

GET CONNECTED SOCIAL PRESCRIBING PROGRAM

Rationale

Get Connected Mount Alexander is a locally co-designed Social Prescribing program currently co-funded by Castlemaine Community House and Dhelkaya Health, and supported by Mount Alexander Shire Council. It was developed to better understand and respond to the social and wellbeing needs of the Mount Alexander community. The program was created around the understanding that health and wellbeing are influenced by many factors, including meaningful social connection.

The program supports local health professionals to connect individuals with local community groups, activities and services that enhance wellbeing, reduce social isolation, and strengthen community participation.

Social Prescribing is a person-centred approach that links people experiencing social isolation or other social challenges with non-clinical supports, such as “chatty cafes”, clubs, activities and networks that help address loneliness and improve quality of life.

Objectives

The objective of the Get Connected Social Prescribing program is to improve health and wellbeing by reducing loneliness and social isolation and strengthening social connection within the community.

The objectives of the Get Connected Steering Committee are:

1. Community Engagement & Co-Design

Engage community members to inform program design and improvement.

2. Stakeholder Consultation

Identify opportunities for collaboration, community assets and opportunities to strengthen social prescribing.



At a Glance

- **89** community members referred
- **23** participants currently engaged
- **17** participants graduated from the program

3. Partnership Development

Build and maintain strategic partnerships that support community wellbeing.

4. Model Development & Continuous Improvement

Refine and strengthen the social prescribing model through feedback and evaluation.

5. Sustainability & Funding

Support funding, resources and partnerships to ensure expansion and long-term sustainability.

6. Monitoring, Evaluation & Quality Improvement

Monitor outcomes and support continuous quality improvement.

What we did

The Get Connected Steering Committee brings together partner organisations to guide and support the delivery of the Get Connected Social Prescribing program. The Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit (LMPHU) is an active member of the Steering Committee, contributing expertise, resources, grant intelligence, strategic connections and advice.

As part of the program, a Dhelkaya Health-funded Community Connector receives referrals from GPs, allied health professionals and hospital staff, while individuals can also self-refer to the program. Through a simple, person-centred process, participants are supported to identify local opportunities that align with their interests, needs and goals, including social groups, community activities and Chatty Cafés held across Castlemaine.

The program is underpinned by strong community involvement, with volunteers supporting a range of activities including Chatty Cafés, social groups, community events and program evaluation.

Through LMPHU's involvement, the Chatty Café model has been adapted and trialled in Heathcote, with opportunities for expansion into Loddon Shire currently being explored.



Outcome/impact

- Connected participants to local social, recreational and volunteering opportunities, such as Chatty Cafés, Tai Chi, Creative Craft, Art Pathways, dog walking, Grumpies Car Club and art exhibitions.
- Introduced a dedicated Quiet Chatty Café to improve accessibility and inclusion for people who are hard of hearing.
- Engaged more than **700** community members through the Town Open Day, increasing awareness of local groups, services and opportunities for connection.
 - Strengthened community networks through the participation of **30+ local clubs and organisations**.
 - Recruited **20+ new volunteers** to support community connection activities.
 - Established foundations to make the Town Open Day an ongoing annual community event.
- Advanced advocacy and partnerships with local research and advocacy bodies to improve community transport access and reduce barriers to participation.

Lessons learned

Enablers of success

- Strong local partnerships have enabled coordinated delivery, shared ownership and innovation.
- A community-led approach has ensured the program remains relevant, trusted and responsive to local needs.
- A funded Community Connector role.

Barriers to Overcome

- Limited transport options continue to affect equitable access to community activities and supports.

Opportunities for Improvement

- Strengthen transport solutions and advocacy
- Continue refining the model to support scalability while maintaining local relevance
- Enhance evaluation and data collection to better demonstrate impact.

Wins & Opportunities for Replication

- Chatty Cafés have successfully fostered social connection and reduced isolation
- The model has strong potential for replication in other communities
- The collaborative, cross-sector approach provides a valuable model for other place-based initiatives.

Broader Impact

- The program has strengthened community networks and generated new opportunities for community-led action, demonstrating the broader value of social prescribing.

Next steps

The LMPHU will continue to work collaboratively as a part of the Get Connected Steering Committee to support Social Prescribing in Mount Alexander, and advocate for learnings to be implemented across our other shires.

“The Get Connected participants have become like family. I hear stories of them helping each other out, things like a younger participant helping an older participant out in their garden.

Multiple people have said the Chatty Cafés, are the highlight of their weeks. Chatty Cafés provide a space to be seen and heard, and that’s where people really get to bond and form deeper connections with each other.

Participants have also started up multiple groups of their own, like Dog Walking and Creative Craft. That’s the beauty of Social Prescribing, it empowers people to build their own communities and meet their own needs.”

Isis Jordan - Community Connector, Get Connected

Supporting documents

LMPHU [Social Prescribing](#) resource.

