Maribyrnong
CITY COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELLBEING PLAN

2025–29



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Acknowledgement of Country

Council is proud to represent a municipality filled with important and significant Aboriginal history. It acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of this land, the Kulin Nation, and acknowledges the rich culture and considerable contributions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have made and continue to make to this City.

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Photo by **Kit Edwards**

INTRODUCTION

The Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025–29 (the Plan) outlines a strategic approach to improving community health, addressing inequalities, and building a vibrant, inclusive City where everyone can thrive. Over the next four years, Council will work alongside residents, community partners, and service providers to create a healthier, more connected, and sustainable city.

Council is committed to creating a community where everyone has the opportunity to live well, feel included, and stay connected. We are committed to fostering environments that support health and wellbeing, ensuring that diversity is celebrated and equity is embedded in everything we do. By focusing on inclusion and access, we aim to build a safe, active, and supportive environment where people can thrive physically, emotionally, socially, environmentally, and economically.

The Plan reflects the voices of our community and our commitment to action. It aligns with the Council Plan 2025–29 strategic objectives and supports the long-term goals outlined in the Community Vision. Additionally, it contributes to state-wide health priorities set out in the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023–27, ensuring that local initiatives drive broader health outcomes.

The Plan has been shaped by community input, evidence-based research, and alignment with policies at local and state levels. Our strategic priorities for the next four years are:

- **A healthy and active community**: A city that supports active living, access to nutritious food, and equitable healthcare services for all.
- **A resilient and thriving community**: A city that strengthens mental wellbeing, social connections, and access to support services for all.
- **A sustainable and liveable city**: A city that prioritises climate resilience, green spaces, and a clean, safe environment for all.
- **An inclusive and connected community**: A city that values diversity and culture, encourages participation, and supports a sense of belonging for all.

We will ensure the community remains informed and engaged throughout the Plan's implementation. Annual action plans and progress reports will track progress and be publicly accessible on Council's website.

Photo by **Nicole Reed**



THE MARIBYRNONG COMMUNITY

The City of Maribyrnong is made up of nine suburbs – Braybrook, Footscray, Kingsville, Maidstone, Maribyrnong, Seddon, Tottenham, West Footscray and Yarraville – with a total land area of 3,121 ha (31km2). The suburbs vary in demographics and social and economic status.

Population

The population was 94,251 in 2024 and is forecast to grow from around 99,000 in 2025 to approximately 155,000 by 2051, a 57 per cent increase on the current population. The suburb with the largest increase in the number of forecast residents by 2051 is Footscray (with an increase of about 18,000 residents), while Maribyrnong is forecast to experience the highest proportional and fastest proportional growth in the municipality (almost 106 per cent growth, from 2025 to 2051 or an average annual rate of 2.8 per cent). Around 18 per cent of the population is aged under 18 years while 15.5 per cent is aged 60 years and over.

Multiculturalism

The City is culturally and linguistically diverse with 38 per cent of the population born overseas. The main overseas countries of birth of residents, in order, are Vietnam, India, United Kingdom, New Zealand, and China.

First Nations

The First Nations population of Maribyrnong City numbers just under 650 people, or 0.7 per cent of the total population.

Housing

20 per cent of Maribyrnong residents own their home, 32 per cent have a mortgage, 36 per cent are renting privately, and about five per cent live in social housing.

Education

About 41 per cent of residents have a Bachelors' degree university qualification or higher. Around 38 per cent of students attend a primary or secondary school while 33 per cent of the City's students are attending a tertiary education institution.

Economy

There were an estimated 51,800 jobs and 9,100 active businesses (registered for GST) based in the City of Maribyrnong in 2023. Key employment industries were health care and social assistance and retail trade. The key industries by number of businesses were transport, postal and warehousing businesses; professional, scientific and technical services businesses; and construction businesses.

The City's economy is in transition from an economy focused on production to one focused on services. The number of manufacturing jobs has reduced in response to changes in technology and competition from lower cost producers overseas. The proportion of service sector jobs has been increasing, with demand growing for a range of services. Employment in many residential related industries, such as retail trade; accommodation and food services; and health, are growing.

Employment in knowledge intensive services are also increasing, such as those in the professional services, science and creative industries. As this transition continues, manufacturers in the City of Maribyrnong are adapting to these new conditions with a shift to high value-adding, knowledge-intensive manufacturing. The City is also undergoing a construction boom, with the resulting increase in employment in the construction sector.

Demographics	Maribyrnong City (%)	Greater Melbourne (%)
Total population 2024	94,251	5,350,705
Population forecast 2036	125,000	7,059,900
Young children 0–11 years (Census 2021)	12.9	14.6
Young people 12–24 years (Census 2021)	13.2	15.8
Older people aged 50+ years (Census 2021)	26.4	32.0
Females (Census 2021)	49.9	50.8
Males (Census 2021)	50.1	49.2
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Census 2021)	0.7	0.7
Overseas born (Census 2021)	38.0	35.7
Speak a language other than English (Census 2021)	38.1	34.1
Lone person households (Census 2021)	28.2	23.7
Group households (Census 2021)	7.0	4.1
Providing unpaid care to a person with disability (Census 2021)	10.9	12.6
People with a disability. People with a need for assistance due to profound or severe disability (Census 2021)	5.3	5.5

Employment and education		
Proportion of people with a university qualification (Census 2021)	40.8	32.8
Proportion of the population aged 15 to 64 years in the work force (Census 2021)	69.4	64.1
Employed women working part-time compared to 31.6 % among men in Maribyrnong City (Census 2021)	25.4	39.0
Unemployment rate (Census 2021)	5.7	5.3

Income	Maribyrnong City (%)	Greater Melbourne (%)
Median personal income $ (Census 2021)	965	841
Median household income $ (Census 2021)	1998	1901
Housing		
Proportion of home owners (Census 2021)	52.0	64.3
Proportion of renters (Census 2021)	41.1	29.2
Proportion of flats and apartments (Census 2021)	20.2	12.8
Travel and transport		
Employed people who used public transport to get to work (Census 2021)	8.7	5.7
Households with more than one motor vehicles per dwelling (Census 2021)	36.4	51.4

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Plan is to contribute to improving the health and wellbeing outcomes across the Maribyrnong community with a focus on priority communities and cohorts.

Photo by **Gracie Sietu**



INTRODUCTION

Council is responsible for improving public health and wellbeing outcomes as part of its obligations and functions outlined in the Victorian Local Government Act 2020 and the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act (2008).

The Plan is a statutory document developed under the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008, which mandates local governments to protect, promote, and improve community health and wellbeing. As the tier of government closest to residents, councils are uniquely positioned to address local health determinants and build community resilience through inclusive and collaborative action.

The Plan recognises that health and wellbeing extend beyond individual behaviours to include environmental, social, cultural and economic factors. By adopting a whole-of-council and whole-of-community approach, the Plan seeks to address the root causes of health inequities, empower residents, and promote long-term community resilience and wellbeing.

For example, air pollution largely driven by heavy truck traffic in Maribyrnong has been linked to significantly higher rates of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases compared to the national average. In response, the Council declared a health emergency in 2023, recognising the urgent need to reduce pollution and protect community health. Addressing such challenges requires proactive policies, strong partnerships, and sustained investment in environmental and public health initiatives.

Through the Plan, Council is committed to creating a healthier, more equitable, and sustainable future for all residents.

LEGISLATIVE AND STRATEGIC INPUTS

To inform health and wellbeing planning, Council has considered the relevant legislative frameworks, consulted widely with stakeholders, evaluated previous Plans and taken into account recent environmental impacts, including:

- *Fair Access Policy Roadmap* (Vic.)
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*, *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, *Building Act 1994*, *Disability Act 2006*, *Emergency Management Act 2013*, *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*, *Cultural Heritage Acts (Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, *Heritage Act 2017)*, *Climate Change Act 2017*, *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, *Environmental Protection Act 2017*, *Gender Equality Act 2020*, and requirements to address family violence such as *Free from Violence* (Vic.), *Victorian Family Violence Protection Act 2008* and recommendations from the *Royal Commission into Family Violence 2015* .
- Engaged staff across Council, local residents, State Government, and partner organisations implementing health and wellbeing actions, to identify emerging priorities and community needs.
- Reviewed actions and achievements from the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021–25.
- Assessed the impacts of recent climate events, including the Maribyrnong River flood in October 2022, to consider disaster preparedness and community resilience responses.
- Considered the 2023–27 Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan priorities.
- Developed the Municipal Health and Wellbeing Data Book, an analysis of health status and health determinants in the City of Maribyrnong.

Photo by **Gianna Rizzo**



ALIGNMENT WITH COMMUNITY VISION AND COUNCIL PLAN 2025–29

The Council Plan 2025–29, provides the planning, development, resourcing and provision of services to the community over a four-year period. It informs direction and activities and addresses the shared goal of improving community health and wellbeing in Maribyrnong and contributing towards the community vision of *a sustainable, vibrant city where history is acknowledged, differences are respected, and diverse communities are supported to connect and thrive.*

The Plan has been developed to integrate with the following Council Plan 2025–29 Strategic Objectives:

Strategic Objective One: Ethical Governance

Council will govern ethically, with consultation, integrity and transparency.

Strategic Objective Two: Wellbeing and Safety

Council will create engaged, socially and physically healthy communities.

Strategic Objective Three: Environmental Sustainability

Council will create and shape healthy built and natural environments.

Strategic Objective Four: Thriving Community

Council will drive future-focused growth and innovation to build a resilient and adaptable city.

Strategic Objective Five: Connected Community

Council will create an active, connected city with thriving neighbourhoods.

Through the alignment of its strategic priorities with the Council Plan 2025–29, the Plan embeds health considerations into Council operations, aiming to build the internal capacity of Council to address health and wellbeing priorities in a coordinated manner. This approach maximises the effectiveness of Council's public health initiatives, ensuring a structured and coordinated response to local challenges and priorities.

Objectives

The key objectives of the Plan is to:

- Establish a dedicated public health and wellbeing plan for Maribyrnong.
- Elevate health and wellbeing as a focus across municipal services and operations.
- Strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of Council health and wellbeing initiatives.

Intersectional Lens and Social Justice Framework

The Plan embeds Maribyrnong's Social Justice Framework 2023–33 and aligns with the Gender Equality Act 2020. This intersectional approach recognises that social identities – such as gender, ethnicity, age, and ability – interact to create unique experiences of disadvantage or privilege. The Plan prioritises addressing these intersecting inequalities by implementing gender-responsive, inclusive strategies that empower marginalised groups and promote fairness across Council services.

Alignment with Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023–27

The Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023–2027 provides the overarching framework for councils across Victoria to align their Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans.

As mandated by Section 26(3) of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008, the Plan aligns with the state public health and wellbeing priorities in the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023–27, ensuring a focused and meaningful approach to addressing the unique needs and aspirations of Maribyrnong's residents.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND OUTCOME INDICATORS

The Plan has four strategic priorities which represent a desired condition of health and wellbeing. Although not explicitly stated, each strategic priority area also includes a reduction in inequality:

A healthy and active community

A city that supports active living, access to nutritious food, and equitable healthcare services for all.

A resilient and thriving community

A city that strengthens mental wellbeing, social connections, and access to support services for all.

A sustainable and liveable city

A city that prioritises climate resilience, green spaces, and a clean, safe environment for all.

An inclusive and connected community

A city that values diversity and culture, encourages participation, and supports a sense of belonging for all.

Each strategic priority area has a number of related outcome indicators. An example of an outcome indicator is "Reducing harm from alcohol and other drugs and gambling through education, harm reduction strategies, equitable access to support services, and local planning interventions". The outcome indicators define the change needed to progress towards a strategic priority. Each outcome indicator reflects a desired contribution or improvement that is clearly relevant, achievable and meaningful.

The outcome indicators answer the question: how will we know if we are progressing toward the strategic priority?

All strategic priorities have more than one outcome indicator, reflecting contributions from multiple council directorates and/or business units.

Many of the factors influencing health and wellbeing are non-medical factors – the social determinates of health – and include elements such as gender, the built, natural and social environments, transport, housing, social connection and inclusion, and education and employment (World Health Organisation, 2021). It is important Council considers these social determinants of health and wellbeing when considering, planning and implementing health and wellbeing projects, initiatives and services.

While Council does not have overarching legislative or regulatory powers to address all health and wellbeing outcomes, it has a direct impact in promoting community health and wellbeing through its role as a planner, provider, partner, and advocate. Systemic, population-level health changes often require broader state and federal intervention. The Plan's success – improving health and wellbeing in Maribyrnong – will require collaboration across local, state, and federal government, along with partner organisations.

The Plan takes an intersectional approach, recognising the influence of social determinants of health and ensuring initiatives benefit all residents while addressing diverse needs and experiences through its four strategic priorities.

The intersectional approach recognises that the strategic priorities of health overlap and interact, highlighting the importance of coordinated actions across Council services, operations and in our partnerships.

The strategic priorities and their corresponding strategies have been informed by research and analysis of Maribyrnong's demographics, feedback from staff across Council, residents of the City of Maribyrnong, State Government and partner organisations, and submissions from advisory committees and community groups.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1:

A HEALTHY AND ACTIVE COMMUNITY

A city that supports active living, access to nutritious food, and equitable healthcare services for all.

Outcome indicators

1. Promoting physical activity for all ages and abilities by ensuring accessible and active spaces and new recreational facilities to help reduce the risks of chronic diseases.
2. Advocating for equitable access to healthy and affordable food options to address health inequities and support healthier lifestyles.
3. Strengthening equity and community leadership in physical health by removing barriers for women, gender-diverse individuals, young people, older people, First Nations people, and marginalised groups while supporting inclusive programs.
4. Embedding physical health promotion into local health and wellbeing policies to ensure long-term wellbeing and minimising disparities in chronic disease outcomes.
5. Reducing harm from alcohol and other drugs and gambling through education, harm reduction strategies, equitable access to support services, and local planning interventions.
6. Facilitating active lifestyles through the design of walkable and rideable neighbourhoods with improved access to public transport and daily needs close to home.

Why it matters

Improving physical wellbeing delivers transformative benefits for individuals and the broader community:

- **Empowering communities**: Resilient communities are built on a foundation of physical health, enabling residents to participate fully in civic, cultural, social and economic life.
- **Preventing disease**: Active living, access to nutritious food and reducing harmful substance use decrease the prevalence of chronic diseases, alleviating pressures on families, workplaces, and healthcare systems.
- **Improving equity**: By addressing structural barriers, health initiatives ensure that all community members – especially those who are marginalised – have equitable access to resources and opportunities.
- **Strengthening resilience**: Opportunities for active living and improved nutrition empower communities to adapt to challenges and recover more effectively from adverse events.

Community feedback

The community was invited to share the health and wellbeing issues that matter most to them through workshops, advisory groups, social media and a survey from August to December 2024.

Broader community engagement

From the broader community survey, almost half (48.1 per cent or 13) respondents wanted to see wellbeing improved by addressing transport options and traffic related air pollution and greener spaces. There were also other calls to focus on active transport and open spaces for all ages in the development of the Plan.

Community workshops

During the community workshops, we heard a strong desire for neighbourhoods where everyone can access nutritious food, engage in physical activities, and thrive in spaces that build community resilience. Workshop attendees highlighted their desire for more spaces for active transport, fitness, and recreation, and emphasised the need for affordable, healthy food options, particularly in low-income areas, to enhance overall wellbeing.

Workshop attendees also highlighted the growing prevalence of vaping and substance use, particularly among young people. Feedback highlighted the need for stronger education programs on the risks of vaping and substance misuse, improved harm reduction initiatives, and more accessible support services for those affected.

Feedback also consistently pointed to the importance of creating supportive environments that address socioeconomic disparities. Suggestions included providing affordable recreation facilities and implementing community-based initiatives that target disadvantaged groups. These reflections underline the determination of many in the Maribyrnong community to develop inclusive and empowered neighbourhoods where everyone has the opportunity to lead a healthy, active life.

Context and evidence

A healthy and active community plays a crucial role in building community resilience, enabling individuals and groups to overcome challenges and thrive. Communities that prioritise active living and healthy eating are more adaptable, better equipped to manage change, and actively contribute to social, economic, and cultural vibrancy. Research demonstrates that active lifestyles, improving access to nutritious foods, and preventing chronic diseases significantly enhances resilience, reduces healthcare pressures, and promotes social cohesion (Friel & Ponnamperuma, 2019).

Healthy lifestyles, including regular physical activity and balanced nutrition, are fundamental for reducing the risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and obesity (Warburton & Bredin, 2017). Equitable access to healthcare is also essential to ensure no community group is left behind, particularly those who are vulnerable or marginalised (Marmot, 2020). Community-level interventions that provide education, opportunities for physical activity, and access to healthy foods have been shown to significantly improve public health outcomes (Friel & Ponnamperuma, 2019).

The harms associated with alcohol and other drugs are a growing public health concern. Vaping, in particular, has seen a rapid rise among young people, with increasing evidence linking it to respiratory issues and long-term health risks (Patel et al., 2018). Reducing access to harmful substances, alongside community education and early intervention strategies, is essential to improving long-term health outcomes and overall wellbeing.

In Maribyrnong, 38 per cent of adults do not meet physical activity guidance, and significant disparities in access to healthy food persist, particularly in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighbourhoods. A significant proportion of households in Maribyrnong experience some level of food insecurity, with 9.4 per cent of residents reporting that they worried about running out of money to buy food, in the past 12 months and another 6.6 per cent of residents saying they had run out of food and could not afford to buy more. These figures highlight the challenges faced by vulnerable groups, including low-income families, single-parent households, and elderly residents, underscoring the urgent need for targeted interventions and support systems to ensure access to nutritious and affordable food for all.

Addressing these inequities is critical to improving overall health outcomes. An intersectional approach ensures that strategies are tailored to the unique experiences of diverse groups, including culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, women, youth, gender-diverse individuals, First Nations people, people with disability, and older people – thereby strengthening resilience and promoting long-term wellbeing for all.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2:

A RESILIENT AND THRIVING COMMUNITY

A city that strengthens mental wellbeing, social connections, and access to support services for all.

Outcome indicators

- Reducing stigma and normalising mental health conversations through inclusive, community-led initiatives that promote awareness, inclusion, and community participation in decision-making.
- Promoting autonomy for the community by advocating for improved access to culturally responsive mental health support, addressing systemic barriers and expanding tailored services to meet individual needs.
- Building emotional resilience through peer-led programs, early intervention, and integrating mental health into Council initiatives to foster a sense of safety and belonging.
- Increasing social connection and belonging through inclusive programs for meaningful engagement across all demographics.
- Facilitating opportunities for connection by providing and creating welcoming and accessible public spaces for people to gather, spend time in and access nature.

Why it matters

Investing in mental wellbeing is essential for building resilient individuals and communities capable of adapting and thriving:

- **Breaking stigma**: Normalising conversations about mental health empowers individuals to seek support without fear of judgment.
- **Removing barriers**: Addressing systemic inequities ensures vulnerable and marginalised groups can access affordable, culturally responsive mental health services.
- **Enhancing social connection**: Strong social bonds reduce loneliness, improve belonging, and create cohesive communities.
- **Improving community resilience**: Emotional wellbeing equips communities to navigate adversity, recover stronger, and flourish under adverse circumstances.
- **Improving health outcomes**: Enhanced emotional resilience contributes to better physical health, reduced healthcare burdens, and improved quality of life.

Community Feedback

The community was invited to share the health and wellbeing issues that matter most to them through workshops, advisory groups, social media and a survey from August to December 2024.

Broader community engagement

Of 31 responses, improving overall mental health and wellbeing (16 votes) was the third highest priority respondents wanted Council to focus on. Of the 16 votes, six respondents said there is the 'potential to improve wellbeing and mental health with greater active transport options and greener spaces', while four respondents said 'mental health is as important as physical health'.

Similarly, 'poor mental health' was raised as a key concern related to health and wellbeing in our community by three respondents.

Community workshops

Workshop attendees shared invaluable insights into the barriers and opportunities surrounding emotional wellbeing. Many expressed challenges in accessing mental health services, with affordability, cultural insensitivity, and logistical barriers as primary concerns. Those who identified as older people, gender diverse people, youth and individuals in public housing noted they were particularly affected by social isolation, with many highlighting a need for safe and welcoming environments to encourage community connection and belonging. Young people specifically emphasised the need for accessible youth-friendly mental health services, including school-based support and peer-led programs, to help them navigate stress, academic pressure, and social challenges.

Stigma around mental health remains a significant barrier, discouraging individuals from seeking help or participating in wellbeing programs. Workshop attendees also highlighted the importance of community-led initiatives and community-Council partnerships to address mental health holistically. There was strong support for culturally tailored programs co-designed with diverse communities to build trust and improve accessibility. Peer-led initiatives and early intervention strategies were also highlighted as important in preventing mental health challenges from escalating. Overall, workshop attendees emphasised the value of inclusive spaces and activities that promote resilience, reduce loneliness, and create a shared sense of purpose.

Context and evidence

Strengthening mental wellbeing, social connections, and advocating for improved access to support services is essential for building resilience, helping individuals and communities navigate challenges, form meaningful connections, and improving overall quality of life. Poor mental health is linked to increased risks of chronic illness, reduced life satisfaction, and lower levels of community engagement (Patel et al., 2018). Early intervention and accessible, inclusive services significantly enhance emotional wellbeing and reduce barriers to participation (Vancampfort et al., 2021).

In Maribyrnong, mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety affect 9.2 out of every 100 residents – higher than the Greater Melbourne average of 7.8 per 100 people. Women in Maribyrnong experience higher rates of mental health challenges (11.3 per 100 women) compared to men (7.2 per 100 men), with Indigenous residents facing particularly high rates of 13.5 per cent. Additionally, LGBTIQA+ people are more likely to experience poorer mental health and residents who speak a language other than English at home report mental health challenges at a rate of 10.2 per cent, compared to 7.4 per cent for those who speak only English (Victorian Agency for Health Information, 2017).

Local areas such as Braybrook and Footscray report higher percentages of mental health conditions compared to other parts of the municipality. Barriers such as housing affordability, cultural appropriateness, and service accessibility disproportionately impact vulnerable populations, including older people, CALD communities, and newly arrived migrants.

Around 5 per cent of our population has a severe disability requiring care – over 4,500 residents of the City of Maribyrnong. Many more residents have a disability that is less severe. Often we concentrate on physical disabilities but many disabilities are invisible. This means that as well as ensuring universal access, our building design should consider sensory and cognitive issues.

Young people in Maribyrnong, particularly young women aged 15–24, are experiencing disproportionately high rates of mental health challenges (Mission Australia & Black Dog Institute, 2022). Long wait times and service shortages for mental health, and high ambulance callouts reflect critical gaps in local support, forcing many to seek care outside the municipality. Young people from multicultural backgrounds, diverse gender identities, or unstable home environments face additional barriers to accessing help. Council continues to advocate for locally designed, early intervention solutions that respond to the unique vulnerabilities and diversity of young people in Melbourne's west. Addressing these disparities is essential to creating a resilient and thriving City of Maribyrnong.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3:

A SUSTAINABLE AND LIVEABLE CITY

A city that prioritises climate resilience, green spaces, and a clean, safe environment for all.

Outcome indicators

1. Planning and delivering community infrastructure that improves liveability and equitable access, while ensuring it is climate responsive and mitigates environmental risks for residents.
2. Expanding access to green spaces and protecting biodiversity by improving existing parks, and shaded recreational areas to support physical and mental wellbeing, while empowering communities to take an active role in their development and use.
3. Increasing tree canopy coverage particularly in vulnerable neighbourhoods, to reduce exposure to urban heat and enhance amenity and environmental sustainability.
4. Advocating for improved air and water quality through targeted policies and programs to address pollution, strengthen local ecosystems, and involving communities in conservation and education efforts
5. Empowering community to contribute to strengthening climate resilience and extreme weather preparedness.

Why it matters

Investing in a sustainable and liveable city yields genuine health benefits for residents of Maribyrnong:

- Reducing health risks: Mitigating air pollution and urban heat reduces the prevalence of respiratory and heat-related illnesses.
- Enhancing climate adaptation: Proactive planning improves infrastructure resilience and reduces vulnerabilities to climate-related events.
- Improving emotional wellbeing: Equitable access to green spaces, the natural environment and community infrastructure is linked to better health outcomes.

Community feedback

The community was invited to share the health and wellbeing issues that matter most to them through workshops, advisory groups, social media and a survey from August to December 2024.

Broader community engagement

Of 31 responses, 'air quality and pollution' was selected as the top health and wellbeing concern in our community by 70.9 per cent (22) respondents, while 32.3 per cent (10) cited 'the lack of green spaces' as the second highest concern. An additional 29 per cent (9) respondents highlighted 'congested, noisy and dangerous roads' as the third highest health and wellbeing concern in our community.

'Tackling climate change and its impact on health' (22 votes) was the highest priority respondents wanted Council to focus on.

Community workshops

Through community workshops, the importance of our community facilities, environmental sustainability and climate resilience was highlighted. Many workshop attendees emphasised the need for increasing urban greenery – not only to mitigate the heat island effect but also to enhance the aesthetic appeal of neighbourhoods and overall wellbeing. Urban heat was described by some as "extremely deadly," with workshop attendees noting that it exacerbates existing inequalities within the community.

The 2022 Maribyrnong River flood was cited as a turning point, demonstrating the need for proactive flood management strategies and the importance of the built environment to address climate-related risks and protect community health and wellbeing. Many workshop attendees also sought biodiversity improvements, including tree planting and expanded green spaces, citing benefits such as mental health improvements, reduced pollution, and stronger community bonds. There was strong support for community-led conservation efforts to engage residents in sustainability initiatives and promote environmental stewardship. Participants expressed a need for stronger climate change policies and infrastructure that prioritises resilience against extreme weather conditions.

These insights from both the community survey and the community workshops reflect a broad desire for increased urban greening, proactive climate change measures, and infrastructure to create a resilient and sustainable Maribyrnong.

Context and evidence

Air pollution remains a critical environmental and public health concern in Maribyrnong, particularly due to heavy truck traffic on local roads. In response, the Council declared a health emergency in 2023, citing significantly higher rates of illness and hospitalisation linked to air pollution compared to the national average. The exhaust from heavy trucks contains harmful particulate matter (PM), which is continuously released into residential areas, posing serious health risks – especially for children, older adults, and individuals with pre-existing conditions such as asthma. The World Health Organisation recognises that there is no safe level of exposure to these pollutants, with experts warning that prolonged exposure can lead to diminished lung capacity and long-term respiratory issues. While a heavy truck curfew was introduced on some roads in 2015 following strong community advocacy, inconsistent enforcement has limited its effectiveness, leaving residents vulnerable to ongoing air quality concerns.

Maribyrnong City has the worst cardiorespiratory outcomes across all metrics, including the highest rate of stroke in Victoria, despite having a younger than average population. Maribyrnong City also has the highest hospital admissions for respiratory ailments in Victoria for young people aged three to 19 at a rate that is 70% above the Victorian average. Hospital admissions for heart failure, lung cancer incidence and premature mortality by chronic obstructive pulmonary disease are also much higher than the national average in both Maribyrnong (Inner West Air Quality Community Reference Group report, 2020).

The impact of air pollution is compounded by broader environmental challenges. The World Health Organisation describes climate change as the defining issue for public health in the 21st century (World Health Organisation, 2015). Climate change poses significant risks to public health, including increased respiratory disorders due to declining air quality, heat-related illnesses, and the spread of vector-borne diseases (World Health Organisation, 2023). In Maribyrnong, the frequency of heatwaves and flooding events has been rising, with severe consequences for both health and infrastructure. The October 2022 Maribyrnong River flood, which affected over 500 properties, underscored the municipality's vulnerability to climate-related events.

Additionally, in 2022, the Footscray air monitoring station recorded an annual average PM2.5 level of 5.8 µg/m³ – exceeding the World Health Organisation's recommended guideline of 5 µg/m³. On six separate days that year, the 24-hour average exposure to PM2.5 surpassed the World Health Organisation's safety threshold of 15 µg/m³. These figures highlight the urgent need for stronger air quality controls, urban greening initiatives, and sustainable infrastructure planning to build resilience and protect community health.

Local greenhouse gas emissions in Maribyrnong totalled 759,000 tCO2e in 2022–23, equating to 8.3 tCO2e per capita – lower than Victoria's average of 12.0 tCO2e per capita. However, commercial electricity use remains 10 per cent higher than the Victorian average, contributing to 44 per cent of total emissions (Ironbark Sustainability, 2024).

Prioritising climate resilience, green spaces, and a clean, safe environment for all requires a focus on infrastructure and services that are designed for as many residents as possible.

Research highlights that infrastructure services often fail to meet the specific needs of women, gender-diverse individuals, and marginalised communities, reinforcing disparities in access, safety, and economic participation (UNOPS, 2022). By adopting an intersectional approach, we can ensure that all residents – regardless of gender, age, or background – have equitable access to healthy and resilient environments. Urban greening, for example, not only mitigates air pollution but also reduces heat stress and promotes mental wellbeing (Nowak et al., 2021). Likewise, sustainable urban planning, including flood management and energy-efficient infrastructure, is essential to reducing climate vulnerabilities and enhancing community resilience (Smith & Thompson, 2022).

Addressing these environmental challenges is essential not only for reducing health risks but also for fostering a more liveable and sustainable city.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4:

AN INCLUSIVE AND CONNECTED COMMUNITY

A city that values diversity and culture, encourages participation, and supports a sense of belonging for all.

Outcome indicators

1. Building skills and capacity through volunteering opportunities, leadership programs, and inclusive events that improve community resilience, with a focus on connecting diverse groups including LGBTIQA+ people, older people, young people, people with disability, and multicultural communities.
2. Improving social cohesion and reducing isolation by creating accessible, culturally inclusive community networks that encourage participation in shared activities and build a sense of belonging.
3. Encouraging community connectedness through libraries, arts, cultural, creativity and heritage initiatives that contribute to economic and cultural growth while fostering trust and inclusion across diverse groups.
4. Promoting community safety and reducing substance and gambling-related harm by embedding harm reduction strategies, ensuring safe public spaces, and addressing gender-based violence through advocating for prevention and support services.
5. Strengthening partnerships by honouring First Nations' ongoing connection to Country and community, and respecting and celebrating the role of creativity and storytelling in their enduring cultural practices and traditions.
6. Supporting economic wellbeing and social inclusion by improving access to resources, education, and local employment opportunities, addressing barriers for CALD communities, ensuring youth-focused programs, enhancing transport accessibility, and planning for affordable housing.

Why it matters

An inclusive and connected community is critical for building cohesive communities where everyone has a sense of belonging and opportunity:

- **Strengthening social capital**: Building trust and relationships within communities enhances resilience and collective action.
- **Reducing inequities**: Addressing barriers to social and economic participation ensures that all residents can benefit from inclusive programs and spaces.
- **Improving public safety**: better social cohesion reduces risks such as family violence and hate crimes and creates a stronger sense of security.
- **Building community pride**: Shared spaces and inclusive initiatives promote civic pride and a deeper connection to place.
- **Enhancing wellbeing**: Strong social networks improve mental, emotional, and physical health, reducing loneliness and isolation.

Community feedback

The community was invited to share the health and wellbeing issues that matter most to them through workshops, advisory groups, social media and a survey from August to December 2024.

Broader community engagement

Of 31 responses, 'dependence on alcohol and drugs' was selected as a top concern related to health and wellbeing in our community by four respondents.

Of 27 responses, 44.5 per cent (12) noted their personal experience of, or had witnessed some form of violence in the community and 'did not personally feel safe'.

Community workshops

The importance of safe, connected, and inclusive spaces across the municipality was key for many workshop attendees who wanted to see fewer incidents of violence, highlighting a desire for a greater sense of safety within their neighbourhoods. Improved public safety measures, such as better lighting and the creation of inclusive, well-maintained public spaces, were among the most frequent suggestions.

Workshop attendees expressed strong support for community events to bring people together and reduce isolation. They also noted the need for accessible support services addressing family violence and gender inequality, alongside safe and welcoming spaces for everyone. Partnerships with local organisations to promote gender equity and support vulnerable groups were considered important in building a more inclusive Maribyrnong. Socioeconomic disparities, language barriers, and cultural divides were seen as key challenges affecting some residents, particularly public housing tenants, older people, and CALD communities. Intergenerational and intercultural programs, alongside initiatives to strengthen trust and connection, were identified for social cohesion and belonging. Attendees also highlighted the need for youth programs that create safe, inclusive spaces and emphasised better public transport to improve social connection, especially for young people, older people, and low-income households.

To ensure the needs of the community are being met and that progress is being made towards reducing the disparities some see within this space, the voices of the LGBTIQA+ community, older people, people with disability, First Nations people, and multicultural communities should be actively sought out, heard, and represented.

Context and evidence

Social health reflects the strength of community connections and the inclusivity of environments that encourage belonging and participation. Research shows that strong social connections reduce loneliness, improve mental and physical health, and enhance overall wellbeing. Conversely, social exclusion and inequity can exacerbate vulnerabilities, particularly among marginalised groups (Kawachi & Berkman, 2014).

When compared with non-LGBTIQA+ people, LGBTIQA+ people are more likely to experience poorer mental health and general physical health including an increased risk of depression, anxiety and chronic illness. This is widely attributed to an increased exposure to discrimination and social marginalisation (Perales, 2019). Additionally, a higher proportion of adults identify as LGBTIQA+ (21.5 per cent) in the City of Maribyrnong, compared to the Victorian average (11 per cent).

A higher percentage of the City's residents agree that multiculturalism makes life in their area better, with 80.2 per cent saying it definitely does, compared to 66.5 per cent across Victoria. A smaller proportion of the City of Maribyrnong residents agree that multiculturalism sometimes makes life better (13 per cent compared to 21.6 per cent in Victoria).

Like many municipalities in Australia, Maribyrnong has experienced rising rates of violence, with family violence incidents increasing by 16.6 per cent between 2020 and 2024 from 1008.7 per 100,000 persons in 2020 to 1176.5 in 2024. All violent offences increased by 21.1 per cent during the same period. These increases outpace Victoria's overall trends, where family violence incidents rose 3.6 per cent and violent offences increased by 2.5 per cent over the same timeframe (Crime Statistics Agency, 2025).

Demographically, 26.4 per cent of Maribyrnong's population is aged 60 years or over. Among this group, 52.5 per cent live with one or more long-term health conditions, and 22 per cent require assistance with core activities such as self-care, mobility, and communication. Almost 13 per cent of the population is aged 12 to 24 years, with 87.2 per cent of youth aged 15 to 24 actively engaged in earning and/or learning.

Homelessness remains a significant issue in Maribyrnong. The 2021 Census recorded 592 homeless individuals, with 50 per cent living in boarding houses, 40 per cent in supported accommodation for the homeless, and the remaining 10 per cent staying temporarily with other households or in boarding houses.

Addressing these challenges is vital for building safer, more cohesive communities. By creating inclusive public spaces, supporting culturally responsive programs, and prioritising equity-focused planning, the Maribyrnong community can create resilience, trust, and belonging for all residents.



Photo by **Bakri Mahmoud**

IMPLEMENTATION, EVALUATION AND REPORTING

Action Plan

A Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Action Plan (Action Plan) will be developed separately to outline the projects, programs, and activities that contribute to the outcome indicators in the Plan.

Annual action plans will be prepared each year, detailing timeframes for implementation, and how progress will be assessed. The action plans will outline specific actions, delivery timeframes, responsible Council teams, and relevant community partners. They will be reviewed and updated annually to ensure ongoing relevance.

Progress will be tracked through internal quarterly and annual reporting to Council, with annual progress reports submitted by October each year, as required under the Council Plan 2025–29, and reported to the State Government. These reports will ensure accountability and maintain focus on achieving the Plan's goals.

Evaluation

To measure progress effectively, the Action Plan will expand existing indicators, introduce new measures, and establish short- and medium-term performance metrics.

In line with the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008, Council will review the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan and Action Plan annually and make amendments when necessary. This review will also assess actions taken to prevent family violence and support victims, as required under the Act.

Annual progress reports will provide a detailed assessment of achievements across priority health and wellbeing areas.

To ensure transparency and community involvement, annual progress reports will be publicly available on Council's website.

HOW THE PLAN WAS DEVELOPED

The Plan was developed through a collaborative process that included reviewing local health data, engaging with the community and stakeholders, evaluating the previous plan, and aligning with state and national health priorities.

Data and evidence review

The Maribyrnong Community Profile provided key insights into the health status and determinants of health in the community, drawing from various data sources. This information informed the Plan alongside the evaluation of the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021–25, which assessed achievements, challenges, and areas for improvement.

A broader policy review also considered alignment with the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023–27 and other relevant frameworks.

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

Residents and other stakeholders shared their priorities on health and wellbeing from August to December 2024 through various channels, including:

- **Your City Your Voice Online Survey** (22 August – 15 September 2024), which attracted 130 visits from 102 users, resulted in 31 responses, with pollution and air quality, lack of green spaces, and congested, noisy and dangerous roads emerging as key issues related to health and wellbeing.
- **Three Stakeholder Engagement Workshops** involving over 85 attendees from Council, community organisations, State Government and service providers, ensuring a broad range of perspectives and expertise. The diverse representation in these workshops ensured the voices of priority communities, including culturally and gender diverse groups, young people, women, people with disability, and people facing socioeconomic disadvantage, were heard and integrated into the Plan.
- Participating organisations including:
  - Department of Health
  - Cohealth
  - Western Health
  - Western Public Health Unit (WPHU)
  - Odyssey House Victoria
  - Western Bulldogs Community Foundation
  - GenWest
  - Australian Multicultural Community Services (AMCS)
  - Borderlands
  - AMES Australia
  - YMCA
  - Asylum Seeker Resource Centre
  - Neighbourhood Houses Victoria
  - Rainbow Network
  - Sustain
  - Victoria University
- **Engagement with Council Advisory Committees**, which provided insights and strategic direction. This engagement was instrumental in understanding the voices of priority communities, including culturally diverse groups, people with disability, older people, and young people.
- Promotional outreach through the **Maribyrnong Messenger**, social media, email, and posters in libraries and community centres to reach a diverse audience.
- **Direct feedback from external stakeholders** who were unable to attend workshops, such as Rainbow Local Government, ensuring broader perspectives were considered.

Engagement on the draft plans

The third community engagement was conducted for three and a half weeks, from **18 June to 13 July 2025**. During this time, the community was invited to provide feedback on updated drafts of key strategic documents, including the **Community Vision**, **Council Plan**, **Asset Plan**, **Financial Plan**, and the **Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (MPHWP).** These drafts were shaped by extensive community and stakeholder engagement throughout 2024.

Engagement Activities and Participation

The engagement attracted broad participation across multiple channels, reflecting community interest and involvement:

- 231 residents participated during the third round of community engagement.
- 181 individuals engaged in six in-person events held at various locations throughout the municipality.
- 24 online contributions via the "Your City Your Voice" platform, including:
  - 15 surveys completed.
  - 9 respondents to a quick poll.
  - One formal email submission received from a stakeholder group.
- Social media engagement resulted in:
  - Facebook reaching 1,852 people with 45 reactions.
  - Instagram reaching 3,572 people generating 53 interactions.

Key Findings Relevant to MPHWP

Feedback specifically on the draft Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan was generally supportive, though respondents identified areas needing further refinement or emphasis:

Support and Uncertainty

62.5% of survey respondents explicitly supported the strategic priorities and outcome indicators.

37.5% were unsure, citing concerns primarily around clarity and measurability.

Community Priorities for Further Action

- **Air Quality:** There were calls for stronger action on improving air quality, including addressing commercial emissions, advocating for increased EPA monitoring, and implementing filters for major projects like the West Gate Tunnel.
- **Green Spaces and Active Transport:** Respondents emphasised protecting greenery and open spaces and prioritising active transport infrastructure, including safe bike lanes.
- **Gender Equity:** Participants requested explicit prioritisation of gender equity and empowerment of women within the plan.
- **UV Safety:** There was feedback highlighting the importance of integrating UV-safe infrastructure into public, play, and mobility spaces to reduce health risks from UV exposure.

Community members recommended explicitly addressing urgent community concerns and providing clearer, more measurable indicators to ensure accountability and effective monitoring.

Policy alignment

The Plan integrates findings from stakeholder engagement, community input, and policy analysis to align with local, state, and national priorities, ensuring a coordinated and evidence-based approach to improving community health and wellbeing.

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