



Loddon Shire Inclusive Communities Plan 2025 - 2029

October 2025



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Loddon Shire Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land comprising the Loddon Shire Council area. Council would like to pay respect to their Elders both past and present.

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Vision for Inclusive Loddon

Loddon Shire Council is an inclusive and welcoming place for all. Everyone feels safe and welcomed to participate in social and community life, no matter their background, gender, ability, faith, culture, or age. Partnerships and collaboration are encouraged to foster social cohesion and connection. We are a community of inclusive communities.



What is an Inclusive Community?

Inclusivity is a broad term that can mean many things to different people. Being inclusive means ensuring there are no barriers to participate in social life, regardless of age, gender, faith, culture, ability, health, education status, and more. This is the opposite of being exclusive, where people feel left out.

Loddon Shire Council is committed to making our municipality a more inclusive place for everyone. The Loddon Shire Inclusive Communities Plan represents our commitment to inclusivity. Regardless of age, gender, disability, or cultural background, everyone deserves to feel included, supported and welcome in Loddon.

This Plan has been written in collaboration and consultation with community members, group representatives, and Council staff. It considers inclusivity in a holistic way - through multiple lenses - identifying six key Focus Areas and supporting outcomes.

Typically, plans related to inclusive communities tend to have a more specific focus on a singular topic, for example, on ageing, disability, or gender equity. This Plan views inclusivity more broadly as a range of aspects that both intersect and contribute to a person's sense of identity.

From extensive engagement across the Shire, you told us that respect is vital to inclusivity. You also told us that when you think about inclusivity, you also think about accessibility, support, connection, and understanding. We heard that you value the sense of community and connection that being part of a community or group brings.

Inclusive communities are welcoming, open, and accepting of diversity. They are places where there is a sense of connection and community spirit, supported by a variety of services, programs, and activities to meet diverse needs.

We know that some people in our municipality face barriers to accessing the support, information, and resources that they need to live healthy and fulfilling lives. Keeping this 'status quo' means that not everyone will be able to participate freely or equally in community life. Therefore, it is important to be proactive in seeking ways to address barriers to help make Loddon more inclusive for all.



Council's role in promoting inclusive practices

Council can play many roles in helping to support communities to be more inclusive. This Plan categorises the actions Council may take to support inclusive communities as: investigate, collaborate, support, deliver, lead, and advocate.

- **Investigate:** Exploring options or conducting studies, with the objective to deepen understanding or assess feasibility.
- **Collaborate:** Working with organisations or groups towards shared objectives.
- **Support:** Encouraging and promoting existing activities, initiatives, or groups.
- **Deliver:** Taking ownership and doing what is within our remit to act, provide, or deliver services.
- **Lead:** Taking initiative and leadership in modelling values and behaviours.
- **Advocate:** Representing, promoting, and defending the value of inclusivity across tiers of government, organisations, interest groups and business owners.

Some of the responsibilities that Council must uphold are stated in the statutory requirements as outlined by the State Government in making communities more inclusive. This Plan seeks to address the requirements of two acts.

The Victorian Disability Act 2006 requires councils to prepare Disability Action Plans. Previously, this requirement was addressed by Council's Access and Inclusion Plan 2018 – 2022. Now at the end of its lifecycle, the Inclusive Communities Plan will build upon and expand this.

The Gender Equality Act 2020 requires all councils to prepare Gender Equality Action Plans for workforce participation, and conduct Gender Impact Assessments for policies, programs, and services that are new, or are being reviewed. This Plan makes recommendations so that Council can more readily and meaningfully meet the requirements of the Gender Equality Act.



How the Plan was developed

The development of this Plan has been informed by comprehensive community engagement across Loddon Shire. Throughout the course of the engagement, we heard from more than 230 community members and organisations from across the Shire.

The first round of community consultation commenced on 20 May 2024, running until 23 June 2024. There were a range of different ways for the community and stakeholders to get involved in the project, and to provide valuable feedback to inform the Plan, such as:

- Community pop-ups and drop-ins across Loddon Shire;
- A community survey, completed by 175 participants online and in person;
- A survey for Council staff and contractors; and
- Targeted discussions with stakeholders.

During the engagement campaign, we visited schools, senior citizen's centres, community halls, workplaces, and shopping centres across East Loddon, Inglewood, Pyramid Hill, Boort, Dingee, Wedderburn, and Tarnagulla.

We also heard from people across the Shire, from Serpentine, Calivil, Korong Vale, Bridgewater, Tandarra, Raywood, Pompapiel, Kamarooka, Bears Lagoon, Yarrawalla, Rheola, Waanyarra, Jarklin, Eastville, and Barraport.

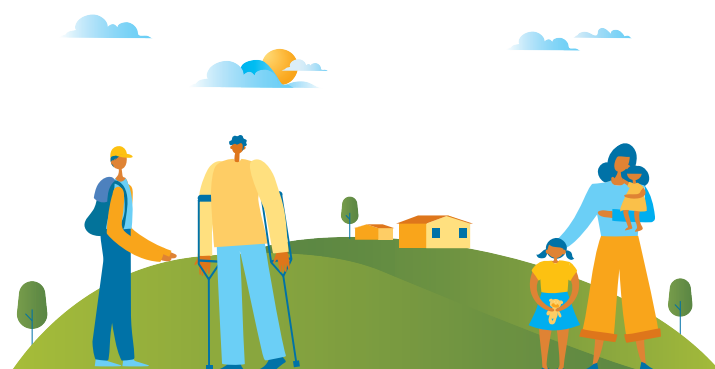
For the community engagement, conversation kits were developed to provide more information about the project. They also promoted the different ways to get involved in consultation, and contained activities designed to elicit feedback about inclusive communities in Loddon Shire. The activities encouraged written and drawn responses, and while they were targeted to younger audiences, could be used by all community members across the Shire.

In addition to engagement a Project Working Group was formed to guide this project. The Project Working Group began the project with a 'knowledge sharing workshop', which brought together people from all across Council to share their ideas about what this Plan might look like, and how best to learn from and reach members of the Loddon community.

A review of all of the strategies and plans that may impact and inform what inclusive communities may look like in Loddon was also undertaken. We did this review while developing a People and Place analysis. The purpose of the People and Place analysis was to better understand who lives in Loddon, what its communities look like, and what makes it unique.

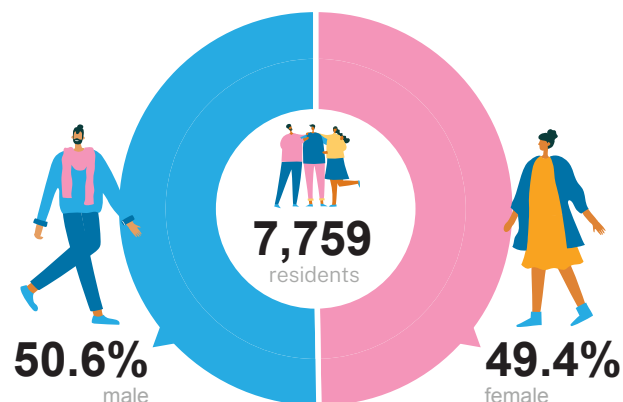
This Plan is the result of all of these different methods. It helped us to understand what the highest priorities of the community and service providers are, and what could be done to make Loddon a more inclusive place.

The Loddon Shire Inclusive Communities Plan aligns with the Community Vision Council Plan, Council Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan as shown in the diagram below.



Our community of communities

WHO WE ARE



MEDIAN AGE

52

Loddon

38

Victoria

173

people identify as
Aboriginal or Torres
Strait Islander

PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE BORN OVERSEAS

8.6%

Loddon

12.4%

Regional
Victoria

30%

Victoria

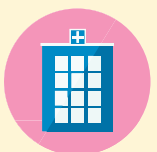
Top countries for overseas
birth were: England, the
Philippines & New Zealand

WHAT WE DO FOR WORK

TOP 3 INDUSTRIES OF EMPLOYMENT



Agriculture,
Forestry &
Fishing



Health care
& social
assistance



Manu-
facturing

AVERAGE WEEKLY HOUSEHOLD INCOME

\$1,309

Loddon

\$1,759

Victoria

PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE THAT VOLUNTEER

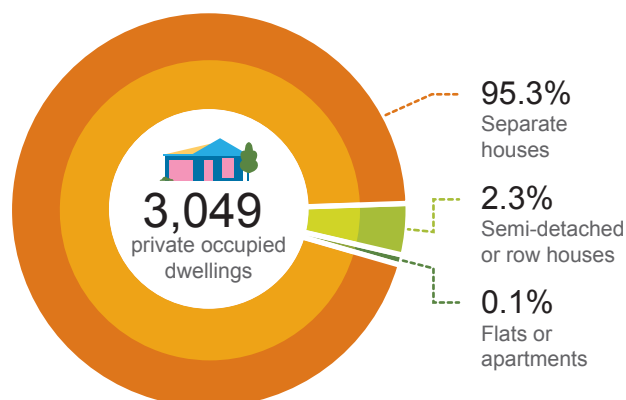
25.4%

Loddon

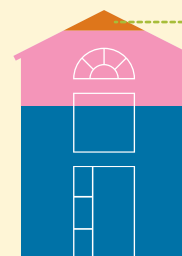
13.3%

Victoria

HOW WE LIVE



HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION



2.6%

Group households

33.5%

Single (or lone)
person households

63.8%

Family households

TENURE TYPE

55.7%

Owned outright

24.8%

Owned with a mortgage

12.0%

Rented

WEEKLY MEDIAN RENT

\$170

Loddon

\$370

Victoria

MONTHLY MEDIAN MORTGAGE REPAYMENTS

\$867

Loddon

\$1859

Victoria

What makes Loddon unique?

Strengths

Unique communities

Loddon Shire is home to a range of geographically separate and distinct townships. Each town possesses a unique character, reflected by its histories, industries, and tightly-knit community groups.

A community of volunteers

Unpaid work and volunteering is an important part of social life for many in Loddon Shire, where 25% of residents reported as being volunteers in 2021 - higher than regional (17%) and state (13.3%) averages.

The natural environment

Loddon Shire is abundant in environmental treasures, which attract tourists for active or passive recreation. Popular activities include bushwalking, cycling, water-skiing, fishing, and canoeing.

Participation in sports and recreation

Loddon Shire's Recreation Strategy (2015) reports that participation in physical activities such as aerobics, gym, and fitness type activities, as well as sports, is higher in the Shire compared to state averages. Further, community satisfaction towards sports and recreational facilities is also high, illustrating a community that is engaged and involved with physical activities and sporting life.

Thriving industry

34% of Loddon Shire's residents are employed in the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing sector, compared with 7% in Regional Victoria.

Challenges

A changing population

The median age in Loddon is 52 years, higher than the state average of 38 years. This median is increasing, from 50 in 2011, and 51 in 2016. 29% of Loddon Shire's population is 65 years old or older, higher than the state's average of 17%, while 13% are between the ages of 18 and 34 years old, lower than the state's average of 23.5%. Although Loddon Shire's older residents play an active and crucial role in civic society, planning for a greater proportion of ageing residents can pose some challenges relating to workforce participation rates and increased care requirements. Also, despite the levels of volunteering being relatively high in the Shire, the percentage of volunteers is declining, down to 25% from 32% in 2016.

Relative socio-economic disadvantage

ABS data relating to Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) highlight that residents in Loddon Shire experience a high level of disadvantage. The SEIFA index considers factors such as unemployment, low incomes or education levels, single parent families, among others. In 2021, Loddon Shire was the 11th most disadvantaged LGA based on this index.

Levels of advantage are not distributed equally throughout the Shire. Areas surrounding Boort, and north of Newbridge, experience higher levels of relative advantage, and areas around Wedderburn, Inglewood, Tarnagulla, as well as Mitiamo, experience lower levels.

Internet connectivity and telecommunications

54% of Loddon Shire's residents live in households with internet access via a broadband connection. This number is considerably lower than the average for Loddon Mallee (73%) and the state average (72%).



What you told us about inclusivity

To make Loddon Shire's communities more inclusive, we heard the need for respect, accessibility, support, connection and understanding among community members. You shared that connection and relationships within communities and among friends are important, as is improving places and spaces and providing areas where people can come together.

We heard that distance, including lack of public transport, poor roads and geographic distance between destinations are barriers to inclusivity, as well as access to services and shops, and income and finances.

You shared that inclusive communities should be welcoming, open, and accepting of diversity,

and should have a sense of community and connection.

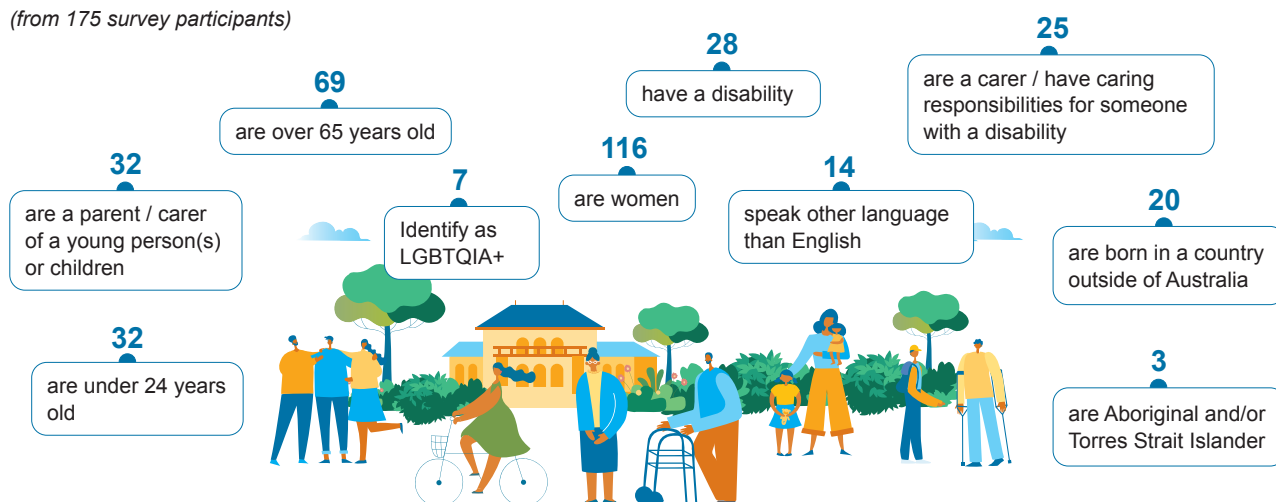
You shared the importance of providing opportunities for all kinds of people to participate in community and social life, and that building relationships with groups and organisations is also important.

Your feedback highlighted the importance of making a more conscious effort to include and engage groups who may currently feel underrepresented or less connected, including people with a disability, young people, older people, people with English as a second language and LGBTQIA+ people.

Who we heard from

Demographic characteristics

(from 175 survey participants)



How we make communities more inclusive

Educate and raise awareness about the importance of inclusivity in our communities

Build relationships with groups and organisations

Create policies that promote inclusivity

Provide opportunities to all kinds of people to participate in the community and social life

Help to change attitudes and behaviours to create a more inclusive environment



Strategic context

Inclusivity touches on many parts of people's identity. There are a range of policies and acts, from all tiers of government, that influence how inclusivity is approached.

Internationally, the World Health Organisation has developed the Social Determinants of Health (SDH) framework. The SDH framework uses research to show that the inequalities people face have tangible impacts on their health and life expectancies.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to achieve a better and more sustainable future for everyone.

There are 17 interconnected SDGs, each addressing global challenges such as poverty, inequality, justice and climate change.

It is part of Council's commitment to the people it serves to strive towards creating an inclusive

environment that supports the health and wellbeing of its communities.

The aims of this Plan align most with the following SDGs:

- no poverty;
- zero hunger;
- good health and wellbeing;
- quality education;
- gender equality;
- decent work and economic growth;
- reduced inequalities;
- sustainable townships and communities; and
- peace, justice and strong institutions.

The broader context for inclusive communities across federal, state and local policy framework is summarised below.

Federal Government Policies and Acts

- Racial Discrimination Act 1975
- Sex Discrimination Act 1984
- Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992
- Age Discrimination Act 2004
- Carers Recognition Act 2010

State Government Policies and Acts

- Disability Act 2006
- Building Code of Australia 2013
- Equal Opportunity Act 2010
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
- Multicultural Victoria Act 2011
- Carers Recognition Act 2012
- Gender Equality Act 2020
- Local Government Act 2020
- Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008
- Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001
- Inclusive Victoria – state disability plan 2022-2026
- Pride in our future: Victoria's LGBTIQA+ strategy 2022-2032

Loddon Shire Council's Policies, Strategies, and Plans

- Community Engagement Policy and Framework
- Child Safety Standards Policy and Framework
- Staff and Contractors Code of Conduct
- Bullying and Occupational Violence Policy
- Sexual Harassment Policy
- Incident Reporting and Investigation Policy
- OH&S Consultation and Communication Policy
- Workforce Plan 2021-2025
- Volunteer Strategy 2022-2026

Loddon Shire Inclusive Communities Plan

What you love about your community

Through listening to community, we learned more about what you love and value about the communities and places you live.

Loddon Shire's residents value feeling connected to one another. You appreciate that people are friendly, kind, helpful, and supportive. We heard about the importance of inter-personal connections, and the way that community members look after one another.

You also cherish the environment around you, from the services and facilities of our buildings and time, to the peaceful, relaxing atmosphere and natural environment.

Using what we heard, we have arranged this Plan into six Focus Areas which reflect the values and priorities you have shared. The Focus Areas are:

- Community participation
- Partnerships and relationships
- Programs and activations
- Places and spaces
- Positive ageing
- Internal commitment





Our Focus Areas

Community participation

Empowering communities to be engaged, feel listened to, and be involved in decisions that impact them.

Partnerships and relationships

Forging strong partnerships and relationships to address barriers to feeling included.

Programs and activations

Creating vibrant places for everyone, with a range of activities and events that celebrate diversity and difference.

Places and spaces

Exploring ways to make our built environments and public spaces more activated and welcoming.

Positive ageing

Encouraging a healthy mindset and a commitment to staying physically, socially and cognitively active in our older years.

Internal commitment

Taking a leadership role and embedding inclusive values within our organisation in everything that we do.



Community participation

Empowering communities to be engaged, feel listened to, and be involved in decisions that impact them.

What this means in practice

- An increased diversity of voices in our community strengthens our resilience and promotes an inclusive culture.
- A 'people-first' approach to planning and decision-making processes ensures that the best outcomes for our community are delivered.
- Our communities feel empowered to participate and influence planning and decision-making that impacts them.
- A broader understanding of inclusivity is embedded into community engagement policies and practices.
- People who experience barriers to inclusivity are consulted with, and where possible involved in shaping outcomes.

What we heard

We heard that there is often a gap between the knowledge of decision-makers and the needs of community members – you told us that the best way to hear from you is for Council to be 'out in the community'. How we manage our processes internally is important too, and we heard suggestions to explore training staff in community engagement practices to build capacity and confidence across the organisation.

You told us that we could do more to build trust and relationships with our reference groups and even consider expanding them. Most importantly, you told us that everyone in the community must have a voice, including those historically left out of the conversation.

What service providers told us:

Listen to young people. Ask them, don't do things without asking [them]. Go to schools. They're pretty honest about what they like."



"...Consultation with community. Asking what they actually need. We have perceived barriers but they're not always accurate - there are things we haven't thought about. Go directly to underrepresented groups and find out their needs. If it doesn't meet their needs, it is probably done in waste."

"[Good projects start with] consultation. It's around having Council hosting or facilitating the group. All ages are welcome, meet face to face, and also work together to make sure that things are tracking well. It needs to be co-designed with community."

Outcomes: Community participation

Council's role

- | | | |
|----|---|-----------------|
| 1. | An expanded pool of community reference group participants to reflect the diversity of the Loddon Shire community, resulting in informed consultation on strategic decisions with individuals and groups. | Lead |
| 2. | Strengthened evaluation of project and program impacts through community-led processes and collaboration with existing community planning committees. | Deliver
Lead |
| 3. | A strengthened culture of community engagement within Council, enhanced by staff training and knowledge sharing in adherence with the Community Engagement Policy. | Deliver
Lead |



Partnerships and relationships

Forging strong partnerships and relationships to address barriers to feeling included.

What this means in practice

- Strong relationships with organisations, community groups, and service providers, as well as with other levels of government enhance community cohesion and deliver greater social benefits.
- Partnerships and resource sharing promotes cross-disciplinary collaboration and deliver more integrated social outcomes.
- Council plays a role as a trusted organisation that creates, enables, and strengthens partnerships and relationships, supporting the delivery of more services for our community.

What we heard

We heard that cross-disciplinary approaches to inclusivity are essential for a truly intersectional approach to health and wellbeing. This involves building relationships with groups and organisations that service our many communities.

There are many successful partnerships and networks that already exist, providing services to address and reduce barriers. Feedback suggested that Council can play an important role in facilitating networks, and in sharing knowledge.

We also heard that more can be done to create better partnerships with community groups and organisations.

Key partnerships which you value:



Outcomes: Partnerships and relationships

Council's role

1.	Strengthened relationships with organisations and service providers, enhancing networks that promote health, wellbeing, and cultural safety.	Support Collaborate
2.	Foster cross-regional partnerships and facilitate knowledge sharing among neighbouring LGAs.	Collaborate
3.	Established relationships with key disability organisations and service providers to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for residents.	Collaborate
4.	Increased service catchments of health and wellbeing services through mobile health services or satellite services at Local venues.	Collaborate Advocate
5.	Enhanced partnerships with mental health service providers, advocating for increased funding for mobile and remote mental health services, through the Loddon Healthy Minds Network.	Collaborate Advocate
6.	Recognition of the Loddon community's needs in relation to the National Disability Strategy through advocacy to the State and Federal Government.	Lead Advocate
7.	Foster relationships with regional multicultural services to enhance social inclusion, promote and celebrate diversity.	Advocate



Programs and activations

Creating a vibrant place for everyone, with a range of activities and events that celebrate diversity and difference.

What this means in practice

- Events and activities cater to different needs and interests amongst our diverse community and bring more people together.
- Support is provided for more programs and activities that create a greater sense of vibrancy and connection, regardless of age, gender, culture, or ability.
- Programs and activities that are accessible, inclusive, and address the diverse needs of our community are prioritised.
- Ongoing community-led events are celebrated and supported. Opportunities to collaborate or partner with other community or regional based organisations to help deliver these events are explored.

What we heard

We heard that services and programs are an important way for people to connect and participate in communities. You would like more programs, activities and events that allow people to come together.

You also shared that there is a lack of programs and activities for young people, particularly of high school age, outside of sport. More events to celebrate cultural diversity, raise awareness and promote inclusivity are strongly supported.

In your feedback, you told us that community support groups are very important to build social connection and can benefit people who are new to Loddon. Loddon is home to many community groups and organisations already delivering excellent programs and services. Many of you agreed that we can do more to support grassroots organisations to deliver ongoing activities.

Your top five factors that make communities more inclusive:



More programs, activities, and events



Foster quality places and spaces



Improve transport and connection



Community behaviour and attitude



Outcomes: Programs and activations

Council's role

1.	Increased access to targeted activities for young people, including extended hours programs in facilities like libraries or community infrastructure.	Investigate Support Collaborate
2.	Increased awareness of cultural diversity and celebration of multiculturalism through community-led and co-designed events with respective communities.	Advocate Support Collaborate
3.	Advocate to the State Government for increased frequency and expansion of the public transport network.	Advocate
4.	Increased opportunities to access grant funding for inclusive events and activations. Particularly those aligned with other regional events.	Support
5.	Investigate opportunities to collate and share information on available services and activities for people with disabilities, advocating for greater access to inclusive programs and support within the community.	Advocate Support Collaborate
6.	Support our community groups to increase awareness through recognition of significant days of diverse groups.	Deliver Lead



Places and spaces

Exploring ways to make our built environments and public spaces more activated and welcoming.

What this means in practice

- Open spaces, buildings, parks, roads, streets, and community facilities continue to play an important role in connecting people and communities.
- Loddon Shire's places and spaces encourage social connections and activities for everyone across all life stages.
- Everyone feels safe to participate in activities that support their daily life around the Shire without fear of prejudice or exclusion.
- Our places and spaces are maintained to a high standard, are welcoming, accessible and meet best practice guidelines such as universal design.

What we heard

You told us that it is important to create more spaces and opportunities outside of the home that are welcoming to young people and that aren't just connected to sport.

We heard that we could do more to make community spaces accessible to people with disabilities and ensure all our community facilities are universally designed.

We heard about how much you value connections to open spaces and the environment of Loddon Shire, and that we can do more to improve the quality of these public spaces and how they are accessed.

Places and spaces you value the most

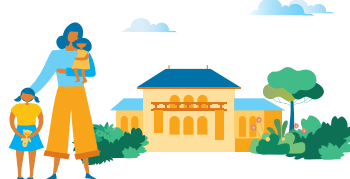
Library hubs



Sporting groups and clubs



Schools



Community/ neighbourhood houses



Outcomes: Places and spaces

Council's role

1.	Enhanced understanding of access to and increased use of open spaces through examination of catchment data from Council's Recreation Open Space and Aquatic Strategy.	Deliver
2.	Improved accessibility of new and redeveloped facilities for a wide range of people, ensuring compliance with DDA standards within Council's Building Asset Management Plan and consideration of all-gender facilities.	Investigate Deliver
3.	Enhanced strategic document development that incorporates Gender Impact Assessments in adherence with Council's legislative responsibilities.	Deliver Lead
4.	Increased funding for upgrades to social infrastructure that enhances inclusion and accessibility.	Deliver Lead Advocate



Positive ageing

Encouraging a healthy mindset and a commitment to staying physically, socially and cognitively active in our older years.

What this means in practice

- Fostering positive ageing enhances the quality of life for seniors, providing them with more opportunities to engage in activities and connect with their community.
- Access to tailored services and programs supports social, health, and wellbeing needs, promoting active and healthy lifestyles among older residents.
- By prioritising inclusive facilities and resources, we reduce barriers for seniors, ensuring they can fully participate in community life and enjoy open spaces and social infrastructure.

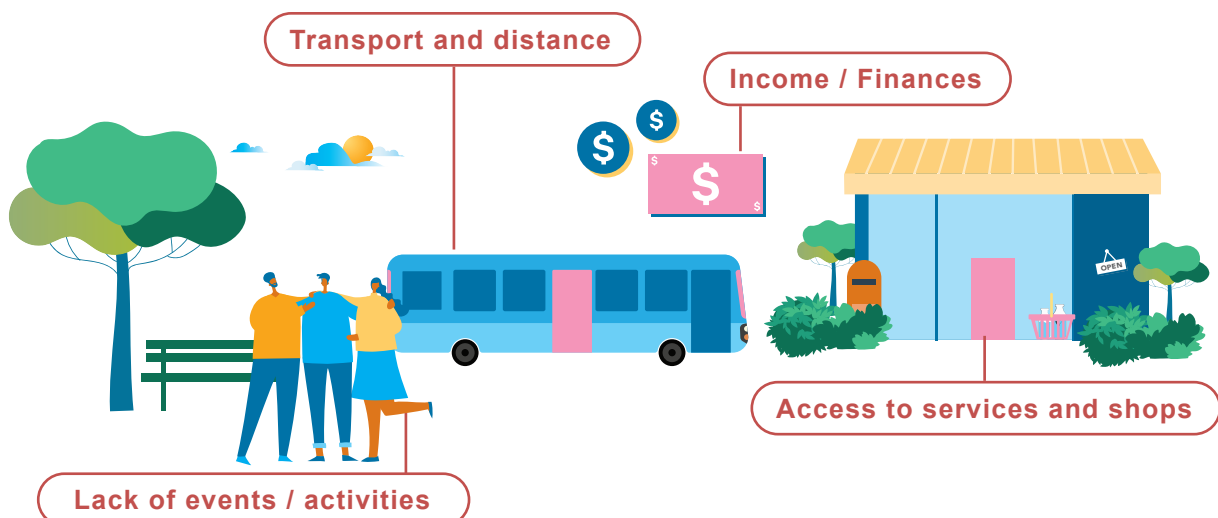
What we heard

We consistently heard that social isolation and access to services were significant barriers to positive ageing in our community. Many residents expressed concern that limited opportunities for engagement and participation hinder the wellbeing of ageing adults.

Feedback indicated that a lack of tailored programs and activities specifically designed for seniors prevents them from fully engaging with the community. Many emphasised the need for more age-friendly initiatives that cater to their interests and needs.

Additionally, there were strong calls for improved access to health and wellbeing services, highlighting that transportation challenges limit older adults' ability to attend appointments and participate in social activities.

Other key barriers to connectivity that were most cited:



Outcomes: Positive ageing

Council's role

1.	Improved positive ageing and social connectedness through ongoing programs and activations for seniors.	Collaborate Support Advocate
2.	Maintain ongoing communication with older members of our community through relevant community groups and services.	Collaborate Support
3.	Improve access to information for available aged care services.	Collaborate Support Advocate
4.	Enhanced organisational capacity to integrate a positive ageing perspective in all Council relevant business.	Deliver Lead

It is important to acknowledge that the outcomes and actions outlined in other focus areas also contribute to promoting / enhancing positive ageing.



Internal commitment

Taking a leadership role and embedding inclusive values within our organisation in everything that we do.

What this means in practice

- There will be an increased diversity of voices in our community which strengthens our resilience and promotes an inclusive culture.
- We recognise the importance of intersectionality and the different parts that make up a person's identity and circumstances.
- We will lead by example to express our commitment to inclusivity, demonstrated by the actions we take.
- Accessibility and inclusivity underpin all of Loddon Shire Council's plans, policies, strategies, and actions.
- We continue ongoing engagement with our community and strive for continuous improvement.

What we heard

We heard that there is often a gap between the knowledge of decision-makers and the needs of community members. We heard that the best way to hear from you and engage is to be 'out in the community'. It is important for everyone in the community to have a voice, including those historically left out of the conversation.

How we do things internally is important too, and we should explore training staff in community engagement to build capacity and confidence across the organisation. We've heard that we could do more to build trusted relationships with our reference groups, and consider expanding them.

Top responses to addressing barriers to accessing services from Council:



Outcomes: Internal commitment

Council's role

- | | | |
|----|--|------------------------|
| 1. | Improved accessibility of all Council communications and information through the use of easy English language and design, aligned with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) standards in the Council Style Guide. | Investigate
Support |
| 2. | Improved accessibility of in-person information and services. | Support |
| 3. | Strengthened proactive cross-departmental approach that considers the impact of Council decision-making on our community. | Deliver
Lead |
| 4. | Sustained progress in gender equality through the implementation of Gender Equality Action Plans and Gender Impact Assessments in line with the Gender Equality Act 2020. | Deliver |





Implementation

Costing and funding of actions

These Focus Areas will be operationalised by an action plan reviewed and updated every two years.

Any actions that incur a cost to Council will be subject to funding approval through Council's annual budget process. This process will prioritise actions based on their alignment with strategic priorities, available resources, and expected community benefits. We will also explore opportunities for external funding where appropriate, such as grants or partnerships to help offset the financial burden on Council resources.



