion and creative activities. The group should also come up with and discuss shared ground rules and values for working together.

Co-design the social connection project

Using creative activities, group discussion and voting, the group should design an outline of what your social connection project is. This design process should start big and broad, with lots of ideas. Work towards taking 1 idea forward and designing what that idea would look like in practice. This should happen over multiple workshops, guided by an experienced facilitator.



Deliver

Identify the support needed to make it happen

The next step is getting the necessary financial, resource and expertise support to put it into action. Councils should outline what support they can provide and what resources they already have, so young people can form clear expectations and requests for external support.

See the step up action in the '[Addressing social determinants of mental wellbeing](#)' impact stream for information on fostering effective internal partnerships and collaboration within council.

Young people can then form clear expectations and requests for what support they would need to run the project (for example, space, money and people with experience in this area to help lead the project).



Review and embed

Evaluation

Evaluate the success of the co-design process. Use agreed-upon criteria to measure and evaluate the effectiveness and Gather feedback. Think about key learnings, what went well and what you can improve next time. Remember to feed this back to your co-design group.



Step up:

Showcase local opportunities that promote mental wellbeing for families and young children

All young children and their families should have access to a range of programs and activities in their communities that provide them with opportunities to play, connect, build positive social support networks and support their mental wellbeing.

Providing opportunities for positive social support, social connection and mental wellbeing for young children and families in the local community is an important way that councils can improve experiences and conditions for children in their first 2,000 days. It can also positively influence their long-term wellbeing.⁴

Councils play a key role in fostering positive social support and connection for young children and families. This can be done by providing a range of family and child-friendly spaces, services and activities that can act as regular or incidental local meeting points, to help families connect and build their social networks. Councils provide destinations and hubs in the community for children, young people and families to meet, play and socialise. These include libraries, toy libraries, neighbourhood houses, sports and recreation centres, playgrounds and parks.

Council-facilitated parent groups, community and supported playgroups, early childhood services, and other council services and programs, offer opportunities for local children and families to connect and play, form friendships and support each other. These hubs, services and activities can also be used as central platforms for delivering information, education and services, such as early childhood and family support services, and parenting, peer support, health education and mental wellbeing programs.

This step up action requires councils to identify, promote and increase opportunities in the community for social connection, positive social support and mental wellbeing. This may involve councils working with local families with young children to co-design strategies to improve and communicate these opportunities, in order to increase families' awareness of the opportunities and empower them to participate.



4. Moore TG (2019) Early childhood, family support and health care services: An evidence review. Prepared for the City of Port Phillip. Melbourne, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health and the City of Port Phillip. doi: 10.25374/MCRI.8312768.



How-to guide to:

Showcase local opportunities that promote mental wellbeing for families and children

Involving young children and their families

Families with young children are the experts on their own lives and needs, and how they can be supported to connect with other families, build social support networks and support their mental wellbeing.

This is a great opportunity to involve local families with young children in co-designing actions to support and encourage families to participate in social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities, such as:

- early childhood and family services
- community hubs and centres
- playgroups
- child and family-friendly programs and activities.

Engaging families with young children in co-design is the best way to ensure their needs are understood and addressed, and to design strategies that will empower families to participate.

Being involved in co-design may itself provide important social connection and mental wellbeing benefits for families, such as meeting new people and building networks, reducing social isolation, increasing social confidence, helping people to feel valued and empowered, and learning and improving skills.





Plan

Review relevant research on the importance of social connection and support for the mental wellbeing of families with young children. See Recommended resources below.

Plan how you will consult with and engage families with young children in co-design, including how many families you will work with, and ways to engage families and young children with diverse needs, abilities and experiences, including families and children who do not normally engage with early childhood and family services. This could include promoting the opportunity to be involved in consultation and co-design through social media and at local locations attended by families with young children, such as shopping centres, schools, community health centres, cultural centres, playgrounds and parks.

Project plan

Plan to implement and deliver actions to address barriers and increase social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities at council settings, services and programs. Decide on a realistic number and program of actions, according to the project budget and available resources.

The project plan should outline:

- actions identified (at the design stage) to address barriers, increase participation, and enhance or create new social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities
- detailed implementation plans that may be needed for delivery of any new social connection opportunities, such as new programs or activities
- the people responsible for delivering actions
- the resources and information needed to support relevant staff at the settings or programs
- resource and budget requirements
- a timeline of how and when actions will be delivered.

Communication plan

A key focus of this step up action is developing communication to showcase and promote social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities for families with young children in the community.

Prepare a communication plan to sit alongside the project plan, with a range of strategies to showcase and promote social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities to families with young children.

The plan should set out:

- key messages, communication channels and strategies for raising awareness and increasing participation of families with young children
- communications and promotional resources that may be used or developed, such as website content, social media content, printed resources and communication templates
- a timeline with any key dates and events for promotion.

Some ideas to include in the communication plan are to use a range of strategies and communication channels for reaching families with young children, including families with diverse needs, abilities and experiences.

Strategies may include:

- promoting opportunities through council's communication channels, including the council website and social media
- displaying posters, flyers and promotional materials in local shopping centres, services and businesses
- sharing promotional materials and communication templates with early years services and schools
- creating an online platform (such as a website or webpage) or resource to showcase all social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities for families with young children
- running a local campaign to promote the importance of social connection for mental wellbeing for families with young children, and to highlight social connection opportunities in the community.

Communications channels may include:

- early childhood services, maternal and child health services, playgroups, schools, libraries, and other community centres and facilities
- shopping centres, and local services and businesses

- online platforms
- social media
- local media.

If you are running a local campaign, develop a detailed campaign plan that sets out objectives, audiences, communication channels, strategies, actions, promotional resources that will be developed, and key campaign events and dates.

Plan to involve families with young children as champions, ambassadors or active participants in promoting social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities in local media, social media and the community. This could include showcasing families enjoying connecting with other families, taking part in activities and talking about the wellbeing benefits they experience.

Practice supportive framing

Refer to VicHealth's values-based messaging guides to prepare effective messages that promote social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities to families with young children. Register to access [guides providing helpful and effective messaging](#) developed by VicHealth and Common Cause Australia, exploring a variety of health promotion themes.

Ground your promotional story in positive attitudes and the desire of families with young children to socially connect, and the mental wellbeing benefits this brings. For example, 'There are lots of opportunities in the community to meet and socialise with other local families, and for children to play together. Making the most of these opportunities is great for kids' and families' mental wellbeing.'

To support a change in language and to focus on a more social and emotional view of mental health, the Emerging Minds: National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health (NWC), commissioned a communications toolkit, [Reframing Children's Mental Health](#), developed by the FrameWorks Institute. This toolkit is underpinned by the premise that the words we use make a difference. It has been developed to help child mental health experts communicate in ways that will resonate with broader practitioner groups working with children, young people and families.

This evidence-informed toolkit supports framing of children's mental health as a state of wellbeing, which is the result of a complex set of influences, including environments and social conditions, and the culture and public policies that shape them. While the primary audience is children's mental health practitioners, it can support council staff to develop communication pieces about child and family mental wellbeing.

Assess

Identify and map council's existing local services, hubs, programs and activities that provide social connection opportunities and promote mental wellbeing for families with young children.

Examples of settings for social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities include:

- libraries
- toy libraries
- sports and recreation centres
- community centres
- community hubs
- neighbourhood houses
- arts and cultural centres
- maternal and child health services
- early childhood services.

Examples of programs and activities for social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities include:

- playgroups and supported playgroups
- parenting programs
- mental wellbeing programs
- early childhood and family activities, such as story time at the library, bush kinder, pram walking groups, exercise classes for parents and carers of babies.

To identify any gaps in local social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities, consider:

- the needs and gaps in local geographic areas
- gaps in meeting the needs of families and children with different circumstances, abilities, and experiences, including families with additional needs, or who are isolated or experiencing adversity
- new opportunities that might better encourage involvement of families who do not usually participate or attend.

Ask council services to collect or provide data on the number of families with young children who currently attend or participate in social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities, programs and activities. This will inform council's assessment of existing gaps, opportunities and levels of participation.

Assess existing communications and promotion of social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities to local families. Consider the effectiveness of the messages, strategies and communication channels used for reaching families with young children and encouraging them to participate. This includes families with diverse needs, abilities and experiences, and families who do not normally engage with early childhood and family services.

Consult local families

Consult and engage with local families with young children to find out about their needs and experiences in the community, how they socially connect with other families and children, and the extent to which they are aware of and have participated in local social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities. While doing this, provide context of why you are asking, the scope of the information you are looking for and how the information they share might be used.

Work with families to identify barriers they experience to participation. These might include lack of awareness of the opportunities, cost, location, transport or other commitments. Ask for their views on the range of existing opportunities and where they perceive there are gaps. Create simple ways for families to provide information. This might include postcards, facilitated art or coffee-and-chat sessions.

Identify places where parents and carers may already meet or feel comfortable, such as:

- spaces like services, meeting places, playgroups and community events
- via organised community groups and services like Communities for Children or collective-impact, place-based initiatives.

Consider conducting a survey of families with young children in the community to engage a broader range of perspectives. Design survey questions to assess:

- awareness of and participation in social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities in the community
- any barriers to participation they may experience
- views on existing opportunities and gaps, and whether there is a need to increase or improve opportunities.

Responses from families can help inform actions and strategies that respond to families' needs, are effective for overcoming barriers, and empower families to participate in social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities.



Design

Review the results of the Assess stage. Consider existing settings and programs that promote social connection and mental wellbeing, any barriers and gaps identified, the need or opportunity for new programs or activities, or enhancements of existing opportunities.

Work closely with families to co-design solutions to remove barriers to families participating in social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities, and provide strategies to better facilitate social connection and support.

These might include actions such as:

- changing the time or location of programs and activities to make them more accessible, convenient and suitable for families with young children
- providing time and space before and after family or children's activities, for parents and carers to chat and socialise informally, and children to play
- providing social connection opportunities that are tailored for families and children with diverse experiences and needs, and extra support for families and children who need it to participate (for example, supported playgroups).

Identify programs that could be delivered through social connection hubs or meeting points to help improve social support, social conditions and mental wellbeing for families and children. These may include parenting programs, peer support programs, family wellbeing programs and supported playgroups (see parenting and family wellbeing program examples on p.21).

Hot tip!

Consider identifying referral and support pathways for children and families to relevant services and programs, in preparation for parents or carers who may seek support or assistance for a particular matter, by participating in local programs. Whether this is of interest to families, could be part of the co-design process.

Develop a campaign or communication platform

Design a local campaign, or other communications strategies and activities, to raise awareness of social connection opportunities and encourage participation. Work closely with families to co-design communications strategies that are effective in reaching and engaging with all families with young children. This should include families who do not normally engage with council services or participate in social connection opportunities.

Design communications to ensure they are accessible and inclusive for families with diverse needs, abilities, experiences and languages. Involve families and children in co-designing promotional and communications materials and resources, such as by contributing ideas, stories, words and artwork.

Design an online platform or resource to showcase and consolidate information about the full range of council services, programs and activities that promote social connection and mental wellbeing for families with young children. If trusted local communication sources already exist, consider how you can build on these and highlight the mental wellbeing aspect of the opportunities you are listing.

The platform or resource should be designed to:

- provide a central repository of information for families
- enable other promotions and communications to link to the platform or resource (for example, via a link or QR code)
- make it easy for early childhood, family and health professionals to refer families and children to relevant services and programs.

If appropriate, consider how you can design the platform or resource to enable council to understand and periodically check the quantity and inclusiveness of local programs. This forms part of council's commitment to social connection and mental wellbeing under its municipal public health and wellbeing plan.

Recommended resources

Wyndham City Council has developed the [Wyndham Child and Family Directory](#) as a central online directory for families, with information on the range of available early childhood and family services.

[Communities for Children Facilitating Partners](#) is an Australian Government Department of Social Services funding program. It follows a place-based model of investment that supports children and families in 52 disadvantaged communities across Australia. This program supports early childhood development and wellbeing of children and their families by facilitating a whole-of-community approach. It funds Community Partners (organisations) to provide evidence-based services to their community, include parenting support, group peer support, case management, home visiting, community events and life skills courses.

For more information, visit [Communities for Children Facilitating Partners evidence-based program profiles](#).

Parenting and family wellbeing program examples

See the following examples of programs that could be delivered through social connection points in the community to promote social support and mental wellbeing for families with young children.

What Were We Thinking

[What Were We Thinking!](#) is an evidence-based program and suite of materials and activities designed to promote confidence and reduce distress in parents with a first baby. The two-session program for small groups of parents and their newborn infants is delivered four to six weeks after the birth of their child. It is designed to be delivered at local health centres set up as safe environments for parents and infants, at convenient times for new parents. The program is facilitated by an experienced maternal and child health or early childhood nurse.

The [What Were We Thinking! website](#) provides background theory and technical information for early childhood professionals, and resources and activities that can be incorporated into parent groups and seminars for new parents. The materials are designed to be attractive, engaging and accessible. They enhance programs for parents and carers with newborns, and promote mental health.

Empowering Parents Empowering Communities

[Empowering Parents Empowering Communities](#) (EPEC) is a community-based training program managed by the Murdoch Children's Research Institute. The EPEC program trains local parents to run parenting groups (in pairs) through early childhood and family services. High-quality parenting programs are an evidence-based way of improving social conditions for children in their early years.

The program is delivered by local parents as an alternative to practitioner-led parenting programs, on the basis that parents are more likely to seek parenting information from other parents and accept the information as credible. Local parents trained to work in the EPEC program are employed, supported and supervised by a trained practitioner within a local community organisation. Childcare is provided for children up to 5 years of age and parent facilitators are paid.

The EPEC program was developed and tested by the UK Centre for Parent and Child Support, based on the most up-to-date theoretical and practical knowledge. The course includes 8 x 2.5-hour sessions based on attachment, social learning, structural, relational and cognitive behavioural theory. Parents who complete the program can then undertake a 10-day course to become EPEC parent facilitators.



Parent-Child Mother Goose Australia

[Parent-Child Mother Goose Australia](#) is a free evidence-based playgroup program for parents and carers with babies and young children. The program focuses on strengthening attachment and interaction between parents and carers and their children through rhymes, songs and stories.

The program is intended for families who may be at risk due to personal, social or socioeconomic circumstances, substance use or postnatal depression, or who need extra support or have special needs.

The goals of the program include to:

- strengthen the bond between parents/carers and children
- build a supportive group where families experiencing isolation can feel comfortable
- build the skills and confidence of parents/carers to help them create positive family patterns during their children's crucial early years
- give children healthy early experiences with language and communication.

The program comprises one hour of learning rhymes, songs and storytelling, and half an hour before and after teaching for parents and carers to socially connect and share experiences while children play with toys. Teaching focuses on helping parents/carers to learn rhymes, songs and stories that they can use with their children throughout their daily lives.

Playsteps

Playsteps is a 9-week play-based program for parents and carers and children aged 0–4 years. It helps parents and carers to strengthen their relationship and interactions with their child, while learning practical parenting skills and building local support networks. The program is delivered by family support workers, maternal and child health nurses, and professionals working with children and families.

A two-day training course is required to deliver the program. To be eligible, professionals must have experience and/or qualifications in infant mental health or have completed the Keys to Care Giving program.

For more information about Playsteps and Keys to Care Giving training, visit the [Queen Elizabeth Centre website](#).

Crossover opportunity 

Baby Makes 3

[Baby Makes 3](#) is a respectful relationship and gender equity program for parents in the [Proud and inclusive communities](#) impact stream and the [Addressing social determinants of mental wellbeing](#) impact stream.

Deliver

Follow the project plan to deliver actions identified to address barriers to local families participating in social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities.

Follow the communications plan to showcase and promote social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities to local families with young children, using the identified communications channels and strategies.

Involve families with young children in delivering the plan, such as by asking families to act as ambassadors for the social connection opportunities in local media and local communication channels.

Prepare and disseminate relevant information to management and staff at council settings and services where actions are being implemented, or where social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities are being showcased and promoted. This should include guidance and supports on steps they can take to:

- enhance the opportunities
- ensure the opportunities are welcoming, friendly, accessible and inclusive for all families with young children
- show how they can be involved in communicating and promoting the opportunities to local families.

Continue to be available to management and staff at the settings to answer questions, provide information, and support them to make changes, improve social connection opportunities and educate staff.

Review and embed

Monitor and evaluate the reach and success of the project

Following the delivery of actions and communications as part of the project, ask council services to collect follow-up data on the number of families with young children who attend or participate in social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities, programs and activities.

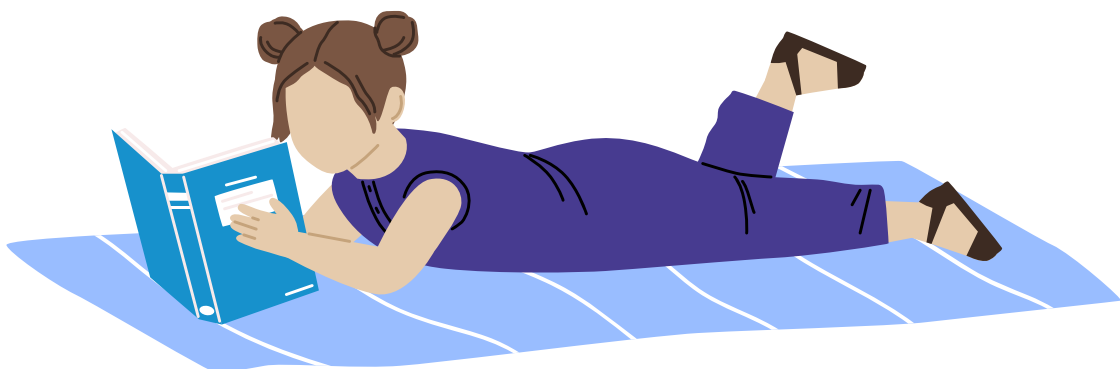
Consider conducting a follow-up survey of families with young children to assess their level of awareness of and participation in social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities in the community, following delivery of the project.

Compare this with data collected in the Assess stage, and identify whether and where there have been increases in awareness of and participation in social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities by families with young children.

Work with council services to support them to consult with families and seek their feedback on social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities, programs and activities offered.

Publish any key results and outcomes from the project using the same channels used to showcase and promote the social connection and mental wellbeing opportunities. Present results in a way that is appropriate and engaging for families with young children (for example, using interesting and positive language, styles and images, such as images of children and families having fun, playing and socially connecting).

Use evaluation to identify opportunities to continue to promote and increase opportunities in the community for social connection, positive social support and mental wellbeing for families with young children.



Recommended resources

Resources that can help you explore evidence for the importance of social connection and social support for families in the first 2,000 days of children's lives include:

- [Centre for Community Health, The First Thousand Days: An Evidence Paper⁵](#)
- [Centre for Community Health, Early Childhood, Family Support and Healthcare Services: An Evidence Review, prepared for the City of Port Phillip⁶](#)
- [VicHealth, Opportunities for Social Connection: A Determinant of Mental Health and Wellbeing: Summary of Learning and Implications⁷](#)

See the [Australian Institute of Family Studies website](#) for information about Communities for Children Facilitating Partners evidence-based program profiles for children, young people and families.

Emerging Minds resources can support you to identify protective and enabling factors in young children's mental wellbeing, including:

- [What is infant and child mental health \(and why is it important\)?](#)
- [Infant and toddler mental health](#)
- [Prevention and early intervention](#)
- [Parent-child relationships](#)
- [Child and Family Partnerships Toolkit](#)

Emerging Minds Learning also provides free online training resources and courses to support children's mental health and wellbeing. Innovative courses are designed to help professionals in health, community and social services to grow their skills and confidence in working with children (aged 0–12) and their families.

[VicHealth](#) provides information about values-based messaging for health promotion, and how to sign up to keep informed about VicHealth's values-based messaging work.

5. Moore TG, Arefadib N, Deery A, West S (2017) The First Thousand Days: An Evidence Paper. Parkville, Victoria; Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute.

6. Moore TG (2019) Early Childhood, Family Support and Health Care Services: An Evidence Review. Prepared for the City of Port Phillip. Melbourne, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health and the City of Port Phillip. doi: 10.25374/MCRI.8312768.

7. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (2010) Opportunities for Social Connection: A Determinant of Mental Health and Wellbeing: Summary of Learning and Implications, VicHealth, available from <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/Social-connection/opportunities_for_Social_Connection_Summary_Nov10.pdf?la=en&hash=CD3977B59473EC772F5CCFC7B40BB0F44ABFA8A0>.



Ambitious:

Implement a project to improve social connection

Through your council co-design processes, you may have identified key project or actions that could be used to improve social connection in your community.

If you haven't identified a social connection project through co-design, you could adapt an existing project for your local area. A range of VicHealth case studies have been provided, which can be adapted to suit your context and needs. The case study below showcases steps to implement a storytelling project to improve social connection.



How-to guide to:

Implement a project to improve social connection



Plan

Put together a plan and budget for the activity and identify the sources of funding. Bring together an implementation team that includes project staff, youth advisors and any external expertise you might require.

Crossover opportunity

Revisit tips for engaging young people in *Leading the Way – Engaging young voices for change foundation module*, particularly around confidentiality, safety and consent.



Design

Identify your target group and how you will find them (for example, through local groups and activities, events, schools, sports clubs, community organisations working with particular groups of young people and social media). Are you trying to reach a specific sub-group of young people or all young people in your community? Think about the outcomes you want to achieve. How will you measure them?



Deliver

Identify your target group and how you will find them (for example, through local groups and activities, events, schools, sports clubs, community organisations working with particular groups of young people and social media). Are you trying to reach a specific sub-group of young people or all young people in your community? Think about the outcomes you want to achieve. How will you measure them?



Review and embed

Evaluate your project, collect data from direct and indirect participants if appropriate. You can use discussions, workshops or surveys. Or collect other types of relevant data (e.g. number of likes on social media, number of clients attending a service).

Think about key learnings, what went well and what you can improve next time. Remember to feed this back to your co-design group. Share what you've done and learnt with young participants, other stakeholders, and the community more broadly.

Scale and repeat. Use feedback to make some changes and improvements to the project. Look to implement the project in new contexts and with new groups of young people.



Case study

Storytelling project: 'We know your name but not your story' (WKYBNYS)



This program aims to build resilience, social connection and mental wellbeing in young people. [WKYBNYS](#) engages and equips young people to develop stories for digital channels and for use in the media about connecting with their community.

Engaging young people to tell stories can build a shared understanding of social connection as a health and wellbeing issue in your community and bring them together to build resilience. VicHealth has created a handbook on the WKYBNYS program which you can look through for inspiration on the storytelling method or to learn how to implement the entire program.



Plan

Revisit tips for engaging young people in the *Leading the Way – Engaging young voices for change foundation module*, particularly around confidentiality, safety and consent.

Consider the demographic and geographic profile of your local area and how far people would have to travel to gather in a central location. Are there places young people are already meeting? If young people would have to travel a long way to participate, consider meeting virtually. Prepare to reimburse young people for their time and travel. Find places where young people already are to advertise the opportunity to be involved in the project, for example schools or local clubs.

Use existing evidence from your local area to identify your target audience, the issues and topics you will address in stories.

Identify a partner with technical expertise in storytelling and videography, if that does not exist within your organisation. Bring together your team and decide whether they need additional training in storytelling practices or working with young people.

Put together a budget for the activity and identify the sources of funding.

Decide how long you will need for story collection. This will depend on how many stories you are capturing and how this collection will happen. Allow time for editing and post-production.

Involving young people

Identify the group of young people you will work with as story collectors, this might be your Youth Advisory Panel or you might identify a new population of young people (for example, through local groups and activities, events, schools, sports clubs, community organisations working with particular groups of young people and social media).

Crossover opportunity

See the *Leading the Way – Engaging young voices for change foundation module* for more details about engaging young people as collaborators.

In collaboration with story collectors, identify whose stories you will tell (interviewees). These may also be young people, or another group from the community (for example, Elders or policy makers).



Design

In collaboration with story collectors, decide how and where stories will be collected: online, in person, at schools, in public places. Prepare your story collectors for filming with training workshops. These could be facilitated by an external source if expertise doesn't exist within your council.

Some things to cover in workshops:

- activities to help the young people connect to each other, get to know each other and feel comfortable
- activities to help the young people identify their strengths
- storytelling basics: why stories are important, how to construct a story
- interviewing techniques
- how to create a film
- use of cameras and equipment
- video production and editing techniques.

Deliver

Participants will collect stories they have chosen to capture, and the stories will go through editing and post-production. The storytellers should get to see and comment on the film before it is approved.

Launch the videos on digital platforms and hold a launch event to share the results of the project (for example, a film festival-style screening).

Promote the program widely throughout your community. Use a combination of digital and traditional media. Go back to the organisations from where you recruited storytellers and collectors (schools, services etc.) and share the outcomes with them.

Review and embed

Collect data from participants, for example, hold a forum to discuss what they got out of the program or use a participant evaluation survey.

Collate all the data and insights into a local snapshot or fact sheet. This document should be concise, easy to read and give readers an overview of the program and its impact on wellbeing among local young people, from their perspective. Think about presenting the data in an easily consumable way, like using infographics, storyboards, videos and highlighting quotes. Circulate your snapshot to relevant internal staff and external stakeholders.



Impact stream:

Building proud and inclusive communities

To complete this impact stream, councils will select from:

Step up: *Strengthen participation in local playgroups*

Addressing race-based discrimination

Quick win: *Undertake a cultural inclusion snapshot*

Step up: *Initiate a community-led partnership*

Ambitious: *Develop an anti-racism strategy*

Ambitious: *Develop a youth film project*

LGBTIQA+ inclusion

Quick win: *Assess Rainbow readiness*

Step up: *Establish an LGBTIQA+ young people's advisory group*

Ambitious: *Develop an LGBTIQA+ young people's action plan*

Ambitious: *Create a community 'Signs of LGBTIQA+ Hope' campaign*

Gender equality

Quick win: *Embed values-based messaging and proactive communications about gender equality across council*

Quick win: *Incorporate an early years focus into council's Gender Equality Action Plan*

Step up: *Address sexist and sexually harassing behaviours in the workplace by empowering bystanders*

Ambitious: *Develop a young women's leadership program to connect, grow and empower future community leaders*

Disability inclusion

Quick win: *Learn about children and young people with disability and how you can support their access, inclusion and participation*

Step up: *Conduct a disability inclusion audit from a children and young people's perspective*

Ambitious: *Take action and strengthen allyship*

Children, young people and their families benefit from being valued members of proud and inclusive communities. A sense of pride and inclusion is vital so that young children can develop relationships and have meaningful participation in all types of daily activities.

By working in partnership with children, young people and families with diverse lived experiences, councils are uniquely placed to build strong connections with families, and create opportunities for meaningful participation and inclusion in the community.

This impact stream is divided into distinct, but often intersecting, focus areas, enabling councils to undertake council-wide and external activities that increase council and community practices to improve social inclusion and connection within the community. It highlights the organisational and structural factors that may currently limit social inclusion in the local area and provides practical actions to address these factors. It allows councils to commence and lead social inclusion activity, while collaborating with partners to deliver real change and benefits.

The key focus areas for this module are:

- addressing race-based discrimination
- LGBTIQA+ inclusion
- gender equality
- disability inclusion.

While co-design approaches are the most optimal for addressing structural and other barriers to social inclusion, this implementation action does not equip councils to co-design for each of the focus areas. It provides the actions that are needed to build knowledge, capability, readiness and relationships to address the complex challenges of social inclusion and health equity. This is likely to provide a strong foundation for councils to engage in co-design at a later stage.

Intended outcomes

Councils undertaking this impact stream can expect to:

- have visible and dedicated internal or external initiatives to address the barriers to social inclusion, including working within council, with partners and in collaboration with the communities that are most affected
- have a renewed commitment to achieving health equity, which will be reflected in new approaches to aspects of their planning, community engagement, communications, program delivery and policy development
- have increased drive and capacity to work collaboratively with communities and partner agencies to improve social inclusion and health equity.

Minimum deliverables

To complete the impact stream 'Building proud and inclusive communities', councils will have:

- identified key priority cohorts of children, young people and their families who face greater barriers to inclusion in community activities
- implemented a new activity that promotes the inclusion of priority cohorts of children, young people and their families based on council demographics and needs
- demonstrated support from council and local leadership to building proud and inclusive community practices by allocating resources or endorsing strategies or policies
- demonstrated succession planning that outlines how the activity will contribute to the outcomes of their current and future Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans.



Step up: *Strengthen participation in local playgroups*

Strengthening participation in local playgroups supports the wellbeing of young children, families and communities. In this step up action, councils will work with local families to ensure local playgroups are inclusive, accessible, welcoming and suit community needs.

Strengthening the participation of families with young children in playgroups helps improve social conditions for children in their first 2,000 days, supporting their healthy development and wellbeing. Playgroups can help overcome social isolation and provide important social support for families, with beneficial impacts on parental knowledge and confidence, family functioning and wellbeing.⁸

Strengthening participation in local playgroups also encourages a sense of pride and inclusion for young children in the community. Every family has unique histories and circumstances. Inclusive playgroups should reflect an understanding of the family's cultural, social and relational contexts, to provide a safe and empowering social space. Inclusive playgroups also instil acceptance and the value of difference in childhood – setting children and their families up to embrace diversity as they move through all their life stages.

The way we deliver services and systems we operate in can create barriers for people. Through creating equitable access to playgroups that respond to the specific needs of local families, council can help open play experiences and social support to all.

Supported playgroups (with a paid coordinator or facilitator) can provide essential social support and wellbeing benefits for families with young children who are experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage. They give children opportunities to play, socialise and learn, and give families opportunities to build positive social support networks. They also provide entry points to link families with formal support when needed, and to deliver family, child and health information, resources and programs.⁹

By increasing participation in playgroups, councils can also provide a vital service for people who are newly arrived in an area. Local playgroups provide

opportunities to overcome social isolation, as well as spaces to interact in and learn about their new home and the services available to them. They help families develop a 'sense of place' and belonging in their community, promoting community inclusion and wellbeing.

Benefits of playgroups

- Child-led play is an ideal way for parents and carers to engage with their children and can strengthen relationships.
- Parents and carers often need support to develop skills in child-led play.
- Playgroup facilitators can play an important role in promoting child-adult playtime as a mental health promotion strategy for all children.
- Playgroup facilitators can support parents and carers to use play with their child to gain insights into their relationship, and the child's strengths and vulnerabilities.
- Young children with responsive and nurturing relationship with their parents or carers typically experience better mental health, are more resilient, and experience better outcomes in school and later life.

More information about the benefits of playgroups for children, families, communities, and social and economic wellbeing can be found in the [Playgroup Statement](#) developed by Playgroup Australia.

8. Moore TG (2019) Early Childhood, Family Support and Health Care Services: An Evidence Review. Prepared for the City of Port Phillip. Melbourne, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health and the City of Port Phillip. doi: 10.25374/MCRI.8312768.

9. Moore TG (2019) Early Childhood, Family Support and Health Care Services: An Evidence Review. Prepared for the City of Port Phillip. Melbourne, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health and the City of Port Phillip. doi: 10.25374/MCRI.8312768.



How-to guide to: *Strengthen participation in local playgroups*

Involving people

Involving families with young children

Councils can involve families with young children in this step up action by consulting and working closely with them to co-design playgroups that are inclusive, accessible, welcoming and suit community needs. Councils can do this by seeking consultation from parents in the community.

Engaging families with young children who are less likely to participate in playgroups and other early childhood and family services, particularly those who may be experiencing disadvantage, requires careful consideration and planning. However, it is essential to address barriers that are preventing them from accessing playgroups. This may involve considering different strategies and communication channels for reaching families, such as shopping centres, social media or engaging members of their communities.

Councils may need to practice assertive outreach to explore the experience of playgroups with a diverse and representative segment of families with young children in their communities. By creating consultation opportunities in familiar and accessible environments, and offering avenues to share ideas in multiple formats and languages, councils can empower target populations, and demonstrate a commitment to understanding their needs.

Hot tip!

Don't wait for families to come to you and ask about playgroups – go to them! Hold an open playgroup in an environment that is safe and convenient, such as a park, local shopping centre, or during specific cultural events or festivals. Use this open playgroup to ask families with young children for ideas about what they and their children would like to experience in a playgroup session.



Plan

Planning to increase participation in playgroups should involve families with young children from the very beginning of the process. This will build trust and establish buy-in to playgroup programs.

A participatory planning process is an effective and inclusive way to prompt increased involvement in local playgroups. It will ensure the strategies to increase playgroup participation are reflective of individual council and community needs and assets, as well as culture and social structure.

Project plan

Identify clear objectives of the project. Objectives may include increasing participation of families with young children generally in the community, as well as increasing equitable access and participation of families from groups or communities facing specific barriers or in which participation is low.

Develop a project plan to capture the implementation and delivery of actions aimed at strengthening participation in local playgroups. Ensure the program of activities outlined in the plan is informed by available resources and allocate budgets.

Typically, the project plan will include:

- the objectives and aims of the project, and what will be achieved by strengthening local play groups
- an outline of the current barriers and opportunities driving the need for action
- implementation plans
- the people responsible for delivering actions, and the resources and information needed to support relevant staff
- resource and budget requirements.

Communication plan

Prepare a communication plan to provide a clear roadmap for strengthening local playgroup participation. To help ensure local playgroups are inclusive and welcoming, use as many avenues as possible to inform the community about them. This could be through press releases, newspaper stories, fliers and posters, as well as community presentations and personal contact (either face to face or by phone).

Make sure council messaging about the benefits of local playgroups is simple and clear, and in the languages that the community speaks. Make sure that your message appears in places where it will be seen or heard by those it is aimed at.

The communication plan for growing local playgroup participation should summarise all the opportunities to demonstrate and share with families how local playgroups can be an essential part of their social connection and mental wellbeing.

The plan should set out:

- key messages, communication channels, and strategies for raising awareness and increasing participation of families and young children
- communications and promotional resources that may be used or developed, such as webpages or website content, social media content, printed resources, and communication templates
- a timeline with any key dates and events for promotion.

Some ideas for the communication plan include using a range of strategies and communication channels for reaching families with young children, including families with diverse needs, abilities and experiences.

Strategies may include:

- engaging local, well-known and respected community members to promote the benefits of playgroups
- promoting opportunities through council's communication channels, including the council website and social media
- involving families and children in co-designing promotional and communications materials and resources, such as by contributing ideas, stories, words and artwork.
- displaying posters, flyers and promotional materials in local shopping centres, services and businesses
- sharing promotional materials and communication templates with early childhood services and schools.

Communication channels may include:

- early childhood services and schools
- health providers (maternal and child health services and local medical clinics)
- local neighbourhood houses and community centres
- shopping centres and local services and businesses
- online platforms
- social media
- local media.

Communication materials should be accessible and inclusive for all families with diverse needs, abilities, experiences and languages.

Assess

Engage and consult with a diverse range of local families to identify their needs, the barriers they experience to participating in local playgroups, and changes or strategies that would overcome barriers and support them to participate. Consult with and consider the diverse needs of all local families in the community.

Conduct a survey of local families to assess their awareness of local playgroups, how they heard about playgroups, their current participation or intentions to participate, barriers they experience, and actions or changes that would make them more likely to participate. Design the survey to find out whether changes, such as to the location, format, days or times of playgroup sessions, would increase their participation.

When consulting with families, map and assess existing local playgroups to help identify gaps and understand barriers to participation.

Consider:

- the need and gaps in local geographic areas
- gaps in meeting the needs of families with young children with different circumstances, abilities, and experiences, including families with additional needs, or who are isolated or experiencing challenges
- barriers or challenges that make it hard for families with young children to attend, including geographical, financial and cultural barriers
- whether playgroups' structure, format and activities are suitable and sufficiently flexible to adapt to the different needs of families and children
- whether playgroup sessions are when and where best suits families
- new approaches and opportunities that might encourage participation (for example, intergenerational playgroups, multicultural playgroups and LGBTIQ+ playgroups).

If possible, ask council services to collect or provide data on the number of families with young children who currently attend or participate in both community and supported playgroups. This will inform council's assessment of existing gaps, opportunities and levels of participation.

Assess the current promotion of local playgroups. Consider if it is likely to resonate or connect with families with diverse needs, abilities and experiences, and families who do not normally engage with early childhood and family services. Consult and engage with local families with young children to find out which communication channels and strategies would be effective in reaching them.

Design

Review the results of the Assess stage. Consider opportunities to strengthen local community and supported playgroup participation, by designing strategies or supports to address identified barriers and to better meet the needs of families.

Design solutions to address practical barriers, such as cost, location, transport, and work, family or other commitments.

Consider and design ways to deliver playgroups in different formats depending on families' needs, such as mobile playgroups, outdoor playgroups at the park and virtual playgroups.

Consider other strategies to strengthen participation, such as developing new, more inclusive programs, or enhancing existing groups by offering a variety of learning and social activities.

Design specific strategies for supported playgroups to prioritise inclusivity and a sense of belonging for families with diverse cultural backgrounds or experiences. These may include:

- using bilingual or bicultural facilitators
- including food-based routines or rituals
- employing local, well-known and respected community members to lead sessions or promote participation
- bringing in storytellers and artists, and providing culturally appropriate music and dance performances
- sourcing supportive council policies or practices that are in place for inclusive engagement
- considering allocated a budget to compensate participants for their contribution
- offering childminding for extended consultation, such as workshops
- providing support for parents before, during and after participation
- allocating the budget and human resources needed to support the process
- creating opportunities to hear from many parents (consider if there is an opportunity at a community event to do postcards or art workshops, and connect with existing services)
- ensuring a clear understanding of what is expected and the parameters of what you are seeking can be articulated
- ensuring professionals involved have a grounded understanding of parent participation and respectful processes to engage, and understand the diversity of the community.

Going where families are

Design a 'going where families are' participation strategy to reach families experiencing social isolation, vulnerability or disadvantage. Council should go to places, such as parks, playgrounds and local shopping centres, to connect with families, providing them with information about local playgroup opportunities. Consider ways to make personal contact with families, such as by sending or delivering brochures or information.

Create a resource

Design a central resource or platform, such as a handbook or website, with a directory and information for families about local community and supported playgroups, focusing on the benefits of involvement. This should be designed so that other promotions and communications can link to the resource platform, and to make it easy for early childhood and family services, and health professionals to refer families to playgroups.

Design a resource, such as a 'Welcome to Playgroup' book, to provide accessible information to families on the benefits of playgroups and what to expect.

Design strategies to remind families about upcoming playgroup sessions or to follow up families who have stopped attending, such as through text message or messaging app reminders.



Case study

Wyndham Child and Family Directory and 'Welcome to Playgroup' book

Wyndham City Council has developed the [Wyndham Child and Family Directory](#) to link families with information about services, including supported playgroups.

Facilitators of Wyndham supported playgroups have also developed a [Welcome to Playgroup](#) book, which was shared with referring services. This led to greater referrals and enrolments in supported playgroups. Facilitators developed a second version of the book that is aimed at sharing information about supported playgroups with parents and carers, and helping families understand what to expect before they attend.

Whittlesea virtual playgroups

While COVID-19 restrictions were in place, Whittlesea City Council used messaging apps, such as WhatsApp, to deliver virtual playgroup sessions to families. In some cases, participation in virtual sessions exceeded participation in face-to-face sessions.

Important note

[Principles for high quality playgroups: Examples from research and practice](#) is an Australian Government resource developed by the Australian Institute of Family Studies and Child Family Community Australia.

The document provides information on a set of principles underpinning the essential core components of a high-quality playgroup. Any council seeking to strengthen proud and inclusive communities through participation in playgroups will benefit from applying these principles to playgroup development and planning.

The principles include that:

- playgroups are about play
- playgroups are child-focused, child-inclusive and developmentally appropriate
- playgroups are about connection
- playgroups are safe and welcoming
- playgroups are culturally safe
- playgroups are flexible
- playgroups are both strengths-based and strengthening
- playgroups have organisational-level support and governance
- supported playgroups draw on skilled facilitators to engage families and link to local services.

Supported playgroups

Running supported playgroups is an effective way for council to reach out to families that may not otherwise attend community playgroups. Led by a paid coordinator or facilitator, attendance at a supported playgroup can be a vital means of social connection for local families with specific needs or vulnerabilities.

Supported playgroups are an intrinsic part of building proud and inclusive communities, because they encourage families with young children to meet with other families for support and friendship. This helps build social support networks in the communities in which they live. A supported playgroup will address needs for social support and more formal supports when required.



Case study

Brimbank City Council and smalltalk Supported Playgroups

smalltalk is a set of evidence-based strategies and resources that are shared with parents by a qualified facilitator during the course of a supported playgroup. The program is funded by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, and delivered by Brimbank City Council. It aims to provide parents and carers with strategies to enhance their child's home learning environment at no charge to families.

Brimbank City Council currently runs 16 smalltalk Supported Playgroup sessions each week. The programs are offered in English, Vietnamese or Burmese.

By delivering the smalltalk Supported Playgroups in a range of different languages, Brimbank City Council enhances the community connectedness experienced by families. It also acknowledges that some playgroup participants might prefer to attend a culturally specific community or supported playgroup.

By facilitating supported playgroups that provide an inclusive and culturally safe environment for parents and carers, councils can play a key role in the development of social supports, and children's social and physical development. These playgroups also create an environment where families with young children can connect with other services that otherwise may remain underutilised.

Deliver

Follow the project plan to deliver actions to strengthen local playgroups, improve awareness and increase participation across all sections of the community.

Work closely with relevant council services to promote and support local playgroups. Inform and upskill services and staff about providing opportunities for inclusive playgroup experiences that adapt and respond to the diverse needs of families.

Work with councils and facilities to deliver communications and promotions activities, following the communications plan.

Consider ways to involve families with young children in communicating and promoting playgroups to the community and encouraging participation, such as by having parents or carers act as ambassadors or mentors.



Review and embed

Monitor and evaluate the reach and success of the project

Evaluation of the participation in local playgroups is constant and ongoing. Council should design review methods to ensure participating families are actively involved in this process, and are encouraged to provide feedback and highlight any areas for improvement at any time.

Following the delivery of actions and communications as part of the project, ask council services to collect follow-up data on the number of families with young children who attend or participate in local playgroups.

Council may wish to work with experts to develop evaluation methods regarding young children as active researchers. This would incorporate multiple authentic ways of listening to children's views about their experience. It might include:

- child-led interviews at playgroups
- play-based focus group discussions
- completion of a questionnaire by facilitators
- asking families to record their experiences in the playgroup programs.

Publish any key results and outcomes from the project using the same channels used to showcase and promote playgroups. Present results in a way that is engaging for families with young children, and is mindful of the different ways people receive and respond to communications. Use colourful imagery and ensure information is available in different formats and languages.

Recommended resources

- [Centre for Community Child Health Promising Practice in Best Start: How to increase participation in early years services](#)
- [Emerging Minds Parent-child Play practice paper](#)
- [Supported Playgroup Guidelines](#)
- [smalltalk program](#)
- [Playgroup Australia](#)
- [Playgroup principles](#)

Addressing race-based discrimination

Racism is one of the defining issues of our time. Racism and racial discrimination are fundamental determinants of health and health inequalities globally.

In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people of colour experience racism on a daily basis. Racism is particularly harmful to children and young people. Racism is about power. It operates at structural (systemic), organisational, interpersonal and individual levels. This includes overt acts of exclusion and harassment, as well as the systems, processes and policies that implicitly favour people from the dominant culture. Racism harms children and young people's health through direct experience of racism as well as through the systems, societal and organisational structures that affect them, their families and carers.

To have the greatest impact on reducing racism and improving child and youth health, local governments should focus on measures that increase access and equity, increase representation, and reduce discrimination within their own systems and practices. Initiatives that aim to reduce interpersonal racism within the community prior to systemic and institutional change occurring, and prior to unconscious bias being addressed, risk doing serious harm to children and youth.

Quick note

'Person of colour' is a broad term used to describe a person who is not white. The term emphasises common experiences of racism experienced by people of colour. In the Australian context, while First Nations people may identify as people of colour, it is common to see First Nations people named separately, given their unique position and the specific and systemic disadvantage and racism they experience.

The term 'culturally and linguistically diverse' is used to describe people who speak a language other than English as their first language and who have diverse cultural backgrounds. It is used by government and services but is not generally how communities or people describe themselves.

Within this module, when speaking of experiences of racism and anti-racism work, 'people of colour and First Nations people' is used as this describes communities who experience regular interpersonal and systemic racism in Australia. In addition, these are terms used by communities to identify themselves, and so should be used wherever possible.





Quick win: *Undertake a cultural inclusion snapshot*

A critical component of anti-racism work is understanding current local government policies, practices and gaps.

All organisations in Australia have an obligation to provide a safe, inclusive and discrimination-free workplace. Additionally, many organisations in Victoria, including local government organisations, must comply with minimum Child Safe Standards, including obligations around cultural safety for both First Nations children and children from culturally diverse backgrounds. The Cultural Inclusion Snapshot is a first step councils can take towards meeting these obligations and reducing racism in the community.

Through the delivery of this quick win, councils will have:

- appointed a Cultural Inclusion Committee and commenced meetings
- implemented a Cultural Inclusion Snapshot focusing on children and young people, and developed 3 to 4 action items to help improve council's cultural inclusion.



How-to guide to:

Undertake a cultural inclusion snapshot



Assess

Allocate a staff member to have overall responsibility of the snapshot. Appoint a cultural inclusion committee of 6 to 8 members from across council, including executive level staff and human resources staff, and get buy-in from a councillor. Consider the diversity of committee members, including age, gender and cultural background.

The committee should meet 3 times.



Workshop 1

Ensure all committee members understand the process and objectives of the group.

Activity 1: Ask all members to read through VicHealth's Racism and Child Health Research Summary. Discuss your thoughts on the 6 key processes and approaches highlighted in the report. These will frame your thinking about future actions.

Activity 2: Start the Cultural Inclusion Snapshot. Focus on answering the snapshot questions (listed under 'Cultural Inclusion Snapshot' below).

Key processes and approaches



1.

Explicitly name and address racism at a systemic, institutional level

Too often interventions focus on addressing disadvantage instead of on the racism that creates, maintains and justifies that disadvantage.



2.

Foreground Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty and leadership

Place First Nation people's right to self-determination at the heart of each strategy and action.



3.

Make anti-racism action life-course appropriate

Avoid reinforcing rather than countering prejudice and stereotypes. Match the action to the social, emotional, cognitive and developmental skills of children and adolescents.



4.

Co-design with community groups (architects and leaders) as well as children and young people (active participants)

Involve people in the decisions that will have an impact on them and incorporate multiple perspectives into the design process.



5.

Strengthen collaboration between health promotion, First Nations and ethno-specific agencies

With sustained commitment, concerted planning and extensive cross-sectoral collaboration comes meaningful participation and sustained change.



6.

Increase evaluation of interventions and monitoring of racism and racialised inequalities

Prior to large-scale implementation, programs should undergo high-quality effectiveness evaluations to ensure they do no harm and do not perpetuate the very issues they are intending to address.

Workshop 2

Continue the Snapshot and address any unanswered questions and add additional evidence/examples

Workshop 3

Review results and agree on 3 or 4 action items and a timeframe. Review the actions from the report again as they may assist in framing some of the action items.

Cultural Inclusion Snapshot

For each question below, answer yes, no or partially and give examples. Once the snapshot questions are answered, review them with your snapshot committee and develop 3 to 4 action items, including timelines, which can help improve your cultural inclusion in Workshop 3.

Examples of potential actions:

- Engage a trainer to provide cultural responsiveness, anti-racism and unconscious bias training to staff, including staff who work with children and young people.
- Update human resources procedures, including adding criteria around fluency in languages other than English to job descriptions, advertising positions through culturally diverse media outlets and community networks, and increasing diversity on interview panels.
- Work with local representative organisations to update council stock photos and improve community representation in council media and information (this can include undertaking photo shoots with local First Nations people and people of colour, including families and young people).
- Develop a checklist of actions to engage, include and respond to the needs of First Nations, migrant and refugee children and young people as part of standard procedures when planning activities for families and young people.



Questions: Cultural Inclusion Snapshot Organisational cultural inclusion

- Is a commitment to cultural diversity explicitly communicated through council documents such as our strategies, plans, policies and job descriptions?
- Is there at least 1 executive position designated to oversee cultural diversity and inclusion?
- Do we advertise jobs through culturally diverse media outlets and community networks, First Nations organisations and organisations that represent people of colour?
- For community-facing positions do we include criteria around fluency in languages other than English spoken in our local government area?
- Do our interview panels include First Nations people and people from culturally diverse backgrounds?
- Do our staff undertake training in cultural responsiveness, unconscious bias and racism?
- Do we collect cultural diversity data for staff and committee members (cultural background, country of birth, language spoken, identification as First Nations or a person of colour)?
- If we collect this data, do we match it against census data to understand the extent to which our staff reflect our community?

Key processes and approaches



Questions: Cultural Inclusion Snapshot cont. Cultural inclusion in service delivery

- Do we have a policy and procedure for residents to report incidences of racism at council services, events and sites? Is it widely promoted?
- Do we have an up-to-date list of cultural organisations, settlement services and representative bodies such as the ethnic communities' council working in our LGA?
- Do we know which of these organisations work with children and youth? Do council staff (including executive staff) currently have meaningful connection, partnerships or work with these organisations?
- Do council brochures, posters, and information use photos that reflect the cultural diversity in our local government area? Do books, toys, artwork and resources in council facilities represent diverse cultures? Specifically consider sites used by children and youth, for example libraries, maternal and child health services and swimming pools.
- Are council brochures and information translated into other languages? Are interpreting services promoted and available at council services?
- Do we have Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols and have these been developed in partnership with local Traditional Owners?
- Do we allocate resources (budget, staffing and facilities) to cultural inclusion or anti-racism work? Are some of these resources focused on children and young people?
- When planning activities for children and youth, do we implement specific actions to engage, include and respond to the needs of First Nations, migrant and refugee families and young people?
- Is the Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission's [Community Reporting Tool](#) embedded in our website? Is it promoted? This tool supports easy reporting of racist incidences in the community.

Recommended resources

A number of evidence-informed, best-practice resources exist to support deeper assessment and reflection on cultural diversity, responsiveness and anti-racism practices.

- The Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission's [Workplace Cultural Diversity Tool](#) is used to assess workplace practices. The tool can be used by management to assess the extent to which the organisation is inclusive, working to increase staff diversity and reduce discrimination within the workplace.
- The [Diversity Atlas](#) supports organisations to measure and understand the diversity within their workplace using a range of measures.
- Multicultural Arts Victoria's [Equity Planning in Culture Program](#) provides tailored access and equity audits and training.
- [Hobsons Bay City council's website](#) provides a best-practice example of how to include the Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission's [Community Reporting Tool](#) on a council website.
- Cultural Responsiveness Training that includes content around racism, privilege, and unconscious bias will support all interventions and anti-racism actions. Recommended training includes that offered by [Hue](#), [Regional Victorians of Colour](#) and [Multicultural Arts Victoria](#).
- [Welcoming Cities](#) is a national network of municipalities who are committed to an Australia where everyone can belong and participate in social, economic and civic life. Welcoming Cities provides a range of resources and supports as well as membership and accreditation opportunities.



Step up: *Initiate a community-led partnership*

For councils that have completed the Cultural Inclusion Snapshot or a similar audit process, the next step is to initiate a community-led partnership that provides opportunities for cross-cultural interaction.

One of the most effective ways to reduce interpersonal racism is via frequent, positive cross-cultural interactions. Initiatives that seek to create environments for such interactions are most effective when they are professionally facilitated and designed by communities affected by racism.

Additionally, this up action will allow you to gain an increased understanding of the needs of, and increased relationships with, people in your community who experience racism, which can support a range of measures, such as actions agreed to during the Snapshot process.

Through the delivery of this step up activity, councils will have:

- initiated a community-led partnership that provides opportunities for cross-cultural interaction
- undertaken a community consultation with young people.



How-to guide to: *Initiate a community-led partnership*



Plan

Allocate a team and staff member where this work will sit (for example, Community Partnerships Team). Starting with any organisations identified during the snapshot, map organisations in your area that represent First Nations people and people of colour (including those from migrant and refugee backgrounds). Consider which organisations are currently working with children, young people and families.



Design

Work in partnership with these organisations to engage young people to undertake a workshop to explore their needs and ideas regarding experiences of racism, discrimination and inclusion.

Crossover opportunity

See the *Leading the Way – Engaging young voices for change foundation module*.

Consider what council resources you can allocate to the partnership. This should include staff time and project funding and may also include facilities. If you have a budget to pay young people for their time, it may be appropriate to engage young people from your workshop in further co-design of this initiative. Take advice from your partner organisations about this.

You may want to refer to activities in the VicHealth Partnerships Analysis Tool that help clarify the aim and purpose of your partnership. This is also captured in the [‘Addressing social determinants of mental wellbeing’](#) impact stream.

Working in partnership with 1 or more representative organisations and potentially directly with young people, develop your partnership activities to meet the needs and aspirations of children, young people and families (see examples below).

Deliver

Ensure activities provide regular opportunities for groups from a variety of cultural backgrounds, including residents born in Australia, to spend time together. Ensure activities are staffed so that interactions are facilitated and supported and that any harmful or racist behaviour is responded to quickly.

Review and embed

Refer to Monitoring and Evaluation section for further guidance.

Case study

Examples of successful initiatives that have increased positive cross-cultural interaction:

- Use a council swimming pool to run women’s and girls’ swimming times. Yarra Council’s [Women Making Waves Program](#) is a best-practice example.
- Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services hosted [Feast of Stories](#) community dinners, celebrating a multicultural community feast while sharing stories. Councils can adapt this example and organise a monthly multicultural family dinner in a council-owned facility. Migrant and refugee communities can cook and host the broader community. Linking with primary schools can increase the participation of families.
- Bring together young people from different cultures to work collaboratively on a project. The Kar Kulture Building Bridges project brought refugee and Australian-born young people from Dandenong and Noble Park together to repair and restore a second-hand car.



Ambitious:

Develop an anti-racism strategy

To make a real impact on reducing racism, councils must develop a multi-year anti-racism strategy. If your council already has an anti-racism strategy or a strategy that includes anti-racism initiatives, this step can involve reviewing your strategy.

Depending on existing policies and strategies, an anti-racism strategy might take the form of a Cultural Diversity & Inclusion Plan alongside a Reconciliation Action Plan. An anti-racism strategy should include a reconciliation component or a human rights policy that addresses the oppression and discrimination experienced by a range of communities.

Through the delivery of this ambitious action, councils will have undertaken steps towards developing an anti-racism strategy focusing on children and young people.



How-to guide to:

Develop an anti-racism strategy

An effective anti-racism strategy must be:

- publicly supported by council leadership
- evidence-informed – based on your Snapshot or a similar assessment as well as community consultation and research
- multi-year
- structured to have actions and goals in 3 focus areas: internal/organisational, council services and spaces, reducing racism in the community
- adequately resourced – budget, staff time and facilities.

It should also include evaluation methodology – quantitative and qualitative data collection across the 3 focus areas.

Actions and goals within your strategy will depend on your Snapshot or assessment data, but at a minimum should include actions around the following:

Internal/organisational focus

- Workforce development actions: for example, collect data on cultural diversity and set targets for increased cultural diversity, change selection criteria to recruit for diversity (languages spoken etc.), promote vacant positions via community channels, review criteria for interview panel membership to be more diverse, develop programs to increase staff diversity (e.g. paid internship program for residents who came to Australia as refugees), review access and equity policies and procedures and how these are operationalised.
- Regular or yearly staff training with anti-racism and unconscious bias components. Recommended training includes those offered by [Hue](#), [Regional Victorians of Colour](#) and [Multicultural Arts Victoria](#).
- Documentation and leadership actions: for example, review plans, policies and strategies to ensure these communicate a commitment to cultural diversity and reducing racism, allocate an executive-level staff member to have responsibility for cultural diversity and inclusion.

Develop an anti-racism strategy cont.

Council services and spaces

- Reporting racism at council facilities actions: for example, develop or review procedures for residents to report racism experienced at council facilities, increase promotion of these procedures; if data is already collected, review and develop actions to reduce racism experienced at council facilities.
- Culturally safe mechanisms for advice-giving and representation actions: for example, work with local First Nations organisations to review cultural safety in resident representative groups/ committees, promote opportunities to join groups/committees via community networks, develop feedback mechanisms for representative organisations to provide feedback on council initiatives and plans.
- Access to council grants actions: for example, review grant criteria to preference activities implemented by marginalised community members (including First Nations and people of colour), promote grant opportunities via community channels, provide grant information sessions in community languages.

Reducing racism in the community

- Reporting racism in the community actions: for example, add the Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission's [Community Reporting Tool](#) to your website ([Hobsons Bay City council's website](#) provides a best-practice example of how to include the tool on a council website), develop community signage promoting opportunities to report racism.
- Partnership actions: for example, councillors and senior staff to regularly attend events hosted by First Nations and migrant and refugee residents, compile a directory of local organisations, develop 1 or more community-led partnership as described above.

Reviewing your strategy

If you have an existing strategy that covers issues of cultural diversity, inclusion or racism, it may be helpful to review this strategy with an anti-racism focus. An effective review will include the following:

- Feedback from First Nations people and people of colour and the organisations that represent them, via a range of mechanisms. Include at least 1 consultation with young people from these communities.
- Assessment of whether there are adequate actions that specifically seek to reduce racism, (for example, community-led anti-racism initiatives).
- Assessment of whether there are adequate actions across the 3 focus areas of organisation, service delivery and reducing racism in the community – see above for suggestions.



Case study

Merri-bek Human rights policy

In 2016, the City of Merri-bek (formerly City of Moreland) launched the [Moreland Human Rights Policy](#), a 10-year overarching framework to advance human rights with a focus on the following priority groups: First Nations people, people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, women, people with disability and LGBTIQ+ communities. It replaced a number of existing policies, including the [Merri-bek Reconciliation Policy](#) and Moreland Multicultural Policy. The policy has 3 goals:

- Be an inclusive organisation
- Deliver inclusive and accessible services
- Advance inclusion and social cohesion in the community

Some of the intended outcomes of the policy:

- Priority groups have increased participation in council decision-making processes
- Priority groups have increased success when applying for grants and accessing council facilities
- Priority groups have increased participation in employment and skill development programs in Merri-bek
- Increased numbers of suppliers from priority groups provide services and products to Merri-bek council
- More people from priority groups access council services, programs and events

Policy Goals

The policy will protect and promote human rights by aiming for three goals:



Moreland Human Rights Policy 2016 – 2026: One Community, Proudly Diverse



Ambitious:

Develop a youth film project

For councils that have existing anti-racism strategies, have reviewed their strategies and have undertaken substantial structural and organisational change, councils may then implement community-based anti-racism initiatives.

A recommended initiative is a Youth Film Project. For this project to be successful it is essential that young people are centred as the creators of art and the authors of anti-racism narratives, rather than its object. Working in partnership with representative organisations and professional artists, this project will engage First Nations young people and young people of colour to create films about their lived experience within the community. These films can then be shown via social media and in a variety of local settings, including council-run sites such as libraries. The Youth Film Project will support increased positive representation of young people, understanding and empathy and provide a starting point for genuine and respectful dialogue.



How-to guide to:

Develop a youth film project

Involving stakeholders and young people

Engage at least 2 partner organisations and develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the project. This may include your local ethnic communities' council, a Migrant Resource Centre, Multicultural Arts Victoria or the Centre for Multicultural Youth. Some funding should be allocated to partners' staff time.

Engage at least 1 professional film maker who can support the project. This will include undertaking film-making workshops with young people, supporting young people to develop their ideas and skills, and working with young people to edit their films. Wherever possible engage a First Nations film

maker or a film maker who is a person of colour. If this is not possible, engage guest speakers who are First Nations and people of colour (with a budget for their time and travel).

Engage at least 1 professional with anti-racism project and research expertise. This may be a local partner organisation or if your local partners do not have this expertise, they may recommend an appropriate organisation.

Potential partner organisations to include:

- [Multicultural Arts Victoria](#)
- [Centre for Multicultural Youth](#)
- [Creatives of Colour](#)
- [Cinespace](#)
- [Regional Victorians of Colour](#)
- [Democracy in Colour](#)
- [The Willin Centre](#)
- [Koorie Heritage Trust](#)



Plan

Establish a project working group. Set a budget and timeframe. A budget of around \$70,000 is recommended, with a 1 year timeframe. Some of this budget might be in-kind in the form of a council staff member's time.

Develop a project plan and an evaluation plan, and include a program logic.



Design & Deliver

Engage 8–12 young people aged 15–25 from diverse backgrounds (within the cohort of First Nations and people of colour) who are interested in film-making.

Undertake a series of film-making and anti-racism workshops with this group of young people. Films should be between 2 and 4 minutes in length and shot on smartphones. Within these parameters, young people should be supported to direct and produce their films in a variety of ways, expressing their own artistic visions.

Provide one-on-one support and warm referrals as needed.

Lend smartphones/devices to young people who don't have access to their own, along with additional equipment to help improve quality (e.g. microphones and lighting).

Plan a graduation ceremony and launch party for film makers. Include a meal, invitations to young people's friends and families, 1 or 2 guest speakers and certificates of completion.



Review and embed

Implement the evaluation plan, review the learnings from the project and consider if and how the project can be embedded into council long term.



Case study

Youth Film Projects:

- Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services' Multicultural Youth Project – watch films '[The White Nile](#)' by Atong and '[Ali Saeedi's Film](#)'.
- Read about Cinespace and Multicultural Arts Victoria's [Smartphone Stories Project](#), and watch their films '[Shadreck](#)' and '[Milka's Story](#)'.
- Read about [Youth Misinterpreted's](#) work through ACMI.

LGBTIQA+ inclusion

This activity builds on a proud history in Victoria of local government engaging young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and asexual (LGBTIQA+) ¹⁰ people. This includes those young people questioning, as well as gender diverse and non-binary young people who challenge traditional thinking of gender as being only men and women. Promisingly, LGBTIQA+ inclusion work is now emerging as a part of everyday council business, particularly when working with young people.¹¹

The number and creativity of LGBTIQA+ inclusion initiatives are growing, and this is critical to addressing the inequalities young LGBTIQA+ people experience. A survey of young LGBTQA+ Victorians¹² identified: 41.7% experienced verbal harassment in the 12 months prior to survey; 81% had experienced high or very high levels of psychological stress; 24% had attempted suicide; 58.2% had seriously considered attempting suicide in the previous 12 months; and 24% had experienced homelessness.

Building on their foundation of engaging, supporting and including local young people, councils are in a unique and ideal position to lead communities in creating safe, supportive, welcoming and inclusive communities for young LGBTIQA+ people.

Quite simply, this work changes and saves lives.

Hot tip!

At the time of writing, young people and those who work with them often use the LGBTIQA+ acronym to acknowledge and include more identities and experiences of young people's sex, sexuality and gender than LGBTI or LGBTIQ. It's important to note that this language is constantly evolving and is best checked with relevant sources and community.



10. For a useful guide to LGBTIQA+ language, see: www.vic.gov.au/inclusive-language-guide

11. For many good examples of this work, see: www.vlga.org.au/resources/vlga-rainbow-resource-victorian-councils

12. See: Writing Themselves In 4: The Health and Wellbeing of LGBTQA+ Young People in Australia



Quick win: *Assess Rainbow Readiness*

The Rainbow Ready audit (part of the [Rainbow Ready roadmap](#))¹³ will provide a useful approach for councils to identify their achievements and gaps related to the inclusion of young LGBTIQ+ people.

The audit is based around an overarching principle and 20 indicators that assesses opportunities to identify and strengthen achievements and incorporate LGBTIQ+ inclusion in council plans, policies and procedures, as well as services and facilities. Council can then use this completed work as a catalyst for a community conversation promoting inclusion.



Plan

Allocate a staff member who will lead this project and assemble an internal working group to complete the Rainbow Ready audit. The audit should involve staff members and decision-makers from across council, including LGBTIQ+ staff members.



Assess

Council should complete the Rainbow Ready audit. It includes:

- the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ young people in plans for a broad range of council services and programs and commitment of council support and resources
- the use of LGBTIQ+ inclusive language
- accessibility of amenities, facilities, services and spaces for young LGBTIQ+ people
- LGBTIQ+ inclusion work already being undertaken
- visible signs of LGBTIQ+ support by council.

Council should conduct a survey of staff that assesses their awareness of the experiences and needs of young LGBTIQ+ people, their competence and confidence in working with them, and their training and information needs.

Share your findings

Provide a presentation and report to your executive team and councillors about the Rainbow Ready roadmap audit and survey. Additionally, present information on why the focus on young LGBTIQ+ people is necessary and the expected benefits.

Share the results of the Rainbow Ready audit and survey with staff with young people engaged with council services and programs. Where possible, share these results with local LGBTIQ+ people, council groups and projects.



Deliver

Work with local young people, services and schools to plan a forum focusing on local LGBTIQ+ inclusion for young people. Choose a date significant to the LGBTIQ+ community, such as International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersexism and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT)¹⁴ or Wear It Purple Day¹⁵ (held respectively in May and August each year).

At your forum focusing on local LGBTIQ+ inclusion for young people, you could include planning for a community safety campaign (for example, an arts-based project).



Review and embed

Review and consolidate findings from your forum and the Rainbow Ready audit to highlight the key gaps in the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people and the key actions you will take.

Communicate learnings and actions from the forum to the council executive team and staff, and the broader community.

¹³. [The Rainbow Ready Roadmap](#)

¹⁴. IDAHOBIT: www.idahobit.org.au/

¹⁵. Wear It Purple Day: www.wearitpurple.org/

Rainbow Ready roadmap Audit – Local Government

The Victorian Government currently has a Rainbow Ready roadmap (RRR Map)¹⁶ under development to support the development of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and asexual (LGBTIQA+) inclusion in regional and rural Victoria. The RRR Map will include a user guide, a guide to core elements of LGBTIQA+ inclusivity, and guides for a range of settings, including local government.

The local government guide includes an overarching principle and 20 indicators that the principle has been achieved. They have been adapted below to focus on LGBTIQA+ young people.

Principle

Local government demonstrates leadership in LGBTIQA+ inclusivity to address the needs of young LGBTIQA+ constituents and to build a culture of LGBTIQA+ inclusivity in their municipality.

Indicators

1. The council's statement of commitment to the inclusion of young LGBTIQA+ is publicly available
2. The council has a plan for the inclusion of young LGBTIQA+ people that is resourced, implemented and evaluated
3. Young LGBTIQA+ people participate in council committees and in council planning
4. The council advocates for young LGBTIQA+ people
5. Council information incorporates images of young LGBTIQA+ people and LGBTIQA+ inclusive language
6. Bookings and assessment processes are inclusive of young LGBTIQA+ people
7. Groups and services for young LGBTIQA+ are supported to access council amenities and spaces
8. Council grants are provided to support young LGBTIQA+ people's initiatives
9. The council library includes LGBTIQA+ collections, events and exhibitions relevant to young LGBTIQA+ people
10. The council provides All Gender Toilet options for young LGBTIQA+ people
11. The council identifies and minimises potential risks to the safety of young LGBTIQA+ people
12. The council has a process for responding to LGBTIQA+ phobic incidents to support young LGBTIQA+ people and prevent reoccurrence
13. The council educates its staff and volunteers on the inclusion of young LGBTIQA+ people
14. The council provides an inclusive workplace for LGBTIQA+ employees and volunteers
15. The council communicates its initiatives for young LGBTIQA+ people to the community
16. The council supports local LGBTIQA+ events for and by young LGBTIQA+ people
17. The council takes opportunities to fly the Rainbow Flag
18. The council's website includes links to its initiatives for young LGBTIQA+ people and resources to support young LGBTIQA+ people
19. The council's social media platforms profile initiatives and events for young LGBTIQA+ people
20. The council reviews progress against these indicators to monitor progress and plan further improvements

16. Engage Victoria: <https://engage.vic.gov.au/>



Step up:

Establish an LGBTIQ+ young people's advisory group

Council should work with its networks, and partner services and organisations, to identify local LGBTIQ+ young people and establish an LGBTIQ+ young people's advisory group or ensure existing youth advisory groups are LGBTIQ+ inclusive.

This group can work with council to: review the findings of the council's Rainbow Ready audit (with a particular focus on LGBTIQ+ young people); share their stories with council's executive team and councillors, and design strategies to address gaps in the audit.



How-to guide to:

Establish an LGBTIQ+ young people's advisory group



Design

Develop Terms of Reference and an Expression of Interest procedure for an LGBTIQ+ young people's advisory group and designate an executive or councillor who could sponsor the work and attend meetings. Ideally, this will involve remunerating young people for their time.

Reach out through council networks and partner services and organisations to identify local LGBTIQ+ people, and those supporting young LGBTIQ+ people, to call for Expressions of Interest. If council has completed the Rainbow Ready roadmap audit, this could be ideal to promote and recruit members for the advisory group.

Crossover opportunity

Make sure that your young person's advisory group is intersectional; that the young folks are not only LGBTIQ+ but may also have other identities that may impact on their experience of health or discrimination. These might be diversities such as race, ethnicity, language, religion, class, socioeconomic status, ability or age. This way you can also tap into and interconnect to advice on best ways to tackle interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage for LGBTIQ+ young people.

Refer to the *Leading the Way – Engaging young voices for change foundation module* for guidance on how to engage young people meaningfully.

Deliver & Embed

Publicly welcome and encourage young LGBTIQ+ people to become involved with the advisory group. Also encourage young people identifying as LGBTIQ+ allies to apply, but ensure they do not make up more than 50% of the group.

Select and convene your advisory group.

Work with your LGBTIQ+ Young People's Advisory Group to:

- get feedback on council's Rainbow Ready audit
- share their stories with council's executive team, councillors and staff
- design local LGBTIQ+ inclusion efforts, such as an IDAHOBIT event.

Hot tip!

Guide for ensuring LGBTIQ+ inclusion in existing groups for young people

Share the results of the Rainbow Ready audit and staff survey with young people engaged with council services and programs. Where possible, these results should also be shared with any local LGBTIQ+ people, groups and projects.

Present the experiences and safety of LGBTIQ+ young people (using research evidence from the Writing Themselves In 4 report and resources from Minus18). Young people and workers can compare and contrast these experiences with their local experiences, and better understand the importance of LGBTIQ+ safety and LGBTIQ+ allies.

Council could, if it hasn't already, work with these young people and other partners to conduct a forum focusing on local LGBTIQ+ inclusion for young people.



Ambitious:

Develop an LGBTIQA+ young people's inclusion action plan

Once you have completed a Rainbow Ready audit in consultation with LGBTIQA+ young people, you can develop an action plan to address the inequalities young LGBTIQA+ people face and build a more safe, supportive, welcoming and inclusive community.

The plan should address the indicators of a Rainbow Ready Local Government. When these have been achieved, launch and promote the plan in partnership with young LGBTIQA+ people. You can make a significant step in local LGBTIQA+ inclusion for young people by creating a young people-led community inclusion campaign.

1. Develop an LGBTIQA+ young people's inclusion action plan

Work with the LGBTIQA+ Young People's Advisory Group to develop an LGBTIQA+ Young People's Inclusion Action Plan that is clearly linked to council plans, particularly the Council Plan and the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan.

Ensure the Action Plan:

- promotes the inclusion of young LGBTIQA+ people in council committees and planning
- ensures all key staff and volunteers undertake LGBTIQA+ inclusion training and professional development, assisted by local young LGBTIQA+ people
- ensures that services, facilities, amenities and spaces are accessible for young LGBTIQA+ people
- develops a statement of commitment to LGBTIQA+ inclusion that is publicly available
- partners with LGBTIQA+ people of all ages for an IDAHOBIT event that includes Rainbow Flag Raising and listening to local LGBTIQA+ stories (see [Ballarat City Council](#))
- identifies and minimises potential risks to the safety of young LGBTIQA+ people.

Resource, implement and evaluate your LGBTIQA+ Inclusion Action Plan.

Partner with LGBTIQA+ people of all ages to launch the Action Plan, ideally on a date significant to the LGBTIQA+ community. Include council progress and outcomes delivered through the Action Plan to LGBTIQA+ young people and the wider community.

2. Create a community 'Signs of LGBTIQA+ Hope' campaign

Assemble a project team of young LGBTIQA+ people, young allies and partners to work on a local campaign to communicate signs of local LGBTIQA+ hope across the community.

Support the project team to develop a project name, key messages and outcomes for their local campaign to let local LGBTIQA+ young people know that they are safe, supported, welcome and included.

Facilitate the project team in delivering the campaign, with young people involved, engaged and driving the project every step of the way.

Case study

Swan Hill Equilibrium project

Swan Hill's Equilibrium¹⁷ project recruited key people from across the community, including community leaders, faith leaders, sports people, community services people, CEOs, business owners and prominent personalities, to commit to a pledge of welcome and inclusion for young LGBTIQA+ people. These 100 local faces were displayed on the most prominent wall in town for a few months.

Along with community information sessions, stories were shared through local and social media, creating meaningful conversations.

Recommended resources

- VLGA (Victorian Local Governance Association) – [Rainbow Resource for Victorian Councils](#)
- La Trobe University – [Writing Themselves In 4 report](#)
- [Rainbow Ready roadmap](#) User Guide
- [Rainbow Local Government](#)



17. Equilibrium Swan Hill: <https://eatmovesmile.shdh.org.au/post/170022993727/equilibrium-project>

Gender equality

Councils now have a duty to ensure positive action to advance gender equality in day-to-day work, including ongoing delivery of policies, programs and services.¹⁸ In addition, the Victorian Auditor-General's 2020 report found councils need to do more to prevent sexual harassment, which is occurring in every Victorian council.¹⁹

This section provides 4 activities that will equip councils to embed and demonstrate their own commitment to leading, modelling and promoting gender equality internally, and then support them to work externally with local communities and organisations engaging with children, young people and families.

The quick win action shows you how to frame your messages about gender equality using values that people connect with. It provides practical advice on writing persuasive messages and communicating effectively with staff and your communities engaging with children and young people. An additional quick win action has been introduced for councils who would like to strengthen the early years focus of their Gender Equality Action Plan.

The step up action engages council staff in modelling respectful workplaces by supporting them in how to take action against sexism and sexual harassment, with a particular focus on teams comprising, or working with, children and young people. The campaign equips staff with active bystander techniques to intervene against sexism or sexual harassment that they witness.

Tested and trialled to ensure its effectiveness at influencing positive bystander behaviour, the campaign includes key messages and 5 email templates that can be tailored to specific council settings.

Outdated assumptions based on gender often limit the leadership options of women and girls. In workplaces, many employers overlook women for senior roles and there is more pressure on women to take on unpaid care work than men, creating an additional barrier to workplace participation. The ambitious one activity focuses on how your council can build leadership aspirations and skills in young women and girls aged 15–20 across your community, particularly those from diverse backgrounds who may face intersecting forms of discrimination.



18. Required by public sector entities under the Gender Equality Act 2020, see Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector details: www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/what-are-my-obligations

19. Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2020) Sexual Harassment in Local Government



Quick win:

Embed values-based messaging and proactive communications about gender equality across council

Values-based messaging is an approach that involves engaging people's deeply held values to motivate understanding and action. Using a narrative framework that conveys a vision, the barrier (or problem) and action (the solution or what needs to change), you can design communications that are more relatable and persuasive.

Because advancing gender equality requires change to systems and established ways of working, it can be resisted by some. If there is a push to implement such change without explaining why, then resistance can intensify. People need to understand why the work is important – and this includes council staff and the broader community. Use this approach with communications to young people and organisations that work with them, as well as across council.



How-to guide to:

Embed values-based messaging and proactive communications about gender equality across council



Plan

Allocate a staff member or team to lead values-based messaging and proactive communication about gender equality across council.

Your council may already be doing work under the [Gender Equality Act 2020](#) to promote communications and initiatives for gender equality. Review any current or ongoing initiatives that this messaging activity can be tied into.

Pick a topic or area of interest to promote gender equality – this topic should resonate with the needs and priorities of your council. An example might be to make sport clubs more inclusive of young women and girls.

Develop a project and a communications plan to support the delivery of this activity.



Design

Use values to explain why this work matters. Review VicHealth's Framing gender equality message guide to help you understand the key principles of values-based messaging and how to appropriately use it for driving change for gender equality.

While evidence and data can back up your messages, people connect more with the values of social change. Values like justice, equality, fairness, belonging, safety, opportunity. Values-based messaging involves engaging people's deeply held values to motivate understanding and action. Use a story framework that conveys a vision, the barrier (or problem) and action (the solution or what needs to change). A brief example is provided below.

Story using the vision/barrier/action framework for gender impact assessments

Vision

We want our council policies and programs designed to make things better for our community.

Barrier

Just like a lack of change rooms can make women athletes feel unwelcome at sporting clubs, our policies need to address the barriers that can block and exclude people from participating.

Young women, girls and gender diverse young people may have less access to resources, opportunities or decision-making, which means their needs can be overlooked in policies and programs. We need to play a lead role in supporting more equal treatment and valuing of these groups in sport, workplaces, education and other spheres of public and private life.

Action

Our gender impact assessments put a focus on women, girls and gender diverse young people to include their perspectives in our decision-making processes.

Gender impact assessments are a way of critically thinking about how policies, programs and services will meet the different needs of young people, those who are gender diverse, and women and men.

Applying a gender lens to our policies creates better and fairer outcomes and means no one gets left behind.

Deliver

Great communication is more than a one-way broadcast or announcement. Choose at least 3 channels for this campaign, using a mix of methods.

Inform and inspire

Inspiring communications are best delivered personally (face-to-face or video conference) and include testimonials or transformational stories, allies and role models, and visual storytelling; they also celebrate progress. For example, show how your gender impact assessment has created positive change. Use direct email messages, social media posts, website/intranet news and posters.

Listen and respond

To be persuasive, and to help explain the various initiatives that will contribute to gender equality,

create opportunities to listen to feedback and answer questions. Example channels include manager dialogue with staff, Q&A sessions with leaders or spokespeople (face-to-face, video conference or via social platforms), and moderating and responding to comments on group chats or social media posts.

Reach out to organisations working with young people

Once you've refined your messages within council, extend your campaign to organisations working with young people. Consider how to work with, fund or support relevant stakeholders to show them how to use values-based messaging when working with young people. This will extend your reach and also equip young people with key messages that help build support for and advance gender equality.

Hot tip!

Be prepared for resistance

Gender equality work can feel new and challenging to people who haven't encountered it previously. They may not have noticed problems with the current state or might reject the reasons for action ('That's not a priority right now'; 'We tried that and it didn't work'; 'Gender equality is not an issue in our workplace').

Clear, sustained communications are needed to counter resistance to gender equality – including opportunities for questions to be raised and answered, with leaders prepared to patiently build understanding.

To prepare and pre-empt push-back and questions, organise a workshop with allies to plan responses in advance, and to brief leaders so they are ready to respond clearly to questions, which allows more people to get on board. Drawing on the resources listed below, rehearsing how you will respond to anticipated concerns is a great way to set your communications up for success.



Review and embed

Monitor the following in order to assess what's worked well and what needs adjustment for future communications. Remember that persistence and repetition of messaging is needed.

- Reach – open rates of emails; views of intranet or website pages (benchmarked against other news items/pages); number of questions or attendees at events.
- Comments, feedback and the tone of these.
- Feedback from leaders/spokespeople (and comments they received).
- Classify resistance or push-back and monitor it over time to show progress.

Recommended resources

- VicHealth's [Framing gender equality message guide](#) (pages 12, 13 and 15 for more examples of messages using the vision/barrier/action framework to communicate your gender equality work)
- [\(En\)countering resistance Strategies to respond to resistance to gender equality initiatives](#)
- VicHealth's [Framing masculinity message guide](#) (see page 13 for values- based messaging that addresses masculine stereotypes with compassion)



Quick win:

Incorporate an early childhood focus in a council's Gender Equality Action Plan

The Victorian [Gender Equality Act 2020](#) aims to improve gender equality in Victorian workplaces and the wider community. It requires councils to implement a [Gender Equality Action Plan \(GEAP\)](#), and consider and promote gender equality in their policies, programs and services.

To implement this quick win action, councils will identify strategies to increase the focus on early childhood needs in their GEAPs, particularly as they begin planning to review and evolve first iterations of the plans.

Children's understanding of gender is influenced and reinforced in the earliest years of their life. Children's interactions and experiences with family, early childhood services, their community, and the media, culture and environment can all shape children's developing understanding of gender, and play a role in challenging or reinforcing gender norms and stereotypes.

If children absorb gender stereotypes, this can influence their attitudes and expectations throughout their lives and directly influence their participation in activities, such as sports, problem solving, arts and craft, cooking, caring and nurturing, leading to long-term impacts on their development, health and wellbeing. In the long-term, gender inequality is a significant driver of violence against women and children.

Promoting gender equity in families and parenting in the early years of children's lives can improve family functioning and wellbeing, and help prevent violence against women and children.

Incorporating an early childhood focus in a council's GEAP will help bolster actions needed to support early childhood services to promote gender equity, helping to promote long-term benefits for children's health and wellbeing.



How-to guide to:

Incorporate an early childhood focus in a council's GEAP

Most council GEAPs strive to improve workplace gender equality. They exist as mainly internal-facing documents that outline important strategies focused on workplace systems, capability and culture, which enable councils to implement meaningful change.

There is an opportunity for council, both within the next iteration of their GEAP and through public-facing documents, to further entrench a sense of proud and inclusive community in their local area by incorporating an early childhood focus. By doing this, council will play a pivotal role in promoting gender

equity and preventing violence against women and children, and will be at the forefront of societal change through the services it delivers.

There are opportunities to promote gender equity with an early childhood lens across the wide range of council responsibilities, including maternal and child health, early childhood education, cultural and arts activities, the management of libraries and sporting grounds, and through organisational policies and procedures.

Involving people

Involving families with young children

It is important to involve local families with young children in the development of a next generation GEAP, with an explicit focus on early childhood opportunities. Being involved in the co-design of the GEAP will support families to feel valued and empowered, and increase confidence that the plan reflects local needs.

Engaging and informing families about inclusive practices and the importance of embedding gender equity at an early age will mean that any actions delivered and promoted through council can be reinforced and strengthened in the home.

As part of stakeholder engagement for the GEAP, hold information sessions or workshops for families in your council area to engage them in gender equity discussions and bring them on board with the plan. This is an opportunity to talk about the impact of stereotypes and to do an activity with their children that promotes gender equality.



Plan

Consider separating your next council GEAP into two sections: one organisational-facing section anchored in issues focused on council people, work and culture; and another public-facing section. This public facing section could include the early childhood focus.

Although not part of this quick win action, the early childhood focus could be a component of a life-course approach to gender equity, outlining how council is committed to prioritising gender equity at all life stages, including early childhood, school years and youth transition, family formation and prime years. By taking this approach, council can develop strategies to promote gender equality, and prevent family violence and violence against women and children, including strategies that consider risk factors for individuals that are associated with different stages of life.

If council time and resources allow, it will be useful to set up a working group to progress the public-facing components of the GEAP, including the focus on early childhood services. This group should reflect the diversity of council, and the young people and families that will benefit from a GEAP. This group should have clear terms of reference or an equivalent document, which outlines its purpose, roles and responsibilities, and to whom the group is accountable.

As part of developing its public-facing GEAP, council should commit to an annual action plan focused on gender equity in early childhood, with roles, responsibilities and budget allocated accordingly.

Recommended resources

The Victorian Government and the [Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector](#) have an online resource that supports the development of GEAPs. Council may wish to adopt the advice applicable to developing a GEAP with a focus on early childhood.

This advice discussed the importance of:

- clearly articulating how council has considered the gender equality principles in the Act in preparing your GEAP with an early childhood focus
- including a statement that explicitly sets out council's commitment to the gender equality principles in early childhood settings
- outlining the business case for gender equality in a way that is relevant to early childhood settings, including a clear explanation of why gender equality is important
- demonstrating how an early-childhood focus in the GEAP will complements existing organisational strategies and measures
- showcasing a history of gender equality work to date in early childhood services within council, with a note on emerging practice research that has informed strategies or measures
- assigning clear accountabilities and timelines to each strategy and measure.

Assess

Assess and review the current council GEAP and determine the best approach for including an early childhood gender-equity focus in an updated version. Review public-facing documents on gender equity and associated topics from other councils, to ascertain potential areas for improvement or opportunities for collaboration.

Incorporate a gender impact assessment process from the earliest stages of design and development of the early childhood-focused section of the GEAP.

Recommended resources

Women's Health in the North has developed [Promoting Women's Health, Safety and Wellbeing in Health Plans](#), a useful resource on applying a gendered lens to municipal public health planning.

See also the [City of Darebin's Creating Gender Equity in the Early Years: A Resource for Local Government](#).

Design

Design an early childhood focus for council's GEAP by highlighting the need for community education to raise awareness of gender equity and the link to violence against women and children.

Design the section of GEAP focusing on early childhood to:

- support support uptake and delivery of respectful relationships education in early childhood education settings
- enable the delivery of activities like *Baby Makes 3*, a respectful relationships and gender equity program for first time parents
- include strategies to strengthen gender equity in council's early childhood services and facilities, including conducting gender-equity audits of services
- include a gender impact assessment of policies, programs and services that are new or up for review and have a direct and significant impact on the public. Concentrate specifically on early childhood settings and services
- promote gender equity through sports and recreation, and arts and culture programs that are targeted to families with young children
- promote local women in history, including recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in places of significant cultural heritage, and in places where families with young children gather
- develop and promote case studies of gender-equity work being achieved early in early childhood settings
- require an annual action plan with roles, responsibilities and budget allocated accordingly
- require a report on the annual action plan provided to council prior to the budget process each year
- ensure progress on strategy implementation is included annually in council's Annual Report.

Crossover opportunity

A strategic action in the GEAP could be to strengthen gender equity and family-inclusive practice across council services. See the how-to-guide for this action in the [Addressing social determinants of mental wellbeing](#) impact stream.

Case study

Baby Makes 3 group program for first-time parents

Delivering the [Baby Makes 3](#) program is an action that may be included in councils' GEAPs to help increase gender equality for parents and carers in early childhood.

All families and their children have the right to live a happy, safe and healthy life. However, many parents find themselves in unequal parenting roles, which are predetermined by their gender and reinforced by social norms and expectations. These outdated expectations are often inadvertently reinforced by early childhood services that work directly with parents.

Baby Makes 3 is a unique, evidence-based health promotion and social change initiative developed by healthAbility. It builds understanding, appreciation and mutual respect among first-time parents to foster equal and healthy relationships that optimise collaborative co-parenting of babies and young children.

There are three components in the initiative, including:

- a group-based program for first-time parents promoting equal co-parenting
- capacity-building approaches with antenatal and postnatal service providers, including local government maternal and child health services (see Case study 2)
- advocacy activities that promote gender equality across society.

Baby Makes 3 outcomes directly align with multiple local government priority areas including:

- gender equality
- mental health and wellbeing
- the prevention of violence against women and other forms of family violence
- development outcomes for children (social, health, education)
- community health and wellbeing
- community safety.

What started in 2009 as a VicHealth-supported pilot program in one local government area has thrived to become a state-wide initiative working with 35 Victorian local government areas.

A core component of *Baby Makes 3* is a three-week (3 x 2 hours) program for first-time parents that focuses on maintaining equal and respectful

relationships after the arrival of a baby. Parents attend three evening or weekend sessions with their babies, with 6–12 other families. The program is run jointly by a male and female facilitator, who have successfully completed healthAbility's facilitator training. Ideally, the group program is integrated into existing first-time parents' programs that are delivered by local maternal and child health services.

The parent group program helps prepare participants for the transition to parenthood by:

- having a specific focus on relationship equality
- increasing the knowledge and skills of the group to challenge outdated and potentially damaging gendered stereotypes and expectations of parenting
- encouraging parents to be equally active and responsible for parenting and housework.

The program can be tailored to the needs of your community, in consultation with healthAbility. *Baby Makes 3* recognises the diversity of Victorian families and the importance of cultural safety. Supporting families from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse, rainbow and regional communities, through direct engagement and program co-design is a central focus of *Baby Makes 3*.

A partnership with healthAbility provides participating local governments with access to *Baby Makes 3* resources and support, including training for facilitators and early childhood staff, as well as guidance on program monitoring, evaluation and ongoing quality control.

Broader organisational capacity-building activities that focus on embedding gender equality into practice and organisational systems is an additional component of *Baby Makes 3* (see second case study on *Baby Makes 3* in the 'Strengthen gender-equity and family-inclusive practice across council services' action in the Addressing social determinants of mental wellbeing impact stream).

For more information about support for your council, visit *Baby Makes 3* or [email healthAbility](#).





Step up: *Address sexist and sexually harassing behaviours in the workplace by empowering bystanders*

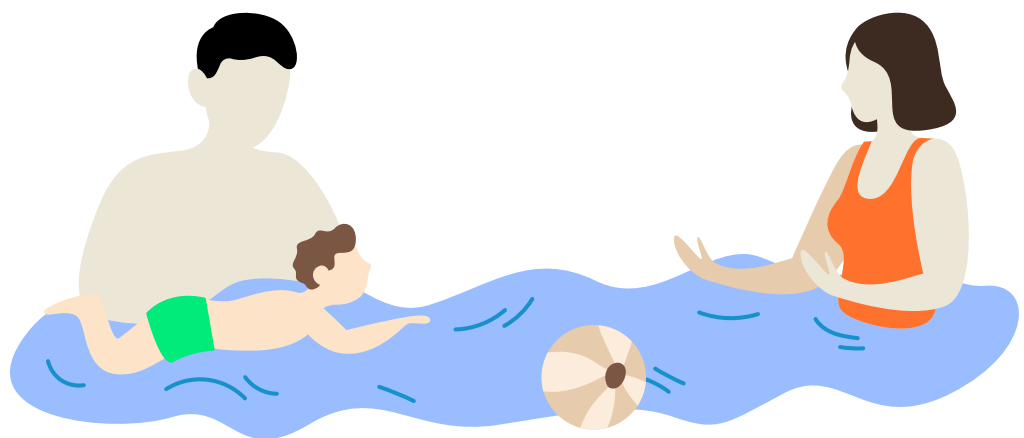
In a 2020 survey by the Victorian Auditor-General of more than 9,500 local government staff, 28% reported experiencing sexual harassment at a council in the last 12 months.²⁰ Empowering witnesses, or people who hear about this bad behaviour, to take action and support their colleagues, helps ensure that everyone feels safe at work.

When bystanders intervene, they can support the target emotionally, discourage the perpetrator from behaving this way again, and reinforce a workplace/community culture of respect and accountability.

Some people are at greater risk of being targeted: young people, women and LGBTIQ+ people. The Victorian Auditor-General's survey found 42% of female respondents aged 18–34 years and 48% of LGBTIQ+ respondents had experienced sexual harassment in the past year.

Developing an active bystander culture within your council and its services – particularly those working with children and young people – puts a priority on staff/participant safety and reduces the burden on the person targeted. This activity includes messaging and resources, and a template for an email campaign that can be rolled out to staff.

To be successful this activity needs proactive communications and role modelling from leaders, and their statements should acknowledge the harm of sexual harassment and the actions everyone can take to support anyone targeted. A sexual harassment policy, and a reporting mechanism (including anonymous reporting) needs to be clear and easy-to-find prior to commencement.



20. Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2020) Sexual Harassment in Local Government



How-to guide to:

Address sexist and sexually harassing behaviours in the workplace by empowering bystanders

Hot tip!

Be clear with your purpose

To be taken seriously, and to engage people on an uncomfortable topic, you need to be clear on your rationale. Here's a start:

- We all want to feel safe and be safe at work so we can achieve our potential. Reducing workplace sexism and sexual harassment can deliver safer, more productive environments, and secure more diverse opportunities and equal treatment of women.
- The secrecy, prevalence and serious harm of sexual harassment in the workplace and in public life is no laughing matter. Sexist jokes and verbal and physical forms of sexual harassment can make people feel humiliated and intimidated, and unsafe in their place of work. Ignoring or minimising disrespectful behaviour allows it to thrive and can lead to physical forms of abuse and sexual harassment.
- Bystanders who take action against sexism and sexual harassment can be an influential front line of response and support for colleagues and community members. They might choose to give a disapproving look, speak out, show support for the target of the harassment or report the behaviour – but we want them to feel empowered to do something to show this bad behaviour is not on. See: 'The ladder of active bystanding' on page 4 of VicHealth's [Take Action](#) resource.



Plan

Allocate a staff member or team to lead the bystander action campaign. Assembling a cross-organisation team can support the work and guide the bystander action. Ensure that staff from the people and culture and communications teams are represented on the working group. Help all members get clear on the messages outlined in the Hot Tip! above, so they can advocate and build support for the activity within their own teams and spheres of influence.

Focus on engagement with council teams who work with children and young people and/or have staff under 34 years of age (remember, young people, women and LGBTIQ+ people are more likely to be targets of harassment). For example, involve sport and recreation teams, child and youth services, or reach out to leisure centre operators.

Develop a project plan and a communications plan with input from the cross-organisation team to support the bystander action campaign.



Assess

Gather benchmarking data on the number of reports of sexual harassment over subsequent years and analyse for any trends. Customer-facing staff are more likely to experience sexual harassment from members of the public, so include leisure centres, libraries, childcare and youth centres and other council-run public facilities in your review of data. Some of this data will be collected as part of the workplace gender audit required under the [Gender Equality Act 2020](#).

Look at language – if the reporting process uses formal, legal language ('Have you witnessed sexual harassment?') this may influence low reporting. Describing behaviours common to sexual harassment is proven as more effective. Use descriptive questions such as 'Have you witnessed or experienced a sexist joke?' or 'Have you witnessed or experienced inappropriate physical contact?'. (See the VicHealth's [Take Action](#) resource.)

Look at employee retention by gender – and take note of trends or turnover hotspots (some of this data will be in your mandated workplace gender audit). This can be a useful comparative measure as part of your evaluation – for example, has turnover reduced as a result of bystander interventions and greater organisational support for preventing harassment?

Draw on data from annual staff surveys such as the 'People Matter Survey' to understand the experiences and prevalence of sexually harassing behaviours in your workplace.

Draw on existing data on social norms which can be persuasive in encouraging bystanders to act (for Victorian data see this [VicHealth research](#)). When we highlight social norms stating that the majority of individuals approve of taking action in response to inappropriate behaviours, research has shown this leads to increased action by bystanders.²¹

If your council has the capacity to do further surveying of staff beyond the personal safety survey, this [Bystander behavioural survey tool for universities](#) provides good example questions about intentions to take action when people witness sexism or harassing behaviour that can be tailored to your own surveys (see questions 29 to 32).

Review current systems for reporting sexism and sexual harassment

Review internal council policies and systems in place to respond to reports of sexism and sexual harassment and to deal with perpetrators and support both targets and bystanders. The key policies include but are not limited to:

- a clear, visible sexism and sexual harassment policy
- an effective and confidential reporting process
- metrics to track sexist and sexually harassing behaviours, and bystander action.



Design

Building knowledge of how harmful sexually harassing behaviour is to those targeted, is one of the most effective ways to persuade bystanders to take action. When designing the bystander campaign ensure the following:

- Messages from leaders are authentic – people easily spot 'box-ticking' and lack of understanding. Use shared values to connect: the right to safety, respect, to be able to contribute equally and be included at work (all are undermined by sexism and sexual harassment). See example messaging below.
- Show people a range of ways bystanders can respond – a disapproving look, an eye roll or a light-hearted comment to stop the interaction – to increase their confidence to act.
- Emphasise desired behaviours (for example, 'The vast majority of staff say they will speak up if they hear an inappropriate sexual comment'). Don't inadvertently advertise the behaviour we don't want (for example, by saying 'Sexist jokes are a huge problem in every department').

21. VicHealth and the Behavioural Insights Team (2019). Take action: Empowering bystanders to act on sexist and sexually harassing behaviours.

Example: Story for sexual harassment prevention at work

Vision

We all want to feel and be safe at work. And we want the people we work with to feel and be safe too.

Barrier

While sexual harassment is against the law, it happens in too many workplaces. Young people are often the targets of this harmful behaviour, and some fear they won't be believed or supported if they speak up.

Action

Most people think it's important to take action against sexism and sexual harassment and would intervene to support someone who is being targeted.

When witnesses and bystanders speak up if someone steps out of line, it takes the burden away from those targeted. Backed by leaders who take action if anyone harasses, harms, or disrespects others, it makes clear what respectful workplaces look like and the standards of behaviour expected.

With clearer ways to report sexual harassment and a culture that backs people up if they intervene, we can all feel safe at work.

Deliver

Communications campaign

VicHealth and the Behavioural Insights Team have developed an email toolkit with 5 templates that can easily be adapted to your workplace and emailed to staff. They were trialled in the university setting and had a proven impact on the number of bystanders prepared to take action.

Ideally these personalised emails should be sent to staff 1 week apart, to allow time for them to be read and reflected on, and to avoid staff feeling overwhelmed by emails on a sensitive topic. Tailor the content to your people and co-design emails with a sample group of recipients, including men.

Highlighting social norms in the message is a persuasive way to encourage more people to be active bystanders, by stating that the majority of individuals approve of taking action in response to inappropriate behaviours. Research by Our Watch shows 79% of Australians want practical tips about ways to safely intervene when witnessing disrespect towards women and girls.²² VicHealth

research shows Victorians are most likely to take bystander action when they believe they will have strong support for such action from their peers and colleagues, community or organisation.

Further email tips are in the Take Action guide. The email templates cover the following:

- Email 1 is an introductory email (about sexism and sexual harassment)
- Email 2 is about sexual comments or jokes (sexual harassment)
- Email 3 is about making assumptions about career interests based on gender (sexism)
- Email 4 is about treating colleagues differently because of gender (sexism)
- Email 5 is about asking intrusive or offensive questions about colleagues' private life or physical appearance (sexual harassment).

22. Our Watch (2015) Bystander research snapshot

Review and embed

Sexual harassment is an uncomfortable topic and you should expect and prepare for a range of responses. Feedback helps you adapt and refine the campaign to improve its effectiveness.

Look for negative reactions to the email campaign Push-back and resistance are common – if people haven't personally seen any problems, they can reject or deny that it's happening. Record staff reactions and feedback to ensure management and HR are aware and have appropriate responses prepared. VicHealth has created a guide to prepare for and respond to resistance to gender equality initiatives should this arise.²³

Check on levels of reporting via HR While the email campaign is live, check reporting levels to see if there are any changes in the number or type of incidents reported. Expect more disclosures to be made. Reports should be communicated in the aggregate, for confidentiality.

Be open to receiving feedback While an email campaign is live, be open to discussions with staff. Ask senior management for feedback. Given the sensitive topic, management should create a safe space where staff can talk to the leadership team regarding their thoughts on the email campaign.

Recommended resources

- VicHealth's [Take action: Empowering bystanders to act on sexist and sexually harassing behaviours](#) helps organisations introduce bystander initiatives to reduce sexist and sexually harassing behaviours. It outlines 4 key steps for implementing effective bystander initiatives. Page 7 highlights good reporting processes.
- [Victorian Auditor-General's Office report on sexual harassment prevalence in local government](#)
- VicHealth's [More than ready: Bystander action to prevent violence against women in the Victorian community – Research highlights](#)
- The Victorian Public Sector Commission's [Model Policy for the Prevention of Sexual Harassment in Workplace](#)
- The Victorian Equal Opportunity Human Rights Commission provides a free, anonymous [Sexual harassment support and response tool](#) for victim-survivors, bystanders and employers.
- Effective [sexual harassment reporting](#) is also a requirement of the [Gender Equality Act 2020](#).
- WorkSafe's [Guide for employers on preventing and responding to work-related gendered violence](#)
- VicHealth's [Women's reflections: Moving to Action](#) to build empathy for the impacts of sexual harassment.
- Our Watch's [Doing nothing does harm](#) campaign has actions that bystanders can take (e.g. show it's not OK, support women, speak up to stop disrespect). See also their guidance for action at work.

23. VicHealth (2008) 13 steps to tackle gender discrimination



Ambitious:

Develop a young women's leadership program to connect, grow and empower future community leaders

Building leadership aspirations and skills in young women and girls is an investment in the future health and wellbeing of your local community. This activity has been trialled and tested in the Cities of Monash, Casey and Whittlesea and is a big opportunity for a group of local youth aged 15–20.

The Young Women's Leadership Program provides a structured way to increase young women's skills, confidence and leadership opportunities in a peer-learning environment. The program has an intersectional approach, with a focus on identifying how ethnicity, religion, migration status, ability, sexuality and gender expression connect to create unique experiences for individuals in society. The program is designed to be co-facilitated with a relevant partner agency, related to the cohort you design the program for. If targeting culturally diverse young women, partner with a local multicultural agency, or a youth agency.

The Young Women's Leadership Program opens new opportunities for the participants who engage with it. For many, it unlocks barriers to accessing leadership positions which may previously have been difficult to access due to a multi-layering of factors, including ethnicity, religion, migration status, ability, sexuality and gender expression. Encouraging your participants' leadership journeys beyond the life of the program can have far-reaching benefits.

There are 2 central themes underpinning the program:

1. Identifying and understanding barriers in the current social climate to women accessing leadership opportunities, supporting participants to understand their strengths and skillsets, and providing information around financial literacy, public speaking, networking and leadership.
2. Prevention of violence against women and the importance of respectful relationships, with links to relevant campaigns and programs.

The key to the program's success is ensuring it aligns to a real need in your community. Use existing research, team knowledge, analysis of intake data, and pay attention to issues presented by young people accessing your youth services for support.



How-to guide to:

Develop a young women's leadership program to connect, grow and empower future community leaders



Plan & Assess

Allocate a staff member or team to lead the development of the program. Establish a steering committee with stakeholders from key council departments who will have a part in informing or developing the program. Work with the committee to develop key timelines, goals and deliverables. Consult with existing local youth groups.

Consider the following questions to define the scope of the program:

- What are the community issues for women and girls that could be a focus for further inquiry or action? What is the local need?
- What is the end goal of the program – what referral pathways and opportunities do you want to make available to participants on completion of the program?
- How will you keep young people engaged and participating in other youth or gender equality programs?

Conduct a gender impact assessment

A gender impact assessment is required under the Gender Equality Act 2020. Even where projects are developed with a gender lens, these assessments are now mandatory for new programs.

Gender impact assessments are a way of critically thinking about how policies, programs and services will meet the different needs of women, men and gender diverse people in order to advance gender equality.

Develop a project plan

Consider service resources, staffing, budget, physical spaces and community partnerships. Type of delivery mode: face-to-face, online or a combination.

Develop a communications and engagement plan

Consider the following:

- Engage key staff from schools (e.g. principals, cohort coordinators, wellbeing staff), and deliver information sessions to students who may have signed up or been nominated by the school staff, to build their comfort and respond to questions.
- Contact local services such as neighbourhood houses, guides, local TAFEs and universities, youth residential facilities, sporting clubs, libraries etc. Consider reaching out to families directly via cultural workers.
- Use a marketing and promotion approach that includes social media to spread the word about the program (use the channels that your target audience is using, e.g. Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat).
- Engage your council's communications and marketing teams early to assist with all forms of communication and to celebrate and promote key successes of the program. A combination of traditional and digital media works well for this target group.

Secure resources, funding and partners

Establish sources of funding and apply for grants if necessary (Youth Central, Victorian Government) and map out a budget. The Young Women's Leadership Handbook – A guide for councils resource handbook provides a list of possible grant sources and cost considerations.



Involving people

Establishing and delivering a successful program requires leadership, and the vision, skills and knowledge of how to promote change within communities. It is important to have program facilitators who have the ability to grow an empathetic relationship with young people (and their supports), to build trust and foster inclusivity. Staff need to have a good understanding of youth participation, group work and issues for young women in the local area.

Engage partners including local family violence/ women's health/family support services to build their engagement with the program and the council's accountability to local service providers. Explore existing networks for potential speakers for the leadership program.

Allow plenty of time for outreach to explain the program and seek help in finding participants. A targeted approach – where you work with others to directly invite young women to participate – is an effective use of your time to secure participants.



Case study

City of Monash – Young Women's Leadership Program

The following approach was adopted by other councils who implemented the Young Women's Leadership Program.

Monash Council delivered their leadership program during school term (2-hour sessions once a week for 10 weeks) and during school holidays (once a week for 2 hours, and a 3½- day intensive). After-school delivery (with a 4.30/5pm start time) was found to be the best option. To wrap-up their successful program, participants organised a Women's Leadership Forum. This public event was attended by prominent women leaders, including Monash Council CEO (Dr Andi Diamond), and featured a panel of graduates who spoke about gender issues. It was emceed by gender equality advocate Jamila Rizvi.

Considerations:

- Consider consulting with parents or carers of younger participants to understand any cultural considerations that may impact their participation in the program.
- Offer paid or staff-escorted transport home from the program to save on travel costs.
- Deliver the final session as an event in the program space or other venue where young participants can deliver a speech to a larger audience, cementing their leadership journey.
- Consider a reunion 2 to 3 months after the program ends. This can also form part of your evaluation – has the program led to other opportunities and connections?

Deliver

Map out the topics you plan to cover in the program. Organise a venue and catering; prepare participant workbooks and any other collateral you may need, including posters. Develop a risk management plan for the program, including transport, safety, lighting, antisocial behaviour, emergency responses.

Consider approaches for online delivery. Launch the program with participants and stakeholders.



Review and embed

Map your evaluation methods at the start of the program – especially surveys. You need to be able to benchmark where participants were before they embarked on the leadership program and document the change or outcomes they reported by the program's end.

Data for reporting could include:

- participant demographics, gathered from indemnities and sign-up forms and initial conversations
- attendance numbers and regularity
- pre- and post-program evaluations and surveys; allow room for open-ended answers (these can be used later – with permission – as testimonials); names on evaluations allow check-ins if required and comparisons of pre and post feedback
- parent evaluations
- facilitator evaluations
- anonymous evaluations – to encourage honest feedback (put a suggestion box in a discrete, accessible area).

In reporting the program outcomes, highlight internal relationships that developed across teams throughout the program, in addition to community relationships. Consider opportunities for systemic change and increased voice or influence. At Monash Council, seats are now available to graduates from their Young Women's Leadership Program to participate in the Monash Gender Equity Advisory Council. The program has become core business and is delivered multiple times each year, and a number of graduates have been invited to speak to council teams or participate in external groups.

Some graduates went on to participate in consultation for the Victorian Royal Commission into Mental Health.

Recommended resources

- The Young Women's Leadership Handbook – A guide for councils. To access this resource, please email VicHealth (lgp@vichealth.vic.gov.au)
- [City of Monash – Young Women's Leadership Program 2021](#)
- [Victorian Government – Gender equality case studies](#)

Short videos for understanding the barriers, systems and unequal power that limits the potential of women and girls and impacts their health and wellbeing:

- [Let's change the story](#) by Our Watch
- [When will she be right?](#) by UN Women Australia

Disability inclusion

Children and young people with disability are active members in the community, however, they often face intersectional barriers to being fully included and having equal access to services and programs. Supporting young people with disability to participate equally is something everyone should know how to do to create positive change – whether this be in your workplace, at school, in your local community, or when developing policy and communications.

This activity provides best-practice and strategies for councils to make sure programs, services and events are inclusive and accessible for young people with disability.

Key benefits of disability access and inclusion:

- Your workforce is strengthened by knowing how to be responsive to a wide range of diversity.
- Disability inclusion lays a foundation for the continued development of flexibility, adaptability, and community focused teams and work.
- Accessible and inclusive services engage more people in a more meaningful way.





Quick win:

Learn about children and young people with disability and how you can support their access, inclusion and participation

For this quick win, councils should:

- complete the online learning modules 'Disability Awareness', 'Humans Rights Model of Disability' and 'How to be Disability Inclusive' to raise knowledge and understanding of the barriers that people with disability face in everyday life
- meet with young people with lived experience of disability to hear their experiences and understand what inclusion means to them
- make disability inclusion training mandatory (and recurring on an annual basis) for all staff and as part of the induction program for new staff.



How-to guide to:

Learn about children and young people with disability and how you can support their access, inclusion and participation

Involving people

Management commitment is vital to the adoption of any whole-of-council policy and procedures. This activity requires strong buy-in at a senior management and executive level to support the implementation of disability inclusion training at an organisational level. Consider including disability inclusion as an agenda item at a future management team or executive meeting to discuss the benefits of this action for council and the community it serves.



Plan

Prepare a project plan to guide the development and delivery of the activity. Add detail to the project plan through the Assess and Design steps. The project plan should include:

- goals and outcomes of the project
- considerations to ensure collaborative, respectful and meaningful engagement with the young people with disability
- timelines
- expected roles, responsibilities, ways of engagement, governance strategy and funding.

Establish a project lead group to drive and support this work throughout council, ensuring that regular time is allocated for group meetings to undertake actions in the timelines specified.

Assess

Council may have gathered information through public engagement during the development of the Council Plan or the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan or other relevant strategies on areas where there are known gaps in disability inclusion. If this information is available it should assist in answering some of the questions related to the disability inclusion baseline assessment.

When the lead project group is conducting the baseline assessment, it is important to gain buy-in from senior management and/or executive teams – engage them early in the process. Where this is not possible present findings from the assessments.

Disability inclusion baseline assessment questions

Does your council have a current written plan or strategy, endorsed and promoted by your senior executive, which details your commitment to access and inclusion of people with disability as potential employees, employees and customers/clients?

If you don't have an executive structure, does the management team in your council have clear communication and commitment to the access and inclusion of people with disability as potential employees, customers or clients?

Does your council have plans specifically for people with disability who have intersectional identities (in particular, young, Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC), LGBTIQ+)?

Do you have regular reflection and feedback opportunities to improve disability inclusion?

Design

The lead project group should communicate with staff the findings from the baseline assessment and communicate the endorsement of improving the baseline.

The lead project group should identify key teams within council who work with or whose work has an impact on young people and young people with disability to undertake training which will enhance their awareness, understanding and capability for disability inclusion. There are 3 recommended stages in the training:

Stage 1: Raise your disability awareness.

Stage 2: Learn about what inclusion means and communication principles.

Stage 3: Attend face-to-face or virtual training for you and your team to learn more about inclusion of young people with disability.

After completing stages 1 and 2, the lead project group should set up a time for the teams to participate in reflective group activities. It is important to conduct these reflective activities as they can assist teams in consolidating and sharing learnings from their training. The reflective group activities can be added to part of a regular team meeting or be completed as a separate meeting.

Stage 1: Raise your disability awareness

The lead project group should encourage staff from the identified teams to:

- register and complete the [Disability Awareness Training](#) online learning module within a designated time
- register and complete the [Human Rights model of disability](#) online learning module within a designated time

- read the [Language Guide](#) from People with Disability Australia within a designated time.

The lead project group should organise a team reflection activity for stage 1 and use the questions below to guide the discussion.

Team reflection activity questions (Stage 1)

1. Can you identify some of the barriers experienced by people with disability in the learning modules you completed? Can you suggest ways these barriers might be overcome?
2. Think about a local public place – a shopping centre, school, or workplace – and identify barriers that children and young people with disability may face in accessing that environment and what changes could be made to overcome them.
3. Discuss the difference between person-first and identity-first language. What does your council use and why?
4. Think about how slurs and offensive language are used when referring to people with disability. Do you understand why this language is offensive and can you think of more inclusive expressions and descriptions?
5. Think about this statement: Access ensures that every member of the community can use the physical environment, transport, information and services equally. Inclusion moves beyond that by recognising that attitudes and expectations may exclude people just as much as lack of ramps or inaccessible parking. How would you describe the difference between access and inclusion?

Stage 2: Learn about what inclusion means and communication principles

The disability community is so diverse, everyone is different and unique. In the disability awareness training you will have discovered that the social model is the foundation for the human rights model. Inclusion might be described as a practical way of proactively promoting and applying the rights of people with disability to participate fully in society.

Picking up on the question of whether your council plans specifically for people with intersectional identities such as young people with disability, focus on young people as a specific group for the purposes of this next exercise.

The lead project group should encourage staff from the identified teams to:

1. Register and complete the online learning module: [How to be disability inclusive](#).
2. Learn some of the [facts about young people with disability](#) in Australia from the Australian Institute of Health.
3. Watch '[A school in the Bush](#)', which tells the story of Scarlett Finney trying to go to her local school.

After the team has completed the online learning tasks, the project lead group should organise a team reflection activity for Stage 2 and use the questions below to guide the discussion.

Team reflection activity questions (Stage 2)

1. The 'How to be disability inclusive' online course featured a video of [Issy Orosz](#), a young person with disability. What does Issy mean when they talk about it being a harder battle asking for supports as a young person with disability?
2. Think about the facts about young people with disability from the [Australian Institute of Health](#) website. Do the facts support an inclusive or exclusive society?
3. What are some systemic reasons why the experience of young people with disability is so skewed?
4. In the video '[A school in the Bush](#)', what are some of the obstacles Scarlett Finney faced going to her local school – think about the physical barriers and the attitudinal barriers.

Stage 3: Attend face-to-face or virtual training for you and your team to learn more about inclusion of young people with disability

Hearing from people with lived experience can be a very powerful way to break down stereotypes and barriers to understanding people with disability. There is no substitute for listening to actual people with disability.

Arrange for your team to attend a face-to-face training session with young people with disability. For example the Youth Disability Advocacy Service (YDAS) has designed an interactive half-day course for youth workers on including young people with disability: [Together: Building an Inclusive Youth Sector Training](#).

[Voice at the Table](#) provides practical training to ensure people with cognitive disabilities have a real and equal voice. It gives simple tips to ensure your meetings are accessible and inclusive for people with cognitive disabilities.

If face-to-face training is not practical, consider an online virtual workshop with the above organisations and/or:

- include young people with disability on your local advisory committees or co-design groups (parents or caregivers of young people with disability do not count as young people representation)
- seek out opportunities to hear the perspectives of young people with disability and compensate young people with disability for their time and emotional labour.



Review and embed

Seek feedback from teams after they have completed the recommended training and reflection activities to understand how they found the structure and usefulness of the sessions and gather any suggestions for modifications. Ensure feedback is sought in ways that participants feel comfortable to provide their honest opinions.

It is important to continue to refresh and be reminded of how to be disability inclusive. In addition to building disability awareness and capacity for greater inclusion within and across council, these

are great professional development opportunities for council staff. Share these findings with the senior management team and gain buy-in to embed disability awareness courses in the annual staff training plan or learning management system so that it is accessible for all staff to complete. Ensure refresher training is available annually.

Celebrate achievements from training and aim to recognise or celebrate one of the [Disability Awareness Day and Events](#) from the calendar.



Step up:

Conduct a disability inclusion audit from a children and young people perspective

A practical way to make your council more disability inclusive is to conduct a disability inclusion audit. Benefits of doing an inclusion audit is it can quickly identify areas that need immediate addressing to make your council inclusive for people with disabilities.

After doing the audit you will likely find changes you can easily make to improve your services to all people, including young people with disabilities. Using an advisory group with young people with disability from your local community to help with the audit and come up with inclusive recommendations, will make sure changes and actions are effective and meaningful for young people with disability.



How-to guide to:

Conduct a disability inclusion audit from a children and young people perspective



Plan

Allocate a staff member or team to lead the coordination and review of the disability inclusion audit with children and young people. Develop a project plan and budget to guide the audit.

Create an advisory reference group that includes children and young people with disability. Consult your local disability advocacy organisation to identify young people with disability who can be a part of your advisory group. [Find an Advocate](#) is a good starting point.

Ensure funding is allocated to compensate any young people who will participate in the audit.



Assess

Conduct a disability access and inclusion audit and create a plan to address any issues raised (see the Implementation Templates). Complete the audit template attached below in this section. Meet with the young people with disability advisory group to discuss the findings of the audit.



Design

Ask the group to identify other areas of improvement from their lived experience perspective. Ask for input in how to improve accessibility and inclusion and what other actions could be taken to address audit findings and other issues raised. Some questions to guide the discussion are listed below.

Crossover opportunity

Refer to the *Leading the Way – Engaging young voices for change foundation module* for guidance on how to effectively engage with young people.

Research and evidence summaries

Recommended questions for the advisory group

1. Do you think that young people with disability have the same opportunities as other people to access the council's services and events?
2. Do you think that young people with disability have the same opportunities as other people to access the council's buildings and facilities?
3. Do you think that young people with disability have the same opportunities as other people to receive information from your council in an easily accessible and inclusive format?
4. Do you think that young people with disability receive the same level and quality of service from the council staff as other people?
5. Do you think that young people with disability have the same opportunities as other people to make complaints to the council?
6. Do you think that young people with disability have the same opportunities as other people to participate in public consultation held by the council?
7. Do you think that young people with disability have the same opportunities as other people to be employed by the council?
8. If you experience barriers when accessing local businesses, what are the barriers?
9. What accessible or inclusive initiatives for young people with disability have you seen or heard about that our council can learn from?



Deliver

Create an action plan for council to address the issues and improvements raised from the audit and the advisory group. To ensure buy-in and dedicated action consider embedding the actions from the audit into existing council action plans with a strong governance mechanism such as the Council Action Plan and the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan.

Assign responsibility to fix these changes to the correct people within your council. A good plan will accurately describe who is responsible for certain actions and the timelines to implement these actions.

Develop new policies and procedures if necessary.

Review and embed

On a quarterly basis, review the audit findings and progress on resolving the actions against the mandated timeline. Communicate your actions taken to the young people with disability advisory/co-design group. Celebrate your achievements and improvements.

Recommended resources

- Australian Network on Disability – the [Access and Inclusion Index](#) is Australia's foremost benchmarking tool for inclusion of people with disability; it will help you drive access and inclusion outcomes across your whole organisation.
- Australian Human Rights Commission – [How to develop Action Plans](#)
- YACVic – [How to include young people](#)
- Victorian Council of Social Service – [Walk alongside: Co-designing social initiatives](#)
- Australian Network on Disability – [What is an Accessibility Action Plan?](#)



Ambitious:

Take action and strengthen allyship

There's no shortage of good intentions but being a good disability ally requires more than goodwill. Allyship is active and requires a lot of accountability.

Being an ally means:

- supporting equal rights for people with disability
- doing what you can to call out discrimination and to fight for equality
- trying to make the world a better place for people with disability.

Hot tip!

How to be a good ally

Research

Learn about issues that are important to the local disability community and young people with disability by talking to local disability advocacy organisations. Don't make this a one-off – invest regular time to hear and talk to young people with disability.

Be visible and support the community as much as you can

Don't speak for people with disability – stand beside them, give them a platform and amplify their voice. This is important especially for young people with disability who often experience gate-keeping.

Speak up against ableism, discrimination or derogatory language for young people with disability.

Know that you will get it wrong sometimes – breathe, apologise and ask for guidance.

Make sure your allyship for people with disability is not limited to celebration days. People with disability need advocacy and support all year.

Demonstrate allyship by providing work experience to a young person with disability.

The transition from education to work is widely recognised as a difficult time, especially for young people with disability. Young people are 3 times more likely to be unemployed than adults. People aged 15–24 with disability (25%) are more than twice as likely as those aged 25–64 (7.9%) to be unemployed.²⁴

The [post-school transition](#) to further education and employment for young people with disability is often poor and they receive little tailored information or support. Often young people with disability face systemic and structural barriers to access employment opportunities. This ambitious activity provides guidance to councils on becoming a pro-active organisation that is an attractive place for young people with disability to gain work experience.

24. See [AIHW Australia's Children report](#)

Recommended resources

- [ABC Everyday – Being an ally to people with disabilities](#)
- [Carly Findlay – How to be a good disability ally](#)
- [Forbes – 3 Ways Disability Allyship Can Go Off Track](#)



How-to guide to:

Providing work experience to a young person with disability

Involving people

In this activity it is important to acknowledge that everyone's experience of disability is different – focus on each individual's needs. It is helpful to reach out to allies in the disability community that have been established through the 'quick win' and 'step up' actions for advice on hiring, marketing to and working with young people with disability.



Plan & Assess

Prepare your council

Most people with disability only require minimal accessibility changes in the workplace. Some people don't require any changes at all. This is much the same for all your employees.

Understand your legal responsibilities – here is a [useful fact sheet](#) provided by Job Access.

Create a plan for how you will promote and talk about diversity and inclusion in and around your workplace. Make sure other team members have disability awareness training so they know what to do and say.

Identify and address any potential barriers raised from the inclusion and accessibility audit. For example, a public building is fitted with lifts but the 6 steps at the front entrance means a person in a wheelchair can only access the lifts through the back service entrance. This may be considered indirect discrimination. Indirect discrimination can occur when your processes appear to be fair, but actually prevents people with disability complying with what's required.

If you need to modify your workplace to support staff with disability to work in an environment free of barriers, there is support available. The [Employment Assistance Fund](#) provides financial assistance to purchase a range of work related modifications and services to meet the access requirements of the employees with disability. For example, do you need any assistive technology? Identify what is required (e.g. screen readers, mobility aids, lifts, extendable reaching devices).

Respect the privacy of people with disability. There is no legal obligation for an employee with disability to share information about their disability unless it affects their ability to carry out the inherent requirements of the job.

Deliver

Design and advertise the role. Make sure you use person-first, positive language and inclusive imagery in your advertising.

Consider holding the interview at an accessible venue, providing an Auslan interpreter or having an employment support worker or carer accompany the candidate to the interview if needed.

Discuss any work arrangements or flexible work arrangements that the employee may require and ensure reasonable adjustments can be made prior to the employee starting.

Supporting your work experience employee to succeed

Allocate additional time to support the employee, being mindful of the work tasks they may be completing for the first time. Consider training or buddying them for initial tasks and induction.

Discuss with the employee their goals and aspirations for the work experience. Tailor tasks and projects in line with their skill level and performance goals. Additionally, find tasks which will assist orienting them to key council processes.

Review and embed

Track the progress of your new employee and celebrate any milestones or achievements if you think it's appropriate. Consider appointing a disability champion who will help to ensure that diversity inclusion and disability employment remain front and centre in your council.

Celebrating diversity awareness days throughout the year can also help to enhance your workplace diversity and inclusion efforts.

Recommended resources

Employer incentives for employing a young person and/or person with disability include:

- [Jobs Victoria Fund Guidelines](#)
- [Jobactive's Financial incentives of up to \\$10,000 for employers](#)
- [CVGT Australia – Incentives and wage subsidies](#)
- [Australian Taxation Office – JobMaker Hiring Credit scheme](#)



Impact stream:

Addressing social determinants of mental wellbeing

To complete this impact stream, councils will select from:

Quick win: *Conduct a self-assessment of council action on social determinants of mental wellbeing*

Step up: *Foster effective internal partnerships and collaboration within council*

Ambitious: *Foster effective external partnerships and collaboration to address social determinants*

Ambitious: *Strengthen gender-equity and family-inclusive practice across council services*

This impact stream is designed to assist councils to implement initiatives in their Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan that improve the mental health and wellbeing of children, young people and their families.

It also aims to inform councils about the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System that relate to mental wellbeing and primary prevention.

Mental health conditions typically start in childhood or young adulthood. Around 50 per cent of all lifelong mental health conditions commence before age 15, and 75 per cent start before age 25. These conditions are distressing. They can have a profound negative impact on children and young people's relationships, academic and employment outcomes, and their ability to realise their potential and participate in community life. They also increase the risk of psychosocial disability and death by suicide.

While common, mental health conditions are not inevitable. There is now good scientific evidence to show the onset of many conditions can be averted through primary prevention actions targeted to children and young people. Primary prevention aims to prevent the occurrence of mental health conditions by influencing the underlying factors associated with these conditions. While some of these factors relate to a child or young person's own intrinsic characteristics, most relate to factors in their social environments. These are commonly known as social determinants.

The social determinants of mental wellbeing are the extrinsic factors embedded in the physical, economic, social and cultural environments in which children and young people are born, grow, learn, work and live, and that shape their health and mental health.

Some of these factors, such as exposure to bullying, racism, discrimination, gendered violence, loneliness, social exclusion, poverty and homelessness, can lead to poor mental wellbeing and an increased likelihood of experiencing a mental health condition.

Others can promote positive mental wellbeing and reduce the probability of experiencing a mental health condition, such as:

- safe, supportive and inclusive families, schools, workplaces and neighbourhoods
- social support and social connectedness
- access to adequate income, education, employment and secure housing
- sustainable natural and built environments.

By working to influence the impact of these social determinants, councils can promote the mental wellbeing of children and young people in their municipality and reduce their risk of experiencing mental health difficulties. They can also prevent disparities in mental health outcomes that result from children or young people's unequal access to the positive determinants of mental wellbeing that are created by socioeconomic inequalities.

Addressing social determinants of mental wellbeing in the first 2,000 days

All families with young children should be supported to experience good mental health and wellbeing in the early years of children's lives. Children's mental wellbeing is shaped by a combination of individual and family-related factors (such as genes and psychological make up), as well as the conditions in which they are born, grow, play, learn and live their daily lives.²⁵

Experiencing positive conditions in the first 2,000 days provides a foundation for children to have good mental health and wellbeing throughout their lives.

The social and economic conditions in which families raise young children are key influences on children's mental wellbeing in their first 2,000 days. They include family socioeconomic status, parents' or carers' educational attainment and employment status, poverty, geographic location, disability, gender and social connectivity.²⁶

These conditions, which are mainly the result of the broad socioeconomic, political and cultural environment in which families live, rather than their individual choices or behaviour, lead to significant inequities in children's and families' mental wellbeing outcomes. These inequities follow a social gradient, where people with more social advantage experience greater wellbeing than people who are less advantaged. This social gradient in mental wellbeing is apparent in children as young as 3 years of age.²⁷

25. Welsh J, Ford L, Strazdins L, Friel S (2015) Evidence review: Addressing the social determinants of inequities in mental wellbeing of children and adolescents, VicHealth. Available from: https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/resourcecentre/publicationsandresources/health%20inequalities/fair%20foundations/full%20reviews/healthequity_mental-wellbeing-evidence-review.pdf?la=en.

26. Newman L, Javanparast S, Baum F, Hutchinson C (2015) Evidence review: Settings for addressing the social determinants of health inequities, VicHealth. Available from: https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/Health-Inequalities/Fair-Foundations/Full-reviews/HealthEquity_Settings-evidence-review.pdf?la=en&hash=A010F43C3ED329BE99C535A12BE535BCD6322532

27. World Health Organization and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (2014) Social determinants of mental health. Geneva, World Health Organization. Available from: https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/112828/9789241506809_eng.pdf.

The building blocks of mental health promotion

INDIVIDUALS

Fulfillment & contribution

Promote mindfulness, compassion, gratitude, personal growth, purpose & civic contribution.

Psychological skills

Foster mental health literacy, social and emotional competence, self-care and resilience & encourage help-giving and help-seeking for stress, psychological distress or suicidal ideation.

Healthy behaviours

Encourage regular physical activity, high quality diet, good sleep hygiene.

FAMILIES

Support and connections

Promote secure attachment, positive parenting, social support, social participation and a sense of belonging.

COMMUNITIES

Safety

Ensure freedom from child abuse, gendered violence, racism and discrimination

ORGANISATIONS

Material Basics

Ensure equitable access to food, adequate income, education, work, stable housing, and holistic healthcare.

GOVERNMENTS

The Environment & Culture

Protect the environment and support people to speak their language and practice their culture.

[Sourced from Prevention United](#)

Addressing the social determinants of children and young people's wellbeing requires cooperation across multiple sectors and levels of government to achieve broad social and structural change.

By providing equitable and inclusive services and facilities, and helping to create a community that supports all children, young people and families, councils can play a role in positively influencing their daily living conditions and supporting their mental wellbeing.

Recommended resources

For policy makers, researchers and mental health practitioners – [Evidence review: the primary prevention of mental health conditions](#)

Intended outcomes

Councils undertaking this impact stream can expect to:

- increase their understanding of the key social, economic and cultural determinants that influence a child or young person's mental wellbeing, and the interventions that can be used to prevent mental ill-health among children and young people
- audit their current primary prevention initiatives against research evidence to determine what strategies they have in place, and what strategies may be needed to address any gaps in their current response
- reflect on their existing internal and external partnerships to determine what partnerships they could forge or strengthen to enhance their mental health promotion activities that target children and young people
- adopt a whole-of-council, cross-sectoral approach to addressing the social determinants of mental wellbeing among children and young people
- embed primary prevention activities in their Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans and Municipal Early Years Plans that reduce mental ill-health among children and young people, and reduce inequalities in mental health outcomes over time.

Minimum deliverables

To complete the 'Addressing social determinants of mental wellbeing' impact stream, councils will have:

- increased their understanding of the key social determinants that influence children and young people's mental wellbeing, and the interventions that can be used to prevent mental ill-health among children and young people
- implemented changes to strengthen their internal and external partnerships, in order to reduce inequities in social determinants for children and young people
- demonstrated activities to involve children and young people in working toward the goal of the impact stream
- demonstrated support from council and local leadership to work toward the goals of the impact stream by allocating resources, and endorsing strategies and policies
- demonstrated succession planning that outlines how the activity will contribute to the outcomes of their current and future Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans.



Quick win:

Conduct a self-assessment of council action on social determinants of mental wellbeing

There is now good scientific evidence to show many common mental health conditions affecting children and young people can be prevented from occurring through strategies that target the socially determined risk and protective factors linked to these conditions. Understanding what these social determinants are, and the interventions that can be used to influence them, is a critical starting point for success in primary prevention.

As part of this module, councils are required to read [VicHealth's Evidence review: The primary prevention of mental health conditions](#) commissioned in 2020.

The review describes the risk and protective factors in children and young people's homes, schools, workplaces, local community and broader social environments that impact their mental wellbeing. Some of these include: the breadth and quality of children's relationships with friends and family members and their level of social connectedness; local neighbourhood environments; their exposure to bullying, racism, homophobia or transphobia; and ability to participate in the social and economic life of their community.

The review also discusses the latest research on what can be done to modify these social determinants, and therefore provides a useful starting point for councils to benchmark their own primary prevention initiatives against the latest research evidence.

What is primary prevention?

Primary prevention aims to prevent the onset of a condition by stopping it from occurring in the first place.

Primary prevention works by **changing modifiable underlying risk and protective factors**.

Risk factors are personal, psychological or broader social ecological variables that are associated with an increased risk of developing a mental health condition.

Protective factors reduce a person's likelihood of experiencing a mental health condition. Protective factors can enhance and protect a person's mental health and wellbeing or they can act as a buffer against a person's exposure to risk factors and thereby reduce their chances of becoming unwell.

Secondary prevention focuses on the detection and treatment of a mental health condition at its earliest possible stage to reduce its duration and severity. Secondary prevention is broadly synonymous with early intervention.

Tertiary prevention aims to reduce the impact of an established condition on an individual's functioning, quality of life and longevity through treatment and psychosocial supports.



How-to guide to:

Conduct a self-assessment of council action on social determinants of mental wellbeing



Assess

Nominate 1 or more people to read VicHealth's [Evidence review: The primary prevention of mental health conditions](#). At an in-house professional development session, they should present an overview of the key findings from the evidence review to managers and staff responsible for the development and implementation of the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan.

One or more people from this team should complete a 'self-audit' of council's current primary prevention initiatives that target children and young people against the interventions listed in the review.

To begin the self-audit, use the following matrix to list all the primary prevention initiatives that focus on children and young people currently being implemented by your council.



Council interventions

Primary prevention initiative currently delivered by council	What social determinant (risk or protective factor) does this initiative address?	Target group/ age/stage (perinatal, infancy, early childhood, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood)	Setting (online, home, primary care service – maternal and child health, early learning centre, school, sports and recreation clubs, council-run services, other)	Type of intervention (e.g. public education, skill-building, creating supportive environments, community mobilisation, or council by-laws, regulations and policies)	Is there evidence for this initiative? (evidence-informed but not-evaluated, undergoing evaluation, evidence-based)	Council's role in the initiative (e.g. leading, funding, contributing in-kind resources, partnering, promoting on behalf of others)
Example: We Know Your Name But Not Your Story – digital storytelling project	Social connection (young people reported feeling more lonely and less connected with neighbours than the Victorian state average)	Young people aged 12–25 years, with a focus on Year 9 students	Arts: digital and media	Program trains Year 9 students with the skills to engage with networks, collect stories from people and increase their social connections	Program evaluated by VicHealth 2019	Leading and promoting the partnership with schools and community youth networks

Compare the list of your council's current primary prevention initiatives against the initiatives described in the Evidence Review. Identify any gaps in your council's approach and opportunities for new initiatives.

Based on this review, prepare and prioritise a list of possible new initiatives for council to better tackle the social determinants of mental wellbeing among children and young people at a local community level which could be considered for inclusion in the next Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Action Plan, Council Action Plan or any other relevant strategy or policy.



Step up: *Foster effective internal partnerships and collaboration within council*

The [Evidence review: The primary prevention of mental health conditions](#) outlines the various evidence- informed interventions that can be used to influence the social determinants of children and young people’s mental wellbeing and prevent the onset of mental health conditions. These interventions include but are not limited to:

- healthy behaviours such as regular physical activity, healthy diet and spending time in green spaces or around water (coastline, rivers, lakes etc.)
- home-visiting programs and other parenting support programs delivered face-to-face or online
- efforts to combat child maltreatment and family violence
- social and emotional learning, self-care, and resilience skills-building programs targeting children and young people
- anti-bullying programs
- initiatives to combat loneliness and promote social connectedness
- programs, policies, regulations and laws to tackle racism and discrimination affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culturally and linguistically diverse people and LGBTIQ+ communities
- social policies to promote income adequacy, employment, access to transport, and stable housing.

While each of these interventions can produce benefits in its own right, success in primary prevention requires a multi-modal approach that simultaneously tackles the various social determinants of mental wellbeing among children and young people. The more initiatives in place, the greater the benefits across the population.

Broadly speaking, the biggest gains are to be had by tackling the social determinants that have a particularly strong negative influence on children and young people’s mental wellbeing such as: child maltreatment; family violence; bullying, racism, homophobia or transphobia; loneliness, lack of social support and social disconnectedness; disengagement from study, training or employment; and socioeconomic disadvantage.

Implementing this broad suite of responses requires a whole-of-council approach. No single team or unit within council can implement all the necessary activities on their own and it is essential that all parts of council contribute to achieving positive mental health outcomes for children and young people in their municipality.



How-to guide to:

Foster effective internal partnerships and collaboration within council

In this activity, councils are required to bring together representatives from a range of council teams to discuss how they can each contribute to implementing the primary prevention initiatives they identified in the quick win activity or through other means, and to activate the internal partnerships to implement these activities. Councils are also required to 'sense check' their ideas with children and young people themselves.



Assess & Design

Internal council meeting

- Convene a meeting of staff from various units within council that have a role in supporting the health and mental health of children, young people and their families. Appoint a minute-taker.
- Circulate [the Evidence review: The primary prevention of mental health conditions](#) and a copy of the [VicHealth Partnerships Analysis Tool](#) ahead of the meeting and ask attendees to read the Executive Summary of the Evidence Review and the Partnerships Analysis Tool.
- Nominate someone to present the findings of the self-audit conducted in the quick win activity and outline the proposed primary prevention initiatives that you may have developed through this activity or any other planning processes.
- Choose up to 3 primary prevention initiatives that might be included in the next Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Action Plan, Council Action Plan or relevant strategy.
- Consider what role each relevant council team could play in implementing these various primary prevention initiatives. Discuss partnerships that could be formed between different parts of council. Work through the steps outlined in [Activity One of the Partnerships Analysis Tool](#) to clarify how the various council teams will work together to implement these specific activities.
- Conduct Activity 1 – Assessing the purpose of the partnership. This exercise is important as teams may have different understandings and expectations of what their involvement means. One council team will contribute differently from another to support the initiatives. If done collectively, this exercise can help to strengthen internal collaboration because people are able to raise issues of concern and work together to address areas in which there is a lack of consensus.
- Re-emphasise that addressing these primary prevention initiatives will require a whole- of- council approach and that change management is a big part of this process. Refer to the

Changing Organisations section of the Partnerships Analysis Tool and discuss how the following 4 phases of organisational change would support these initiatives:

- Phase 1: Motivating change (to support primary prevention initiatives)
- Phase 2: Developing support for change
- Phase 3: Managing the transition
- Phase 4: Sustaining momentum

Activity 1: Assessing the purpose of the partnership

To complete this activity, we suggest you adopt the following approach.

Ask each participant to write 5 answers to each of the following questions on a piece of paper and rank them in order of importance:

- Why is the partnership necessary in this particular project?
- What value is it trying to add to the project?

Compare individual lists by starting with the reasons that are most important. Follow through to those that are least important. Look for the points of consensus, but also be aware of any differences. Find out if council departments and teams have a clear understanding of what each one can contribute to the partnership.

External meeting with young people, schools and youth services

Involving children and young people

Once you have completed your internal audit and prioritised your primary prevention initiatives, you can host a children and young people's roundtable. Invite young people, and child and parent groups from your municipality and give them an opportunity to 'sense check' and provide input into the prioritised primary prevention initiatives. At the roundtable, provide a brief explanation about primary prevention, the 3 initiatives you have in mind, and how they will be implemented.

Deliver

After consolidating the findings from the internal and external meeting, finalise the 3 primary prevention initiatives to be added to the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, Council Action Plan or relevant strategy.

Implement the 3 primary prevention cross-council initiatives through the internal partnership.

Review and embed

Monitor and review the primary prevention initiatives implemented through the internal partnership.

Monitor and review the internal partnership progress. Embed any learnings and improvement for future internal partnership work.

Crossover opportunity

For more information about engaging young people, see *Leading the Way – Engaging young voices for change foundation module*.



Ambitious:

Foster effective external partnerships and collaboration to address social determinants

The breadth and diversity of social determinants that influence children and young people's mental wellbeing means that no single organisation can tackle them all. Partnerships with organisations that are external to council are also needed to bring about real and sustainable change.

Such partnerships bring together diverse skills and extra resources to achieve better and more sustainable outcomes. They enable organisations to increase their reach, efficiency and impact by making use of different perspectives, skills and resources. They are particularly relevant when tackling complex issues that require effort across multiple settings and sectors. Regardless of whether a partnership is small or large, is established for the short-term or long-term, to network, consult, cooperate or collaborate, it is important that it is planned, purposeful and properly managed.



How-to guide to:

Foster effective external partnerships and collaboration to address social determinants

In this activity, councils are required to use the VicHealth Partnerships Analysis Tool to help them forge or strengthen their partnerships with external organisations that can assist them to implement the primary prevention initiatives that are likely to be included in their next Municipal Health and Wellbeing Action Plan, Council Action Plan or relevant strategy.

Involving people

When bringing together internal staff and external partners, ensure there is senior management or executive level representation. It is important to have key decision-makers from the council there to discuss the partnership, their potential roles and responsibilities. Ultimately, buy-in from decision-makers is key to ensuring that the partnership has accountability and delivers on the agreed tasks. It also reduces the amount of brokering by project officers/planners to get approval and endorsement for tasks.



Plan & Assess

Allocate a staff member or team to lead the partnership development work.

Select 1 primary prevention activity targeting children's and young people's mental wellbeing that council plans to include in its next Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, Council Action Plan or relevant strategy. This may have been identified through the quick win or step up activities or some other planning process.

Councils are encouraged to consider primary prevention initiatives that aim to enhance the quality of children and young people's social supports and social connectedness, or that support young people's employment opportunities (see 'The Youth Friendly Employer Project' case study, later).

Map out the various council teams and the key staff in these teams who will have a role in implementing the chosen initiative or who could provide insight into children and young people. Convene an internal meeting.

During the meeting identify external partners who will assist with implementing the proposed activity. Pay particular attention to how you will co-design this initiative with young people and how they are represented in the partnership (see the foundation module Leading the Way – Engaging young voices for change).

These external partners may include:

- organisations that represent young people with lived experience and from diverse communities
- organisations with specific subject matter expertise in relation to 1 or more specific social determinants
- program designers
- partners with expertise in designing awareness campaigns or prevention programs
- creative and/or marketing agencies
- IT and technology partners
- implementation and program/service delivery partners
- research and evaluation partners.

Arrange a meeting with selected external organisations to consider Activity 1, 2 and 3 below from VicHealth's Partnerships Analysis Tool.

Prior to the meeting

Ensure the meeting is booked for a few hours – it can take a while to reflect on and assess questions related to the partnership. Make sure to build breaks into the meeting.

Communicate with the external stakeholders the purpose and importance of the meeting.

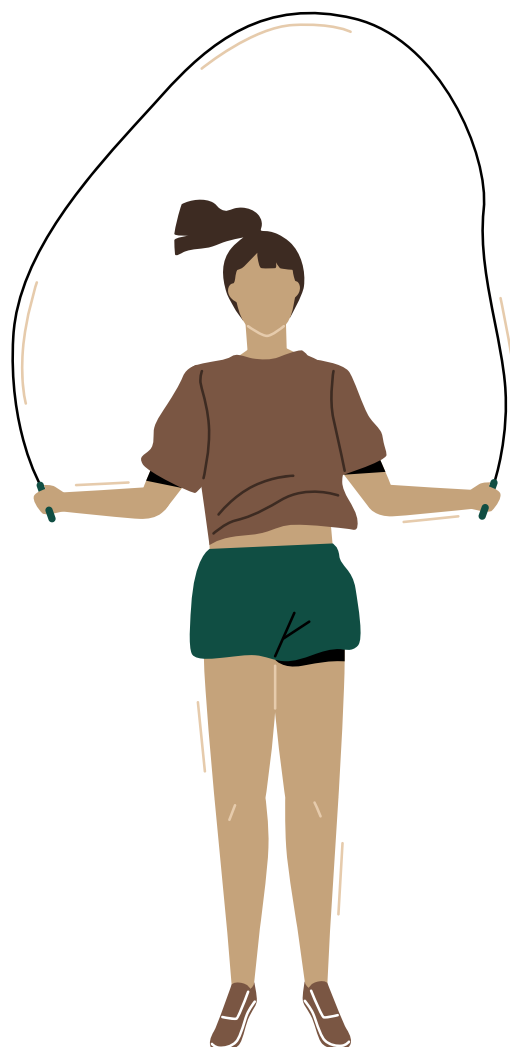
Download VicHealth's [Partnerships Analysis Tool](#) and Checklist from the VicHealth website and circulate it to all internal and external attendees.

Design & Deliver

Refer to the case study partnership project example in the section below to assist in the design and delivery of the chosen primary prevention initiative. Continue to maintain effective relationships with key internal and external stakeholders. Consider the best approach for engaging your key partnership stakeholders. For example, ongoing meetings or another online advisory mechanism.

Review and embed

Monitor and evaluate your chosen primary prevention initiative. Monitor and review the partnership progress. Consider revisiting Activity 3. Embed any learnings and improvement for future partnership work.



Activity 1: Assess the purpose of the partnership

To complete this activity, we suggest you adopt the following approach.

Ask each participant to write 5 answers to each of the following questions on a piece of paper and rank them in order of importance:

- Why is the partnership necessary in this particular project?
- What value is it trying to add to the project?

Compare individual lists by starting with the reasons that are most important and following through to those that are least important. Look for the points of consensus, but also be aware of any differences. Find out if organisations have a clear understanding of what each one can contribute to the partnership.

At the meeting, as a group, work through and share your answers.

Activity 2: Map the partnership

This activity involves mapping all the partners in relation to each other to clarify roles and levels of commitment to the partnership. The concept of partnerships used in this tool implies a level of mutuality and equality between agencies. There are different types of partnerships in health promotion, ranging on a continuum from networking to collaboration.

Completing the mapping exercise

This mapping exercise is designed to map all of the partners in relation to each other. Lines are drawn to show the strength and nature of the relationships. This is important as partners may have different understandings and expectations of what their involvement means. If done collectively, this exercise can help to strengthen a partnership because people are able to raise issues of concern. This provides an opportunity to address areas in which there is a lack of consensus.

It is interesting to note patterns in the relationships and how these change over time.

Many partnerships are strong on networking and coordinating but considerably weaker on collaborating. Completing the map provides an opportunity to look at ways that relationships can be strengthened and made more productive.

Look at the example on this page then follow this suggested approach to complete the mapping exercise:

- List all the agencies involved in the partnership. The lead agency (if there is one) can be placed in the centre.
- Using the legend, link the agencies in terms of the nature of the relationship. The lead agency is likely to have a relationship with all of the others; however, there may also be important links between partners that do not rely on the lead agency.
- Where possible cite concrete examples as evidence of the strength of the partnership. The strength of the links between partners should be based on evidence of how the partnership works rather than how people might like it to work or how it may work in the future.

Activity 2: Map the partnership cont.

A continuum of partnerships in health promotion

A distinction can be made between the purposes and nature of partnerships.

Partnerships in health promotion may range along a continuum from networking to collaboration.

Networking

Involves the exchange of information for mutual benefit. This requires little time and trust between partners. For example, youth services within a local government area may meet monthly to provide an update on their work and discuss issues that affect young people.

Coordinating

Involves exchanging information and altering activities for a common purpose. For example, the youth services may meet and plan a coordinated campaign to lobby the council for more youth-specific services.

Cooperating

Involves exchanging information, altering activities and sharing resources. It requires a significant amount of time, a high level of trust between partners, and an ability for agencies to share turf. For example, a group of secondary schools may pool some resources with a youth welfare agency to run a 'Diversity Week' as a way of combating violence and discrimination.

Collaborating

Includes enhancing the health promotion capacity of the other partner for mutual benefit and a common purpose. Collaborating requires the partner to give up a part of their turf to another agency to create a better or more seamless service system. For example, a group of schools may fund a youth agency to establish a full-time position to coordinate a Diversity Week, provide professional development for teachers, and train student peer mediators in conflict resolution.

Note: Not all partnerships will or should move to collaboration. In some cases, networking is the appropriate response. The nature of the partnership will depend on the need, purpose and willingness of participating agencies to engage in the partnership.

As a partnership moves towards collaboration, it will need to become more embedded in the core work of the agencies involved. This has resource and structural implications. In particular, collaborative partnerships require the support and involvement of senior agency personnel since project workers may be relatively junior or on short-term contracts. This can affect their capacity to mobilise the agency resources required for collaboration.

Activity 2: Mapping example

A state peak non-government organisation (NGO) for children and young people is leading a project to increase social connection and participation in physical activity for young people at risk. The project involves linking secondary school students to an after-school program run by a local sports club.

Role of each agency in the partnership

State peak NGO for children and young people – is the lead agency, which coordinates funds and project steering group.

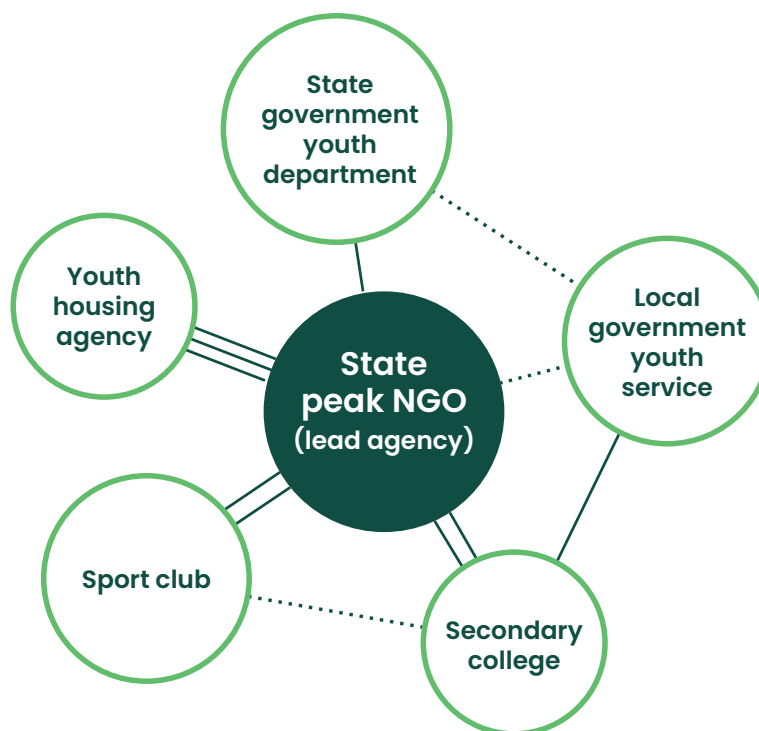
State government youth department – provides funds for the project and requires a report at the completion of funding.

Sports club – provides sports facilities, equipment and a coach.

Youth housing agency – provides an office for project workers, and coordinates and provides transport for young people to travel from school to the club. It also provides training for volunteers, sports coaches and other workers about youth issues, and promotes this project.

Secondary college – refers young people to the project.

Local government youth service – is a member of steering committee.



Legend

Nature of relationship between partners

Networking

Coordinating ———

Cooperating ===

Collaborating =====

Activity 3: Provide feedback using a partnership

Activity 3 is designed to review the workings of the partnership and suggest how it can be strengthened. This can be used as an evaluation and monitoring tool as the partnership progresses, but it can be discussed at the first meetings of the partnership.

If the partnership appears to be functioning well, work towards formalising the partnership arrangements to implement the selected initiative. Otherwise, use the results of this activity to work through any areas of concern to strengthen the partnership before commencing the new primary prevention initiative.

This activity involves the completion of selected areas of a checklist that define key features of a successful partnership for health promotion. It provides important questions about choosing partners, the current status of the partnership and areas that can be monitored.

The checklist is organised into 7 areas being:

1. determining the need for the partnership
2. choosing partners
3. making sure partnerships work
4. planning collaborative action
5. implementing collaborative action
6. minimising the barriers to partnerships
7. reflecting on and continuing the partnership.

Recommended resources

- VicHealth's [Evidence review: The primary prevention of mental health conditions](#)
- VicHealth's [Partnerships Analysis Tool](#)
- [Government of South Australia – Working together for Joined Up Policy resources](#)

The youth friendly employer project

As the VicHealth Evidence review: The primary prevention of mental health conditions identified, work (in terms of employment, unemployment, income, connection, experience and skills) is an important determinant of youth mental wellbeing.

We know that one of the most critical transitions for 18–25 year olds is the transition from school, TAFE or university to work. If this transition is unsuccessful then this can become a risk factor for mental illness.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a significant burden on young people, not just in relation to employment prospects. They have limited experience and professional networks, are overrepresented in casualised, precarious jobs and often poorly prepared or trained. The Youth Friendly Employer Project provides an exciting initiative that could be adapted in various communities across Victoria.

The Youth Friendly Employer Project is a joint initiative of Maribyrnong and Moonee Valley Local Learning and Employment Network (MMVLLEN) with funding by VicHealth under the Bright Futures for Young Victorians initiative. This initiative aims to support organisations working with young people to establish new partnerships and find solutions to promote community and young people's resilience, social connection and mental wellbeing.

Background

The Youth Friendly Employer Project developed and piloted a process and assessment tool to inspire employers to become recognised for providing a positive experience for young people who are job seeking, and a supportive environment for those working with them.

The initial 4-month proof-of-concept pilot project was conducted in January to May 2017. It aimed to co-design a youth friendly employer checklist and toolkit with young people and local employers.

The project team consulted young people on the development of the resources, which were intended for employers to implement to improve the youth employment opportunities and experiences in their business. This toolkit was then tested with 2 major employers including 1 local government and 1 large employer.

Key steps in the project:

- Identify the standards of a youth-friendly employer.
- Consult and co-design a new young employer self-assessment questionnaire.
- Create a new toolkit of human resource information to inform up-to-date practice in engaging and supporting young employees.
- Trial the toolkit with 2 employers, creating an action plan and review.
- Evaluate the toolkit and resources to inform future practice.
- Develop an implementation guide for future employers and identify new employers to undertake the youth-friendly employer program.
- Finalise recognition and publicity of youth-friendly employers.

The project seeks to impact the following long-term indicators of change:

1. Increase employment opportunities and remove barriers to employment for young Victorians.
2. Enable organisations to develop innovative, effective and sustainable strategies; and attract, develop, and retain talented, inspiring, high-performing young employees.
3. Enable organisations to leverage the unique skills and traits of Gen Y and Gen Z employees.

4. Increase the confidence of young people in their employers.
5. Increase employer positivity, awareness and capacity to treat young people respectfully and fairly through the process of recruitment and as employees.
6. Set a new standard for youth-friendly workplace procedures, strategies, behaviours and settings.
7. Raise expectations of employers regarding recruitment practice and outcomes involving young people.
8. Increase community support and recognition of organisations engaged in being youth-friendly.
9. Enable organisations and local government associations to take more innovative and proactive steps to redesign work, systems and workplaces to eliminate or minimise risks to mental wellbeing, as well as to monitor the mental health of workers and of workplace conditions.
10. Increase the resilience, social connection and mental wellbeing of young people.

If youth employment is a priority social determinant in your local area, it may be useful for your council to consider this solution. See [Youth Friendly Employers \(YFE\)](#) for further info.

This project would be developed in partnership with [MMVLLN](#). For more info, contact Boyd Maplestone, CEO, boydmaplestone@mmvllen.org.au



Case study

Auditing and mapping social connection infrastructure in communities (preliminary summary)

This is an introduction to and preliminary summary of a project underway in Melbourne councils. The project explores 'Community Social Connection Infrastructure' across metropolitan Local Government Areas (LGAs). It audits and maps place-based social connection assets and experiences

using a novel typology developed from projects funded by Australian Red Cross. The project will make recommendations about the Community Infrastructure of Social Connection in the participating LGAs and about future activities to promote social connection in the regions.

The specific objectives of the project:

- Test a place-based approach aiming to progress work towards reducing social isolation and loneliness and promoting social connection.
- Leverage a typology of places and spaces to provide investigation of the current pro-social connection places and spaces (assets) in the
- region as well as 'hotspots' for connection.
- Provide empirical evidence of community experiences within the pro-social connection places and spaces.
- Provide a foundation for understanding the breadth and role of places and spaces in the community.
- Deliver recommendations for future social connection promoting initiatives.

The project undertook these research activities:

- Reviewed the literature and practice about community connectedness initiatives.
- Developed and populated a typology for categorising pro-social connection places and spaces across LGAs.
- Mapped social indicator data and places and spaces to understand the alignment of places and spaces with population characteristics.
- Held focus groups with managers and facilitators of places and spaces to understand perceptions of user experience of places and spaces.



Ambitious:

Strengthen gender equity and family-inclusive practice across council services

All families with young children should feel welcome, accepted and a sense of belonging in their communities, and the services and facilities they use. Young children should grow up in families and communities that promote equitable and respectful relationships, and provide safe, healthy and happy environments for children to live, grow and learn.

There is a key opportunity for councils to improve the experiences and conditions for children in their first 2,000 days, and to support the long-term wellbeing of families and children.²⁸ This is to strengthen equitable and inclusive practices and environments across council services and facilities, to ensure they meet the diverse needs of all parents, carers and families.

Councils provide a wide range of high-quality services and facilities in the community that can have a significant influence on children's development, family functioning and wellbeing.

These include:

- maternal and child health services
- early childhood services
- community and supported playgroups
- family support services
- community health services
- sport and recreation centres
- arts and cultural centres
- libraries and toy libraries.

All council services and facilities should be designed to be equitable, welcoming, accessible and gender and family inclusive for all. Services should be offered universally to all families and children in the community, but should provide increased levels of support for families with additional needs.

Council should embed gender equity in their services and facilities, and promote equitable and respectful relationships in families and the community. This helps to prevent violence against women and children before it occurs. It can improve families' and children's wellbeing, helping to ensure families and children are safe, healthy and happy, and children have positive experiences and conditions in their first 2,000 days.

This ambitious action requires councils to audit priority council services and facilities for families and young children. This will enable councils to assess the extent to which they promote gender equity and are inclusive, and meet the needs of all families, parents, carers and young children in the community.

Councils will identify and work with services to deliver changes to ensure all families feel welcome, safe, supported and included. They will make changes to ensure they reinforce positive gender norms, respect and equity, and help challenge outdated gendered norms and expectations of parenting. This may include changes to services' policies, practices, and social, cultural and physical environments.

Councils should consult and engage with local families to understand their diverse needs and any inequities or barriers they face to access and inclusion. They should also involve them in co-designing actions to address these inequities and barriers.

28. Moore TG (2019) Early childhood, family support and health care services: An evidence review. Prepared for the City of Port Phillip. Melbourne, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health and the City of Port Phillip. doi: 10.25374/MCRI.8312768.

Key terms

Gender equality – means equal treatment of people of all genders in laws and policies, and equal access to resources and services within families, communities and society, which is sometimes referred to as formal equality.

Gender equity – involves fairness and justice in the distribution of resources and responsibilities between people of all genders, which is sometimes referred to as substantive equality.²⁹

Why is it important to promote gender equity in families in children's first 2,000 days?

Traditional gendered roles and expectations associated with parenting and caring for children can have a significant influence on how parents and carers navigate their roles. Often, they become trapped in unequal gender-based parenting roles, including unequal gendered division of household labour, which are reinforced by social norms.³⁰

The transition to parenthood and the early years of children's lives are a critical time when gender roles are shaped, and when there is most opportunity to positively influence children's and families' understanding of gender norms.³¹

Promoting equal, equitable and respectful relationships in families and parenting can prevent family violence, improve family functioning, and improve the mental wellbeing of parents and carers and their children.

Evidence shows that gender equality is linked to the health and mental wellbeing of parents, carers and children:

- Gender equality is associated with lower levels of depression among women and men.³²

- Gender inequality is a key driver of violence against women, which is more damaging to the health of Victorian women aged 15 to 44 than any other risk factors for chronic disease.³³
- Family violence has major negative impacts on young children's development, health and wellbeing.³⁴
- Gendered social norms and structures can limit men's and boys' behaviour or roles, including in parenting and caregiving.³⁵
- Conforming to traditional constructions of masculinity is associated with poorer mental health for men.³⁶

Council services can play a role in ensuring gender equity in access to services and facilities, challenging outdated gender norms, and promoting equitable and respectful relationships in families.

29. World Health Organization 2010, Violence prevention: The evidence, WHO, Geneva

30. Carrington Health (2020) Baby Makes 3: Promoting Equality in Parenting, Supporting Parents to Thrive, available from: <https://assets.healthability.org.au/images/Baby-Makes-3-Program-Overview.pdf>.

31. City of Darebin, Creating Gender Equity in the Early Years: A resource for Local Government, available from https://www.mav.asn.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0007/7279/Darebin-City-Council-Creating-Gender-Equity-in-the-Early-Years-A-Resource-for-Local-Government.pdf.

32. Hammarström, A & Phillips, SP 2012, 'Gender inequity needs to be regarded as a social determinant of depressive symptoms: Results from the Northern Swedish cohort', *Scandinavian Journal of Social Medicine*, vol. 40, no. 8, pp. 746–752; Harryson, L, Novo, M & Hammarström, A 2012, 'Is gender inequality in the domestic sphere associated with psychological distress among women and men? Results from the Northern Swedish Cohort', *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, vol. 66, no. 3, pp. 271–276; VandeVelde, Svd, Huijts, T, Bracke, P & Bambra, C 2013, 'Macro-level gender equality and depression in men and women in Europe', *Sociology of Health and Illness*, vol. 35, no. 5, pp. 682–698.

33. VicHealth 2004, The health costs of violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.

34. The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne (2019) Family violence – effects on children's health fact sheet, available from https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Family_violence/

35. VicHealth 2017, Behavioural insights and gender equality, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.

36. Wong, Y, Ho, M, Wang, S & Miller, I 2017, 'Meta-analyses of the relationship between conformity to masculine norms and mental health-related outcomes', *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, vol. 64, no. 1, pp. 80–93.

How can services be more gender equitable and family-inclusive?

A service or facility is inclusive of families if all families can easily access and use it.

Inclusive services will:

- celebrate diversity and the value of all families with young children
- promote acceptance, inclusion, participation and belonging
- recognise the varying needs of families with young children
- recognise and respond to inequalities.³⁷

Services can become more equitable and inclusive by considering families' diverse needs and any discriminatory effects, inequities or barriers they might face and working to address them. Barriers to families accessing services are the result of the way services are designed and delivered, rather than the characteristics of families or individuals. Barriers can be practical (such as cost, location, transport, childcare or administrative complexity), cultural or attitudinal.

Organisational systems, including policies, plans, programs, services and communication, can cause or lead to discriminatory effects and inequity in access, or may inadvertently reinforce unequal or harmful gender norms and stereotypes.³⁸

Making services and facilities more gender equitable and family inclusive requires considering their policies, practices, and social, cultural and physical environments, and supporting the services and facilities to take actions or make changes, to ensure all families and family members feel welcome, safe, accepted and included.

Gender and family-inclusive language

As part of making services more gender equitable and inclusive, councils should champion and help normalise the use of gender and family-inclusive language by staff, and in all resources and communications.

Ensure communications are family inclusive by:

- using language that doesn't reinforce gendered stereotypes or make assumptions about roles and family structures
- only referring to personal characteristics, such as sex, gender, marital status, religion, racial group, disability or age, in reference to a family structure when necessary
- using gender-neutral words, such as 'partner' or 'parent' and other inclusive terms
- making sure that references to young people and families reflect the diversity of the intended audience
- avoiding unnecessary jargon and acronyms, and focusing on people.

By using gender and family-inclusive language, council can contribute to the positive experiences of young children, parents and carers. It will enable everyone to feel they are included and represented in the services, information and resources that councils provide.

Quick note

See also – Key terms in [Supporting a healthy first 2,000 days for all Victorian children](#)

37. Carbone S, Fraser A, Ramburuth R, & Nelms L (2004) Breaking Cycles, Building Futures. Promoting inclusion of vulnerable families in antenatal and universal early childhood services: A report on the first three stages of the project. Melbourne, Victoria: Victorian Department of Human Services.

38. VicHealth (2016) Applying a gender lens in the workplace: Learnings from the generating equality and respect program. Available from: <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/PVAW/GEAR-tools/Applying-a-gender-lens-in-the-workplace.pdf?la=en&hash=214FD1392311F979E85F680D0F7E0C80761745EE>

Case study

Baby Makes 3: Challenging gendered expectations of new parents through organisational and practice change

[Baby Makes 3](#) is a unique health promotion initiative developed by healthAbility. It builds equal and respectful relationships between couples in the transition to becoming new parents. In addition to a group program for parents (see Case study – *Baby Makes 3* Group Program for first-time parents in the Proud and inclusive communities impact stream), *Baby Makes 3* focuses on influencing early childhood services through practice, structural and systems evolution. This enables broad-scale, sustainable, long-term change to support the health and wellbeing of first-time parents and their babies.

It is critical that this work identifies opportunities to disrupt and shift outdated attitudes, norms, practices and structures, which reinforce potentially damaging gender stereotypes and gendered expectations of being a parent. These shifts ultimately foster collaborative co-parenting that supports families to thrive – optimising mental health and wellbeing outcomes for parents and children, as well as contributing to the prevention of violence against women and other forms of family violence.

It is vitally important that council's early years services, including maternal and child health services, embed gender equality principles and practices into their systems and processes, and do not inadvertently reinforce potentially damaging gendered expectations of being a parent.

Baby Makes 3 supports local government to take a whole-of-setting approach through consultation, workforce development and reviewing current structures and practices.

It supports services to:

- amend all correspondence – including invitations and appointment reminders – to be directed to both birthing and non-birthing parents. This avoids the assumption that only the birthing parent will be caring for the new baby
- use language that is inclusive, and acknowledges and respects the diversity of birthing and non-birthing parents, genders and relationships
- engage all parents as responsible, directing questions and teaching new skills not only to the birthing parent
- acknowledge that parenting requires a team approach and that all have a role to play

- not assume what roles and responsibilities each parent will take on in caring for the baby and managing household chores
- support shared decision making about retaining connection with family and friends, pursuing personal interests and participating in the workforce
- review the images and language used in information provided to parents, to ensure these have an equal representation of men and women in parenting and caring roles
- offer services and appointments outside of usual working hours.

Baby Makes 3 is continually expanding its work with early parenting sector partners in local government to support the mental health of first-time parents. This includes using gender impact assessments to avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes and gendered expectations.

The program is underpinned by a strong evidence and evaluation base. *Baby Makes 3* outcomes directly support several key government policies, including the [Gender Equality Act 2020](#) (Vic) and the [Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022](#) (Vic).

Note: Local governments do not have to be delivering the *Baby Makes 3* parenting group program (see *Baby Makes 3* case study in the Proud and inclusive communities impact stream) to partner with healthAbility in this broader approach to embedding gender equality principles and practices across maternal and child health and other early childhood services.

For more information and to find out how your council can be supported in this area, visit the *Baby Makes 3* [website](#) or email *Baby Makes 3*.





How-to guide to:

Strengthen gender equity and family-inclusive practice across council services

Involving families with young children

Families with young children are the experts on how council services and facilities can meet their diverse needs, and make them feel equally welcome, safe, supported and included. By consulting and engaging with families with young children, councils can involve families in co-designing council services that are equitable, inclusive, accessible and address the needs of all parents, carers and young children.

Councils should aim to consult with and engage local families with young children with diverse structures, circumstances and needs, including birth and non-birth parents of young children. This is an opportunity to understand their needs and identify barriers they face to accessing and using council services and facilities.

Councils can engage families in addressing the extent to which council services and facilities are gender equitable and inclusive of all families and family members. They can also involve them in recommending and co-designing changes and improvements to their policies, practices and environments.

Refer to 'Step up: Showcase local opportunities that promote mental wellbeing for families and children' for guidance on how to support the engagement of local families with young children in co-design. Take steps to engage families and children with diverse family structures, needs, abilities, experiences and circumstances, and consider ways to engage families who are less likely to attend council services and facilities.



Plan

Review relevant research on gender equity and family inclusion (see Recommended resources section).

Identify relevant council plans and policies that support the need to strengthen gender equitable and inclusive practices across council services (such as council's GEAP, Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, and any policies or strategies preventing violence against women, and supporting gender equity, or family or social inclusion). Refer to these in deciding on project objectives and championing the project within council. Work within council to determine the budget and resource requirements for the project and seek support.

Consider engaging council's gender equity officer or local women's health service to provide gender-equity information and training, to build the expertise of council staff who will be working on the project.

Consultation and co-design plan

Plan how you will consult and engage with local families, including by:

- working with families to understand their needs

- involving families in the audit of priority services and facilities
- involving families in the co-design of changes to services and facilities to strengthen their gender equitable and family-inclusive practices and environments.

Decide on the number of families with young children you will consult and work with or involve in co-design. Plan strategies to engage local families, including birth and non-birth parents, families with diverse structures and needs, and families who might not normally attend early childhood and family settings or services (see Involving families with young children section).

Consider establishing a co-design project team, including families and relevant council staff, partners and stakeholders. Identify any funding and resource requirements. If you do form a team, prepare a clear outline of the co-design process for participants. This should include times and locations for co-design sessions. Be flexible and prepared to adapt the timing, location and format of sessions to suit the needs of families.

Consider the need to engage council's gender-equity officer or a local women's health service to provide gender equity training to the team.

Discuss and agree on operating principles, ground rules and values for working together, including a shared commitment to valuing and respecting all ideas and contributions, and working with all members of the team as equal partners. Consider using group activities, discussion and voting to generate ideas and make team decisions.

Project and implementation plan

Plan objectives, intended outcomes and key project parameters

Decide on an achievable number of priority council services and facilities to audit and work with, taking into account the project budget and available resources. Prioritise services and facilities, according to the needs of families with young children. Priority services and facilities may include early childhood centres, maternal and child health services, family support services, libraries, toy libraries, community and supported playgroups, arts and cultural centres, and sport and recreation centres.

Plan the implementation and delivery of actions and changes at the design stage, to strengthen and improve gender equity and family-inclusive practices at priority council services and facilities.

The implementation plan should outline:

- priority services and facilities where changes and actions will be delivered
- the changes and actions needed for each priority service and facility
- policies that require development or improvement, including for particular services or across multiple services
- materials or resources that need to be developed for particular services or across multiple services (such as posters, language guides, communication and marketing materials, and templates)
- staff professional development and training needs
- the people responsible for delivering actions
- available budget and resources
- a timeline that outlines how and when actions and changes will be delivered.

Communications plan

Develop a plan to communicate to local families that council services and facilities are welcoming and inclusive of all genders and families, and to promote changes and innovations to make services more gender equitable, inclusive and responsive to families' diverse needs.

Identify communications channels and strategies that will be used, including channels and strategies for reaching families with diverse structures, needs and experiences, and families that are less likely to engage with council services.

Plan promotional materials that will be developed, such as posters, social media content, and email and newsletter templates.

Review and draw on VicHealth's values-based messaging resources, including VicHealth's [Framing Gender Equality Message Guide](#) to prepare key messages that are effective for promoting the actions that services are taking to welcome and support all families. These should focus on the positive changes that the project is aiming to create. For example, 'Council services are places where all families and children in our community can feel welcome and included'.

Involve families with young children in contributing ideas, identifying communication channels, co-designing communication strategies, contributing content to promotional materials (such as quotes, case studies or artwork), and acting as ambassadors or champions for gender equity and family-inclusive practices in the media and the local community.

Recommended resources

VicHealth has worked with Common Cause Australia to develop the [Framing Gender Equality Message Guide](#), based on research on values-based messaging frames that are most effective to promote the importance of gender equality. The guide provides tips and example messages to help convince people of the need for and value of gender-equality initiatives. Sign up on the [VicHealth website](#) to stay up to date with this work and access other values-based messaging resources.

Assess

Audit and assess priority services and facilities, using existing gender equity and family-inclusivity checklists or auditing tools, or a tool or checklist co-designed or adapted for the project (see the 'Design' section below).

Engage with local families to identify practical and cultural or attitudinal barriers to families accessing or using priority services or facilities, and areas for change or improvement to strengthen gender-equitable and family-inclusive practices and environments.

Consider conducting a broader survey or focus group of families with young children in the community about how gender equitable and inclusive they find council services and facilities, and any discrimination, inequities or barriers they experience, in order to engage a broader range of perspectives.

Design survey questions to assess issues, such as:

- What are the barriers and challenges to families with young children attending and participating at council services and facilities?
- How welcoming, inclusive, equitable and family-friendly do they perceive services and facilities to be?
- Do families currently attend services or facilities with their young children, and what experiences have they had?
- What would support and enable them to attend or participate at services and facilities with their young children (including activities, programs, facilities and spaces, flexible times or other support)?

Interview management and staff to gather information about services' policies, environments, practices, programs, and the attendance and participation of local families with young children. Find out their views and perspectives on the opportunities, barriers, challenges and changes required to strengthen gender equity and family inclusion.

Design consultation with services and facilities to assess issues such as:

- What are the current participation levels of families with young children?
- What are their ideas or existing policies or approaches for ensuring gender equity, and welcoming, including and supporting all families?
- What family-friendly facilities or programs do they currently provide?
- Are there any practical considerations or constraints in implementing actions to welcome and support families with young children?

Consider collecting data on each service's booking and program attendance, and analyse this data by gender, age of children and other relevant characteristics of participants. Consider following up any identified gaps in attendance or participation at services and facilities with surveys of families, focus groups or individual interviews with management, staff and attendees, to explore the reasons for the gaps.

Design

Audit tool

Review existing gender equity and family-inclusion checklists or auditing tools (see Recommended resources below). Adapt these checklists or use them to inform the design of new checklists or tools for auditing council services and facilities, as appropriate for the project.

Recommended resources

Equity and inclusion checklists and auditing tools

See gender equity checklist tools and guidance that could be used or adapted to audit council services, or to inform development of a new checklist or tool:

- City of Darebin's [Creating gender equity in the early years: a resource for local government](#) (includes a gender-equity assessment tool)
- Women's Health West's Gender Audit Guidelines for the Government, Community and Health Sectors
- Women's Health East's [Gender Audit Tool and Guidelines](#)
- Women's Health Grampians's [Gender Lens Checklist](#)
- VicHealth's [Applying a gender lens in the workplace](#) tool
- InterAction's [Gender Audit Handbook](#).

Guidance materials and audit tools for inclusive practices for LGBTIQ+ people that may help inform audits of family inclusive practices at council services and facilities include:

- the Victorian Government's [Rainbow Ready roadmap](#) resources – these resources help regional and rural communities identify, plan, monitor and evaluate progress towards local LGBTIQ+ inclusion in a range of local and community settings. See in particular the [Rainbow Ready roadmap – Assessment and Evaluation Tool](#)
- Rainbow Health Australia's [LGBTI Inclusive Practice Tool](#).

To help audit and assess early childhood services, see this [list of resources and checklists for inclusive practices for early childhood educators](#).

Design actions

Review and carefully consider the consultation responses

Decide on recommendations, and design actions, changes and improvements to the policies, practices and environments of the services. Engage with families and involve them in co-design of recommendations and actions

It may be helpful to think about actions and changes under the following broad categories:

Policies and practices

Examples:

- Develop gender equity and family-inclusion policies and strategies
- Ensure gender equitable staff policies
- Allow all families using services the opportunity to describe their family formation, and the roles of family members, in their own way.

Staff knowledge and attitudes

Examples:

- Provide ongoing training and professional development in gender equitable and family inclusive practices for staff, ensuring any lack of skills, knowledge or confidence among staff is addressed (for example, *Baby Makes 3* – see the *Baby Makes 3* case study)
- Develop guides for management and staff on gender equitable and family inclusive behaviour and practices
- Ensuring non-birth parents in families are recognised and treated as legitimate and intrinsic members of families and that communications and practices include and value them

Communications and resources

Examples:

- Develop gender and family inclusive language guides.
- Ensure all communications, resources and marketing and promotional materials use gender and family inclusive language, tone and imagery, and promote gender equity.
- Review service or program enrolment or intake forms to ensure they use gender equitable and family inclusive language and ask appropriate, relevant questions in relation to gender or family structure.
- Design communications and display materials (e.g. website, social media, posters, flyers, stickers) to promote gender equity and family inclusion, and indicate that all families are welcome.
- Communicate that the service or facility supports and welcomes LGBTIQ+ parented families by, for example, by displaying rainbow stickers or posters, photos of LGBTIQ+ parented families, and supportive statements.
- Communicate that the service or facility supports and welcomes breastfeeding (such as by registering and promoting their status as Breastfeeding Welcome Here venues) and providing suitable, comfortable spaces and facilities for breastfeeding and baby feeding.
- Ensure gender and family inclusive language in program and activity titles and descriptions, for example, refer to 'new parent groups' rather than 'mothers' groups'.

Programs and activities

Examples:

- Provide programs and activities for parents, carers and young children that support children's healthy development, family functioning, social support and connection, creativity, physical activity and/or family wellbeing.
- Offer services and programs aimed at promoting equitable and respectful gender roles and relationships in families, such as *Baby Makes 3* (see *Baby Makes 3* case study above).
- Ensure the times of programs and activities are suitable for families with young children (for example, consider sleep and mealtimes, work hours, childcare hours and school hours of older siblings).

Built and physical environment

Examples:

- Ensure the physical environments of services and facilities are family- and child-friendly, accessible and safe, with access and secure storage areas for prams and mobility aids, and suitable spaces and facilities for children to play, and for families to feed, change, care for and supervise them.
- Design or improve built environment to enable access for families using prams, mobility aids or active transport (e.g. bikes, scooters), and provide secure storage and adequate parking space.
- Provide baby change facilities that are accessible by all genders.
- Provide spaces and furniture that are suitable and comfortable for breastfeeding and baby feeding.
- Provide play or breakout spaces for children that are adjacent to and visible from spaces used by parents and carers.
- Provide books, toys and dress ups for children that are inclusive of diverse families, promote positive gender norms, and challenge or avoid reinforcing stereotypical gender roles.
- Provide family change spaces in major sports, recreation and aquatic centres.
- Design or improve the safety of the built environment, for example, to ensure clear sightlines and allow for passive surveillance, and to improve the safety of road access and carparking.

Develop a set of recommendations and guidance on co-designed changes for each priority service and facility. Where actions are recommended across multiple services and facilities, consider designing a toolkit of the actions with guidance, which councils can support services and facilities to work through and implement. Consider designing other guidance material and resources, such as standard gender equity and family-inclusion policies and language guides or templates.

Crossover opportunity

For ideas on changes to improve gender equity in sports and recreation facilities, see the *Create a toolkit for welcoming families and young children to sport and recreation clubs and facilities implementation* action in the Building Active Communities core module.



Deliver

Follow the implementation plan and work closely with priority services and facilities to support them to deliver recommended and co-designed changes and actions. Prepare and disseminate relevant information and guidance materials to staff. Seek investment and funding opportunities to enable services and facilities to implement actions.

Work with councils and facilities to deliver communications and promotions activities following the communications plan.

Consider ways to involve families and children in delivery of actions. This could include families working closely with services and facilities to educate staff and support them to develop policies or implement changes in ways that best responds to the needs of families and children. Families could act as ambassadors or champions, helping to promote council services and facilities as welcoming and inclusive environments for all families, and to encourage and support families to access them.

Be available to services and facilities to answer questions, provide information, and support them to deliver actions and changes throughout and following the project period. Continue to work with services and facilities to build on and expand actions they have taken.



Review and embed

Monitor and evaluate the impact of actions taken to improve gender equity, and welcome and include all families with young children at council services and facilities.

Repeat the survey or consultation with local families undertaken at the Assess stage. Compare results to find out whether changes to council services and facilities delivered by the project have made families feel more welcome, included and supported, and whether their participation has increased.

Seek feedback from services and facilities on the actions delivered through the project, including positive changes in attendance or participation of families, and any challenges they have encountered. Support services and facilities to consult with families who attend and seek their perspectives and feedback.

Seek follow up data from the services and facilities on attendance and participation by families and young children. Analyse the data, compare it with data analysed at the Assess stage, and identify any increases in participation following the project.

Promote and celebrate positive outcomes from the project. Communicate key results to services and facilities, council leaders and staff, and to the community more broadly. Showcase families participating at council services and facilities in your communications. Refer to VicHealth's values-based messaging guidance, including the [Framing Gender Equality Message Guide](#), in developing values-based messages and frames to communicate the outcomes of the project.

Use evaluation to identify opportunities to continue to work with services and facilities to strengthen their gender equitable and family inclusive policies, practices and environments.

Embed actions to improve gender equitable and family inclusive practices and environments at council services and facilities as part of council's annual program delivery. Seek funding and support to extend the project by broadening the range of services and facilities that council works with.

Recommended resources

Resources on promoting gender equity in the early years of children's lives:

- City of Darebin [Creating gender equity in the early years: a resource for local government](#)
- Women's Health East and Manningham City Council [No limitations: breaking down gender stereotypes in the early years. A resource for early years educators](#)
- [Free to Be Me](#) is a free, interactive online program that supports early childhood centres and educators to provide an environment that promotes gender equity using gender-equitable practices and spaces where children learn, play and grow. It is delivered by Access Health and Community and supported by City of Boroondara, Manningham City Council and Yarra City Council

Gender equity checklists and assessment tools:

- City of Darebin [Creating gender equity in the early years: a resource for local government](#) (includes a gender-equity assessment tool)
- Women's Health West [Gender Audit Guidelines for the Government, Community and Health Sectors](#)
- Women's Health East [Gender Audit Tool and Guidelines](#)
- Women's Health Grampians [Gender Lens Checklist](#)
- VicHealth [Applying a gender lens in the workplace](#) tool
- InterAction [Gender Audit Handbook](#)
- City of Whittlesea [Gender Equity in Design Guideline](#) provides guidance on designing built environments to promote gender equity

Guidance materials and audit tools for inclusive practices for LGBTIQ+ people:

- The Victorian Government's [Rainbow Ready roadmap](#) resources, including the [assessment and evaluation tool](#)
- Rainbow Health Australia's [LGBTI-inclusive practice audit tool](#)

Values-based messaging guidance:

- VicHealth's Framing Gender Equality Message Guide. For more information and how to stay informed, see [VicHealth's values-based messaging for health promotion guidance](#)

Support for fathers and male carers:

- [Support for Fathers](#)
- [Engaging fathers in early childhood services](#)
- [7 Types of Dad resources](#)
- [Dads raising the next generation](#)
- [Introduction to working with men and family relationships guide](#)

Community of practice

Community of Practice will be provided to fast-track councils working through the health promotion modules, giving them the opportunity to share with, learn from and support each other through implementation.

Councils, together with expert partners and young people, will share experiences and insights about the suggested activities within the core modules. They will also look at topics related to the VicHealth Local Government Partnership more broadly, and the development and adoption of Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans 2021–25.

Council staff interested in finding out more about participating in the Community of Practice and the VicHealth Local Government Partnership health promotion modules can [email the VicHealth team](#).



Implementation templates

The following templates will help you implement the 'Building proud and inclusive communities' impact stream.



Template

Disability Inclusion Audit

Here are some suggested questions to ask when doing the audit. This is a fact-finding exercise to identify the gaps in your council and the areas that need to be addressed.

Respond 'yes', 'no' or 'NA' (not applicable) to the following questions and then identify what actions your council will take. To improve your access and inclusion, you must talk with and engage young people with disability to help develop solutions.

Management commitment

Does your council have a current written plan or strategy, endorsed and promoted by your senior executive, which details your commitment to access and inclusion of people with disability as potential employees, employees and customers/clients?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Does your council have a focus on and plans specifically for people with disability with intersectional identities (for example, young, old, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, LGBTIQ+)?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you have regular reflection and feedback opportunities to improve disability inclusion in your management?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Comments about how your council can improve:

Useful resources and ideas for addressing issues raised in this section:

- [How to develop Disability Action Plans](#)

Planning, policies and programing

Does your council clearly promote the principle of disability inclusion in all aspects of programing? Is this embedded in all programs, not just disability/inclusion/accessibility spaces (for example, staffing, advocacy, awareness raising, activities and monitoring)?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Are the principles of accessibility and inclusion represented in council policies?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you meet the access needs of people with disability? Does this include alternative communication formats (for example, Braille, large-print, sign language interpreters, use of digital and physical communication)? Does this include environmental access, transportation access, programmatic access and economic access?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Are you ensuring that your services do not segregate people with disability unnecessarily?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you communicate with people about what your accessibility supports are?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you address accessibility issues with regard to facilities and/or services, and include them as a cost of your operations, as part of long-term and annual planning?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you have regular reflection and feedback opportunities to improve disability inclusion in your planning, policies and programing?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Comments about how your council can improve:

- Read these resources on communications accessibility: [Australian Network on Disability – Making accessibility a core principle](#)
- Read about online meetings and webinar accessibility: Disability Advocacy Resource Unit's [Accessible online meetings](#)
- Create important documents that are easy to understand for everyone – written in easy and plain English alternatives.

Inclusion of people with disability and disabled people's organisations

Do you engage directly with organisations run by and for people with disability (see [Disabled People's Organisations Australia](#)) to ensure an inclusive approach to your council's programs, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you ensure that volunteers and interns with disability have an equal opportunity to participate? Do you only engage people with disability in unpaid positions and, if so, are you making efforts to change that?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you ensure that staff and potential contractors have an equal opportunity to be hired? How do you support people with disability in your recruitment and onboarding processes?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Are people with disability included on your Board, advisory boards and committees? Are they remunerated for their time at the same rate as people without disability? Are these people diverse and do they include young people with disability?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Have you identified young people with disability who can provide input about access to your services, programs and facilities? Do you pay them for their time? Do you make sure you don't expect people with disability to fix your accessibility issues?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Are staff and consultants with disability paid adequately for their work? Are their credentials and expertise acknowledged? Is this at the same rate as people without disability?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Comments about how your council can improve:

Outreach and awareness

Do you know which are the leading disability organisations in your area, or the communities you most interact with? Have you read their resources and paid for their services if needed? Have you reached out to them to engage them in your projects?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you require staff to attend disability rights training, to ensure all sections and offices are aware of how to design, implement, monitor and evaluate inclusive programs, and create an inclusive office culture? Do you recommend that people seek out additional professional development in this area?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do your staff appropriately and effectively engage with people with disability? What do you do to ensure they treat people with disability with respect and dignity?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Have you informed your staff of your non-discrimination/accessibility/accommodation policies? Do they know the consequences if they are breached?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do your staff know how to support people with disability in an emergency? do they feel confident to communicate with people with disability about this? Do they know how to assist people with disability in leaving the building or sheltering safely and appropriately?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do your staff know how to meet access needs, including accessible transportation, sign language interpreters and other accommodations, when providing services to people or groups with disability?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Comments about how your council can improve:

Useful resources and ideas for addressing issues raised in this section:

- Have meetings and events to help people learn about disability rights.

Communications

Do your communications promote disability inclusion and use language that is respectful, humanising and non-discriminatory? Do you ask people with disability what language they want to be used and then use it?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

If you distribute printed materials (for example, brochures, forms, exhibits and handbooks) or have displays of print information, do you have those that are frequently used available in large print or other alternate formats, such as Braille, electronic format, recorded tape or disk?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you consider the use of high contrast colours for people with low vision, and avoid overly bright colours for people who struggle with sensory processing?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

If you produce or use videos, television broadcasts, or make audio-visual presentations, do you make them accessible to people with disability? Do you make captioning available? If at a presentation, do you provide sign language interpretation and/or live captioning? Do you include image descriptions, audio descriptions and other supplementary information for people with disability?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do consumers have a way to contact council other than via phone, such as email or a web form? Do you include the information for the National Relay service alongside other contact information? If you are using a web form, do you make sure that it is screen-reader friendly?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you emphasise accessibility in ads, programs, notices and newsletters, and on your website and social media?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you ensure internal and external documents and communications are accessible?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Outreach and awareness cont.

Do you have a mechanism for collecting the feedback of people with disability on the accessibility of your communications?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ NA

Comments about how your council can improve:

Useful resources and ideas for addressing issues raised in this section:

- Learn about [accessible communications](#)

Meetings and events

Do you hold public meetings and events only in accessible facilities, or do you have a way to give notice and move the meeting to an accessible location, depending on the circumstances and attendees?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ NA

Is information provided in advance about how to make requests for modifications or auxiliary aids, and the accessibility of the meeting (for example, interpreters and real-time captioning)?

Do you give participants enough time with information about locations to be able to make changes if necessary?

Do all meetings incorporate accommodations to ensure they are accessible to all participants? This may include covering the cost of transport to the meetings for people with disability.

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ NA

Do you consider the time that events are held to make them more accessible for young people with disability specifically (for example, not holding meetings during school hours)?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ NA

Do you provide options for online meetings at all meetings? Are your online events and meetings accessible and engaging for people with disability? Do you make adjustments to accessibility considerations that are responsive to the needs of online meetings?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ NA

Do you find, create or share access keys, or share general accessibility information to participants, for venues you use?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ NA

Do you have a mechanism for collecting the feedback of people with disability on the accessibility of your meetings and events?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ NA

Comments about how your council can improve:

Useful resources and ideas for addressing issues raised in this section:

- Meetings & Events Australia has an in-depth report [Accessible Events: A Guide for Meeting and Event Organisers](#)
- The Youth Disability Advocacy Service has a guide on [access keys](#)
- The Disability Advocacy Resource Unit's [Accessible online meetings](#) resource will help make your online meetings more inclusive.

Website and social media

Have you evaluated your website for accessibility? How accessible is your social media?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Is your website and social media accessible to blind or visually impaired people who use screen readers? Are videos on your website captioned? Are your videos correctly audio described?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you have processes in place to you ensure that new content is accessible?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you have a mechanism for collecting the feedback of people with disability on the accessibility of your website and social media?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Comments about how your council can improve:

Useful resources and ideas for addressing issues raised in this section:

- [Learn about accessible communications](#)

Transportation

Is the transport you provide is accessible? Do you provide alternative options that are accessible for people with disability when needed?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you have a mechanism for collecting the feedback of people with disability on the accessibility of your transport?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Comments about how your council can improve:

Useful resources and ideas for addressing issues raised in this section:

- Guidelines have been developed by the Australian Human Rights Commission to provide practical assistance to facilitate compliance with the [Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002](#)



Facilities

Do you have an access key for your facilities?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Have you evaluated your facilities for physical accessibility within the last year? Do you have a process for doing so regularly?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you ensure that places where you carry out your services and activities are accessible? If they are not, do you move the services to accessible locations or make other modifications to ensure participation by those who have disability?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you ensure that staff and volunteers accurately inform clients and visitors of accessible features of your building?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Are you compliant with federal, state and local accessibility requirements?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

When you look for new space to lease or use, do you make every effort to find space that meets accessibility requirements or can be altered to meet them?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you have a mechanism for collecting the feedback of people with disability on the accessibility of your facilities?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Comments about how your council can improve:

Useful resources and ideas for addressing issues raised in this section:

- The Youth Disability Avocacy Service has developed a guide on [access keys](#)

Employment/recruitment

Do you make your recruitment process accessible and inclusive of people with disability? What do you put in place to make it accessible for them to apply for jobs, attend interviews and engage in work?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Does your council have a written policy or procedures in place to instruct employees on requesting and implementing workplace adjustments to enable equal access and inclusion for people with disability in the recruitment and selection process, and at all stages during employment?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you ensure you are not maintaining bias against people with disability of intersectional identities? Do you provide equitable and inclusive support for young people, people who are culturally and linguistically diverse, and LGBTIQ+ people with disability?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you have a mechanism for collecting the feedback of people with disability on the accessibility of your employment, recruitment and onboarding processes?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Comments about how your council can improve:

Useful resources and ideas for addressing issues raised in this section:

- Job Access [Employer Toolkit](#)

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

Does your program require that reporting mechanisms specifically include indicators for people with disability and around disability inclusion?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Does your evaluation process mandate that the data be disaggregated by disability to ensure that people with disability are included in the project, as well as the outcomes?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you ensure a disability inclusion perspective in monitoring and evaluating your programs? When reviewing the program reports, do you ensure that people with disability are included in the program activities in a meaningful and effective way?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do people with disability play an active role in evaluation, reporting and monitoring processes?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you have a mechanism for collecting the feedback of people with disability on the accessibility of your monitoring, evaluation and reporting?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Comments about how your council can improve:

Useful resources and ideas for addressing issues raised in this section:

- Create co-design and advisory groups with young people with disability, to give regular input into the design of and feedback on programs.

Understanding people with disability

Do you have mechanisms in place to support young people with disability?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you have mechanisms in place to support culturally and linguistically diverse people with disability?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you have mechanisms in place to support LGBTIQ+ people with disability?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Do you have mechanisms in place to support marginalised people with disability?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ NA

Comments about how your council can improve:

Useful resources and ideas for addressing issues raised in this section:

- See the online and face-to-face training offerings outlined in the quick win section.

Further Information

Stay up to date with the VicHealth Local Government Partnership.

Visit: www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/programs-and-projects/local-government-partnership

For further information or enquiries, contact our Local Government team
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VicHealth acknowledges the Traditional
Custodians of the land. We pay our respects
to all Elders past, present and future.



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