



# Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit

## Strategic Plan 2026 - 2030



We acknowledge the First Peoples of Australia who are the Traditional Custodians of the land and water where we live, work and play. We celebrate that this is the oldest living and continuous culture in the world. We are proud to be sharing the land that we work on and recognise that sovereignty was never ceded.



We welcome all cultures, nationalities and religions. Being inclusive and providing equitable healthcare is our commitment.

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## Our Message

This plan outlines the key initiatives and priorities that will guide our work in supporting accessible and responsive public health services across the Loddon Mallee region.

The Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit (LMPHU), as part of Bendigo Health, and in partnership with the Victorian Department of Health and other local organisations, plays a crucial role in supporting the health, safety, and wellbeing of communities across the region.

Established in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the LMPHU operates as a regional centre for public health leadership and action.

Drawing on strong local knowledge, trusted relationships, and stakeholder engagement, the unit delivers tailored responses to public health challenges and supports initiatives that reflect the unique needs of people living in the Loddon Mallee.

# Our Region

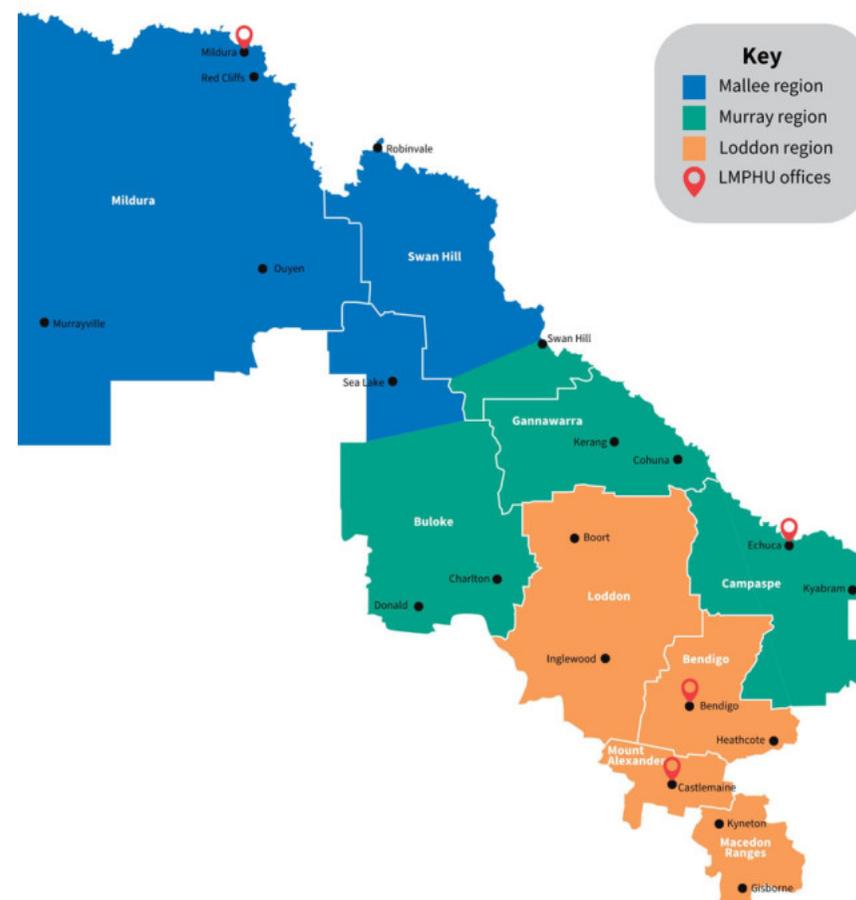
Protecting and promoting public health across nine local government areas

The LMPHU serves nine local government areas:

- Buloke
- Campaspe
- Gannawarra
- Greater Bendigo
- Loddon
- Macedon Ranges
- Mildura
- Mount Alexander
- Swan Hill

Our priorities span a broad range of public health functions, including:

- Communicable disease control
- Emergency preparedness and response
- Promote population health and disease prevention
- Collaborate to strengthen environmental health systems



# Our Context

A large and diverse region spanning metropolitan fringes to remote communities, with growing demand for health and aged care services



The Loddon Mallee region (LMR) is expansive and diverse, spanning just under **59,000 square kilometres**; the largest Local Public Health Unit region in Victoria.



The LMPHU region stretches from the **outskirts of Melbourne to far north-western Victoria**, bordered on the northern edge by the Murray River.



The region ranges from areas of high population density such as Bendigo, to areas of very low-density areas such as Buloke Shire, which are associated with **fewer community assets and services**.



As of 2021, the Loddon Mallee region is home to **334,911 residents**.



The population is older than the state average, with **21.5% aged over 65 years**, creating increased demand for health and aged care services.

# Our Context

## Key social, environmental and health influences shaping population health outcomes across the Loddon Mallee region



The region experiences **notable socioeconomic disadvantage**, with lower educational attainment, low household income, high rental stress, food insecurity and high rates of family violence and homelessness.



**Health risk behaviours** are more common than state averages, including smoking, alcohol consumption, obesity, poor diet, physical inactivity, and poor dental health, contributing to chronic disease.



Developmental vulnerability in children and high levels of loneliness are also widespread. **Chronic health conditions** such as asthma, arthritis, cancer and mental illness are prevalent across the region.



The region is **vulnerable to catastrophic climate events** with heightened risks of bushfires and flooding.



While rates of most infectious diseases are **lower than metropolitan areas** due to differences in population density, the risks and impact of these diseases can be higher due to less timely access to care and the compounding effects of relative disadvantage.

# Stakeholder-Identified Challenges and Opportunities

Noted focus areas arising from region complexity, workforce pressures and inequity

- **Ensuring equitable health outcomes** across the region remains challenging due to workforce sustainability and the complexities of delivering services to diverse, remote and under-served communities.
- **Addressing the influence of social determinants of health**, particularly in regional settings, requires targeted strategies, especially in relation to rising mental health needs.
- **Integrating the 'One Health' approach** within regional contexts presents challenges in aligning human, animal, and environmental health systems for coordinated action.
- **Securing sustainable funding** sources that are responsive to regional needs and priorities remains a persistent barrier to long-term planning and impact.
- **Targeting communication** using values-based messaging to address priority community needs and foster meaningful engagement.
- **Translating collective outcome measures** into meaningful, measurable impact remains a key challenge, requiring alignment across systems, shared accountability and locally led community engagement.
- **Developing locally and regionally relevant data** and program mapping is essential to inform decision-making, reduce duplication and support strategic alignment across systems yet remains a complex and resource-intensive challenge.
- **Addressing the complexity of vaccination** within regional contexts requires coordinated action, tailoring strategies to local needs, strengthening partnerships with clear roles and responsibilities and adapting delivery models to ensure equitable access and uptake.

# Strategic Intent

The LMPHU Strategic Plan strengthens public health leadership and coordination across the Loddon Mallee region by:

- Embedding climate resilience
- Promoting inclusive and connected communities
- Enhancing core public health functions including:
  - Communicable disease control
  - Preparedness
  - Prevention
  - Equity driven practice



# Our Values

Guided by Bendigo Health's values, LMPHU contributes to trusted public health outcomes grounded in equity and prevention

The LMPHU Strategic Plan aligns with Bendigo Health to ensure a shared purpose, consistent direction and integrated approach to improving health and wellbeing across the region.

As part of Bendigo Health, LMPHU is guided by the values of:

- Passionate
- Accountable
- Caring
- Trustworthy

These values shape how we lead public health action, work with communities and collaborate with partners.

Aligning to these values strengthens trust, accountability and consistency across the health system and ensures our place-based, equity-focused public health work complements clinical care and supports Bendigo Health's long-term vision for healthier, more resilient communities.

# Our Approach

A place-based, equity-driven approach that strengthens systems through partnership and collaboration

The LMPHU aims to support communities to lead healthier lives through place-based public health initiatives, delivered in partnership with local organisations.

## Place-based

We will work with stakeholders to tailor public health initiatives to local contexts, ensuring strategies reflect community needs and strengths.

## Equity

We will embed equity across all our public health initiatives, guided by the lenses of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination, climate justice, and lived and living experience.

## System Strengthening

We are committed to a value-based system that improves community outcomes by optimising resources through collaboration, communication and capacity building.

# Our Strategic Objectives

Focused objectives to protect communities, strengthen capability and promote equitable population health

## **Objective One: Communication**

Position LMPHU as a trusted voice on public health and population health issues.

## **Objective Two: Collaboration**

Collaborate with stakeholders to harness knowledge and diverse perspectives, identifying place-based solutions that improve public health.

## **Objective Three: Capacity Building**

Strengthen workforce capability and capacity to support effective public health practice across the region.

## **Objective Four: Health Protection**

Protect communities from preventable conditions, emergency incidents, and environmental risks.

## **Objective Five: Population Health**

Promote healthy, resilient communities and reduce the burden of disease through equity-focused, place-based initiatives.

# Objective One: Communication

Position LMPHU as a trusted voice on public health and population health issues

## Key initiatives

Keep stakeholders informed of reforms, workforce development opportunities, local initiatives and emerging public health risks through timely, accessible communication delivered via a multimedia approach

Co-design, value-based public health communication is tailored to be accessible, culturally appropriate, and responsive to the unique needs of priority populations.

## Outcome

Stakeholders trust LMPHU as a credible and authoritative voice on public health, share public health messaging, respond to public health advice and collaborate on initiatives that advance population health across the region.



# Objective Two: Collaboration

Collaborate with stakeholders to harness knowledge and diverse perspectives, identifying place-based solutions that improve public health

## Key initiatives

Strengthen and utilise established governance structures, with cross sector representations to guide and authorise the LMPHU Strategic Plan.

Support place-based, cross sector networks, including priority population representation to deliver public health initiatives and demonstrate leadership in translating state policies into local action.

Embed continuous improvement and reduce duplication by reviewing the sub-regional structure and associated governance framework to strengthen regional collaboration.

## Outcome

Improved public health outcomes through inclusive, locally tailored public health strategies that reflect diverse stakeholder input, supported by robust governance and cross-sector collaboration.



# Objective Three: Capacity Building

Strengthen workforce capability and capacity to support effective public health practice across the region

## Key initiatives

Collect, analyse, interpret and communicate public health related information to inform and support regional decision-making, detect emerging issues and guide effective public health responses.

Identify and address the workforce capacity building needs of local stakeholders to effectively implement public health initiatives.

## Outcome

Stakeholders across the region are equipped with the skills, capabilities and access to data insights necessary to identify emerging issues, inform strategic decision-making and implement effective, locally tailored public health initiatives.



# Objective Four: Health Protection

Protect communities from preventable conditions, emergency incidents, and environmental risks

## Key initiatives

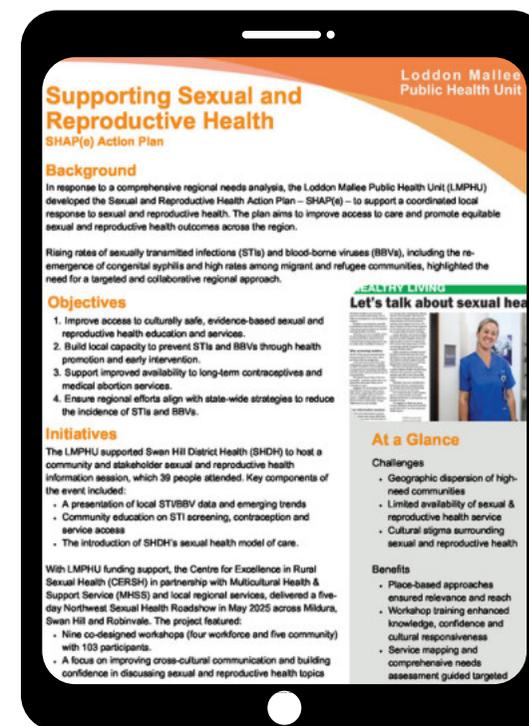
Develop targeted, region specific strategies that enhance education, testing, and treatment access for sexually transmitted infections in high-risk communities.

Work with trusted channels to increase access to and strengthen community engagements around immunisation with a focus on priority populations.

Strengthen emergency preparedness for communicable disease outbreaks and health crises through collaborative, multi-agency proactive planning with a one health lens, training, rapid response systems and coordinated management.

## Outcome

Improved sexual health outcomes, increased immunisation coverage and reduce communicable disease outbreaks through prevention and timely response, driven by targeted, place-based strategies that enhance education, access and community engagement among priority populations.



# Objective Five: Population Health

Promote healthy, resilient communities and reduce the burden of disease through equity-focused, place-based initiatives

## Key initiatives

Implement the Loddon Mallee Population Health Plan 2025–2029 in alignment with Victorian and Municipal Public Health Plan and Wellbeing Plan:

- a. Implement and review the Climate Change and Health Framework within the Loddon Mallee health and wellbeing sector and support services and community to assess and adapt to climate-related health risks.
- b. Promote wellbeing, cultural safety and connection by embedding respect and inclusion and creating environments where all individuals feel safe, resilient, and accepted.
- c. Support and promote evidence-informed initiatives that strengthen a resilient, equitable and healthy food system by improving access to healthy food and increase the availability of locally grown, plant-based options to mitigate climate change.

## Outcome

Stakeholders across sectors are meaningfully engaged in implementing shared priorities outlined in the Population Health Plan, contributing their expertise and local knowledge to co-design, deliver, and evaluate public health initiatives that reflect regional needs and drive equitable health outcomes.

# Our Commitments

## A structured approach to implementation, evaluation and shared accountability

The Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit will deliver our Strategic Plan through a structured, transparent and collaborative approach to implementation, evaluation and shared accountability. Progress will be guided by a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework aligned with state and regional priorities.

Through clear governance, regular reporting to the Victorian Department of Health and ongoing engagement with regional partners, we will act with accountability, care, integrity and purpose. Our commitment reflects Bendigo Health's values and supports our shared responsibility to drive measurable, equitable and lasting improvements in health and wellbeing across the Loddon Mallee region.







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