



Connected Community Strategy

2023 – 2033



**City of
Whittlesea**

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

The City of Whittlesea recognises the rich Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities heritage of this country and acknowledges the Wurundjeri Willum Clan and the Taungurung People as the Traditional Owners of this place.

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Executive Summary

The Connected Community Strategy 2023-2033 (the Strategy) outlines the City of Whittlesea’s commitment to fostering an inclusive, healthy, safe and welcoming place where all community members are celebrated and supported.

The Strategy 2023 - 2033 is one of seven strategies comprising Council’s Integrated Planning Framework and relates to Goal 1: Connected Community in Whittlesea 2040: A Place for All.

The Strategy presents eight Key Focus Areas that respond to the needs and aspirations of the community.

Each Focus Area provides priorities for action that have been informed by background research, extensive community and stakeholder engagement and the review and consolidation of 36 individual policies and strategies.

Key Focus Areas



Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Communities



Arts, Culture and Events



Multicultural Communities



Access, Inclusion and Discrimination



Physical and Mental Health



Life Stages



Community Safety



Community Participation

Informed by the analysis of trends and engagement with community, the Strategy:

- Provides an overview of the City of Whittlesea’s demographic profile
- Identifies the challenges and opportunities facing our community
- Articulates the impact we are seeking to make through the Strategy
- Outlines how we will monitor (the Strategy) to ensure we continue to respond to the changing needs of our community.

Vision

“In 2040 the City of Whittlesea is a place that opens its arms to every resident, where all walks of life are celebrated and supported. Our community is compassionate and welcoming. We are healthy and can easily access the support services we need. People of all backgrounds, ages and abilities feel that they are an essential part of the community. We work together, making our community a better place for all.”

Whittlesea 2040: A place for all

How we engaged



Whittlesea 2040 community consultation:

more than 4,000 people participated through submissions, workshops and forums; and online, paper-based and in-person activities



Let’s Talk: Shaping the Community Plan 2021-25:

the consultation program included community surveys, online and face-to-face events, pop-up stalls and targeted focus groups



Community priorities focus groups:

community members from a diversity of age groups, genders, abilities, cultural backgrounds, suburbs and household structures participated in a series of focus groups to shape the direction of the Connected Community Strategy



Council workshops:

staff participated in internal stakeholder workshops to establish outcomes to be achieved in delivering the Connected Community Strategy.

A collaborative approach

Achievement of the outcomes and commitments outlined in the Strategy rely on Council’s collaboration with our community and stakeholders, including community service providers, other levels of government and special interest groups. In referring to “our approach”, Council acknowledges the need to work closely with our partners to achieve the best outcomes for our community.

How we plan – an integrated people focused approach

The Connected Community Strategy is one of seven strategies that outlines Council’s commitments, the outcomes we strive for and the actions we will deliver for our community.

The seven strategies form Council’s Integrated Planning Framework. Each strategy expands on our long-term 20-year community vision, Whittlesea 2040: A place for all and the Community Plan 2021–2025, which details Council’s priorities and our overall strategic direction.

Our approach to a Connected Community is provided via:

Connected Community Strategy 2023-2028 – Outlines our overall strategic direction across all focus areas in delivering on our vision for a Connected Community.

Connected Community Action Plan – Commencing in 2024, a Connected Community Action Plan will be developed every two years. The plan will outline actions Council will take in line with the priorities in the Connected Community Strategy.

Action plans will be developed in response to the priorities in each focus area. These plans will articulate the specific work Council will undertake and will also identify how we will measure progress.

An equity approach

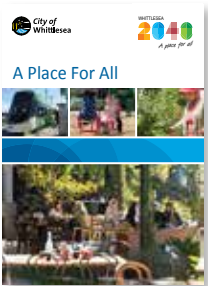
The principle of equity is consistent with a social justice and human rights approach which highlights the importance of equality, democracy, participation, transparency, accountability and inclusion. The City of Whittlesea is bound by the Victorian Charter of Human Rights.

For Council, taking an equity approach means that some population groups, geographical areas and social issues need to receive a greater share of Council resources, services or attention through policy because they are unfairly disadvantaged or experience significant barriers to participation in that service or program.

Providing this helps to achieve equality in the community – where everyone has what they need, and there are no barriers to participation.

Level 1: Vision

Council’s overarching vision

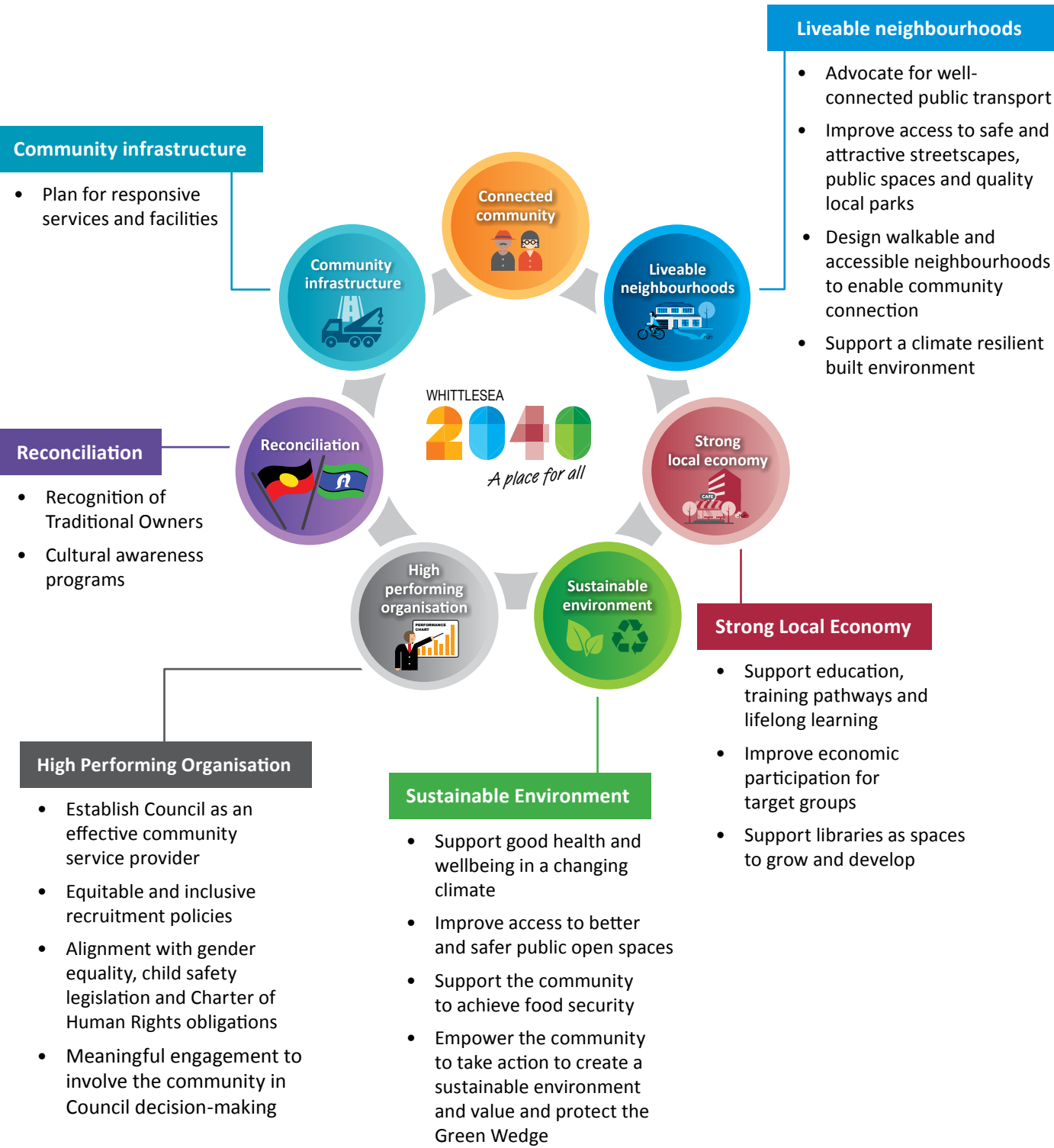


Whittlesea 2040



Community Plan

Connected Community Strategy links to other Council strategies



Our strategic direction

In developing the Strategy, Council has incorporated the goals and aspirations set out in Whittlesea 2040 and the key directions established in the Community Plan 2021-2025. Shared community outcomes have been identified under each key direction to progress the Strategy and provide a focus towards strengthening social connections and building community.

The following diagram articulates the strategic outcomes we want to achieve and the outcome indicators that will support us to monitor our success.



A connected community

“ In 2040 the City of Whittlesea is a place that opens its arms to every resident, where all walks of life are celebrated and supported. Our community is compassionate and welcoming. We are healthy and can easily access the support services we need. People of all backgrounds, ages and abilities feel that they are an essential part of the community. We work together, making our community a better place for all.”

Whittlesea 2040: A place for all

The following table lists the outcomes that have been established under each Key Direction for the Strategy which will provide benefits to our local community.

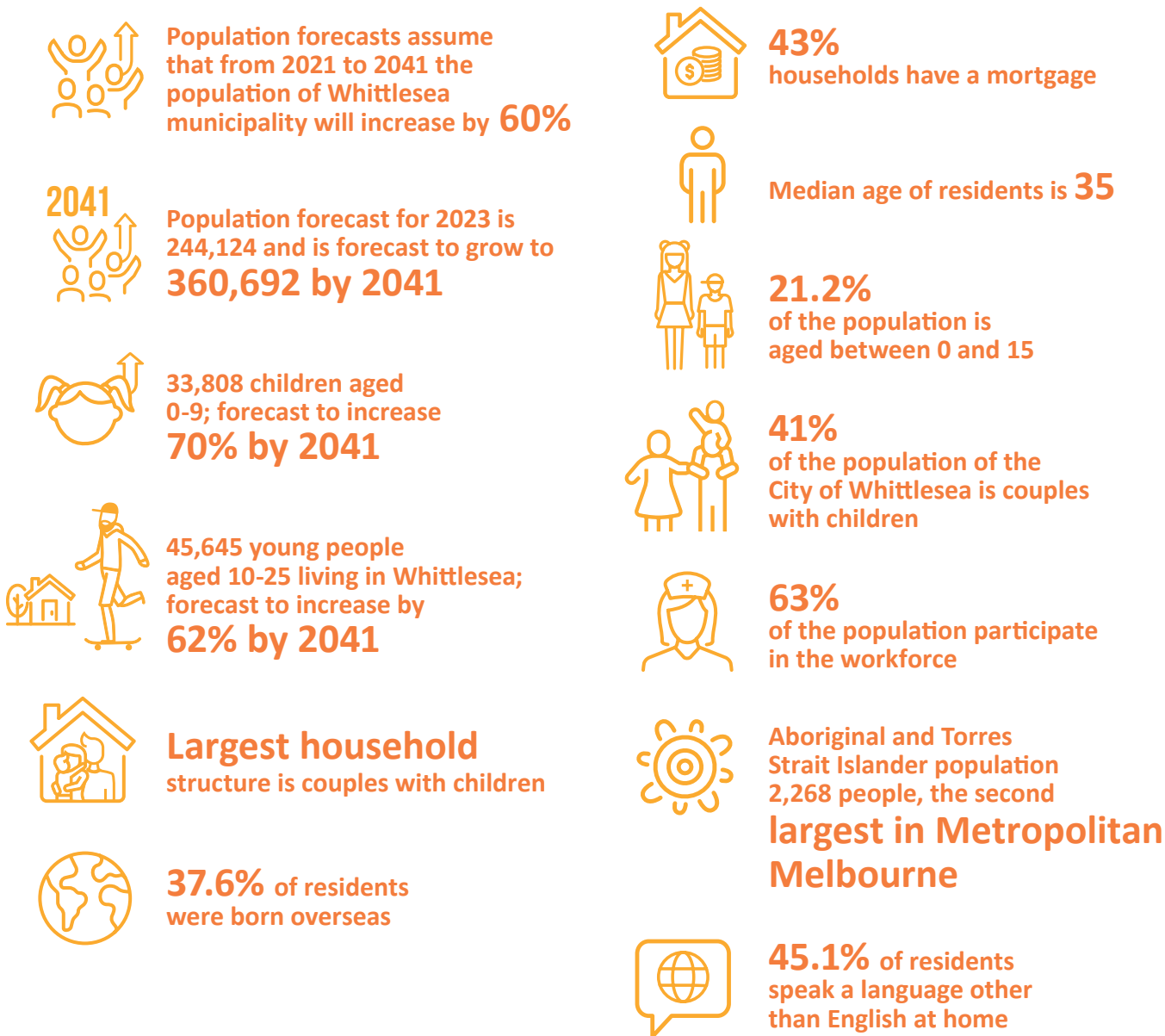
<div></div> <div>Key direction 1: A socially cohesive community</div> <div>Outcomes<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All members of our community feel that they belong, are valued and respected• Our community strengthens connections between diverse cultures• Our community shares stories and learns from one another• Our community values and respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and celebrates their rich diverse cultures</div>	<div></div> <div>Key direction 2: A healthy and safe community</div> <div>Outcomes<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Our community is healthy, well and physically active• Our community can live independently and safely• Our children and young people are supported to thrive• Our community experiences financial wellbeing• Our community feels safe and supported• Our community experiences healthy, equal and respectful relationships, and live free from abuse and family violence</div>	<div></div> <div>Key direction 3: A participating community</div> <div>Outcomes<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Our community is empowered and enabled to participate in decision-making• Our community values and acknowledges volunteering</div>
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The City of Whittlesea Community

The City of Whittlesea is one of Melbourne’s largest and fastest growing municipalities, covering a land area of 489 square kilometres. It has established urban areas across Bundoora, Epping, Lalor, Mill Park and Thomastown, growth precincts in Mernda, Doreen, South Morang, Epping North, Wollert and Donnybrook and rural areas that are characterised by farming and historic township communities, including Whittlesea Township.

Our highest population growth over the next 20 years will be in Epping North, Wollert and Donnybrook. The established areas will continue to grow, especially Mernda, Doreen, Epping Central (Epping), Plenty Valley Town Centre (South Morang), Thomastown, Lalor and University Hill (Bundoora). Approximately 70 per cent of the municipality is rural, with the other 30 per cent being urban, comprising houses, shops and factories.

The City of Whittlesea has a diverse population with a significant percentage of people born overseas and a higher proportion of non-English languages spoken at home compared to the wider Victorian population. The major differences in ancestries and languages spoken at home reflect the area's cultural diversity, with Italian and Macedonian being prominent ancestries and Macedonian, Arabic, Punjabi and Italian being widely spoken languages.



Place-based approach

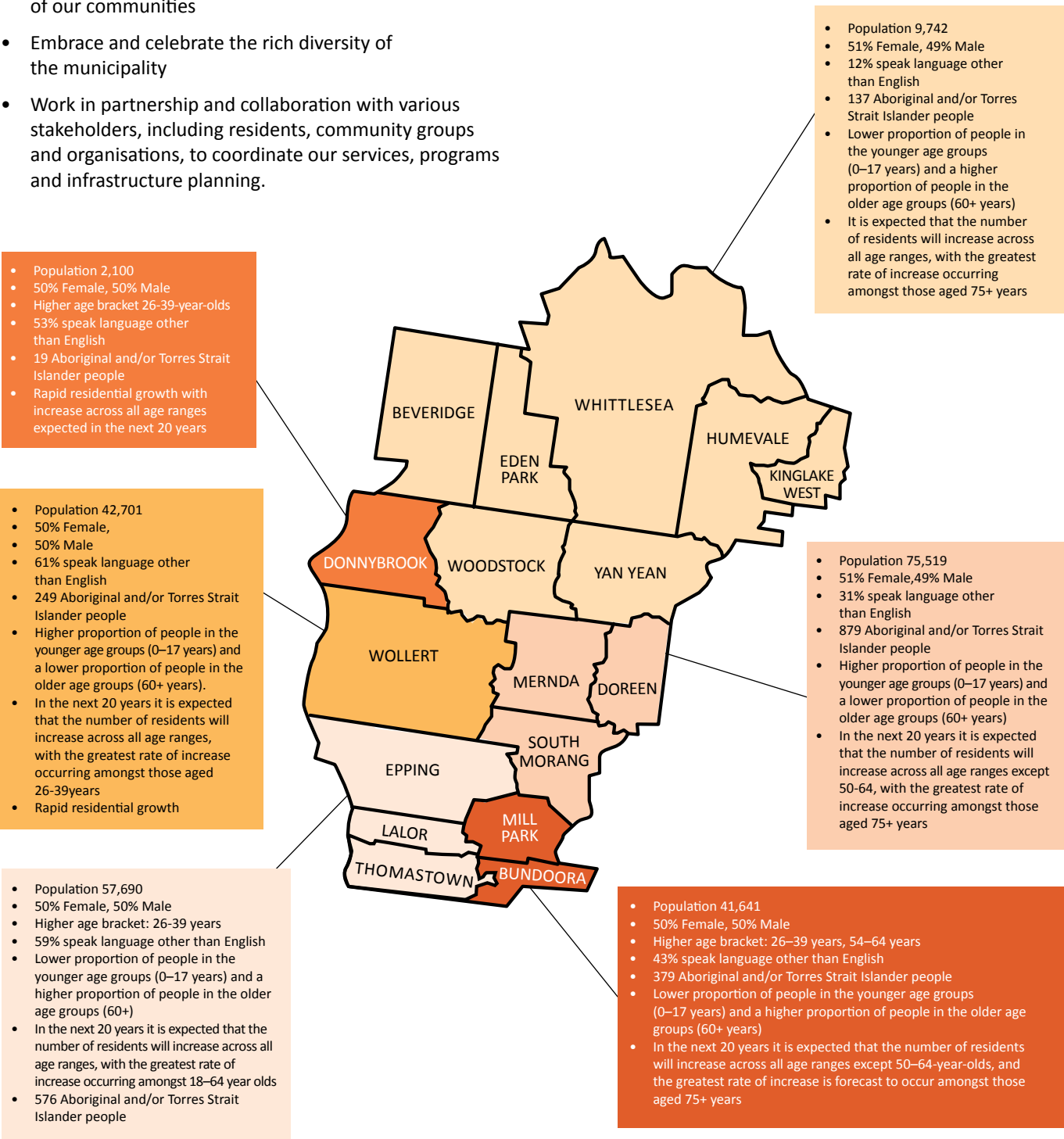
The City of Whittlesea has made significant progress in achieving positive outcomes by placing a strong emphasis on local communities.

Our approach involves understanding and addressing the unique aspirations and needs of each local community within our municipality, with the goal of directly addressing these when delivering initiatives and creating a place for all.

Adopting a localised approach allows Council to facilitate equal opportunities for community members to participate and engage within their local areas, fostering strong social connections and building resilience within our communities

Our key priorities are to:

- Recognise and appreciate the distinct characteristics of our communities
- Embrace and celebrate the rich diversity of the municipality
- Work in partnership and collaboration with various stakeholders, including residents, community groups and organisations, to coordinate our services, programs and infrastructure planning.



Opportunities and challenges

The City of Whittlesea is committed to building welcoming, healthy and connected communities. Being part of a community has a positive effect on mental health and emotional wellbeing and provides a sense of belonging and social connectedness. Informed by community needs and aspirations, we will work to respond to opportunities and challenges. We strive to build on the priorities and values of our community and on our strengths and achievements.¹



Responsive services and infrastructure provision

The City of Whittlesea's demographic and geographic diversity, which includes established, rural and growth communities, requires a nuanced response to service and infrastructure delivery. Timely and appropriate access to high quality services and infrastructure is needed to address barriers to participation and access to support for communities across the municipality.



Recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the community have been significant. Social, emotional and health impacts are still evident, which means that the way people participate and connect in the community has changed. It is important to adapt how we work with the community to respond to these changes, particularly regarding the way Council provides opportunities for social connections, recreation and physical activities.



Partnering to prevent and respond to family violence

Family violence rates in the municipality remain high and are one of the most common types of crime in the municipality. Council has a unique opportunity to partner with local community and family services to respond appropriately to affected community members, as well as to prevent family violence through promoting gender equality and respect in the community.



Rising cost of living

Increasing costs of living requires a considered response to support members of our community who are experiencing financial challenges, including rental and mortgage stress and access to health services. It is important that Council reduces as many barriers to participation as possible, particularly for our most vulnerable community members.



Celebrating cultural diversity

The City of Whittlesea has a rich culture and heritage. This is characterised by our multicultural community where almost half of our residents speak a language other than English at home. We also have the second largest Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population in metropolitan Melbourne. However, racism and discrimination are part of the lives of many in the community and are leading to a higher likelihood of emotional distress, depression and anxiety by affected communities². Providing opportunities to support and celebrate contemporary cultural and community heritage while connecting with traditions and the past, helps to foster a sense of shared identity.



Enhancing Community Safety

Crime rates across the municipality are trending down, however many residents, particularly women, still feel unsafe at night.³ Council will continue to seek opportunities for improving safety and perceptions of safety for our community through activating public spaces and places, supporting community vibrancy, and helping people to feel safe and supported.



Increasing Community Participation

The capacity of our community to participate and influence local decision-making and engage in activities such as volunteering has decreased in recent years.⁴ Council is committed to empower all people living, working, studying and doing business within the City of Whittlesea to have their voices heard and considered in decision-making that influences the future of our city and the delivery of our services.

¹ W2040

² Whittlesea anti-racism community project, Victoria University, 2022

³ City of Whittlesea Household Survey 2021

⁴ City of Whittlesea Connected Communities Background Research Report, 2023

Key Focus Areas

Council recognises that communities are strengthened by their connections with others and the importance of aligning strategic outcomes with the needs and aspirations of our community. Informed by an understanding of our community and research on the challenges and opportunities related to achieving a connected community, this Strategy has eight key focus areas.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Communities

The local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities are made up of many different and distinct groups, each with their own cultures, languages, beliefs, protocols and practices. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples live in urban, regional and remote areas and are present in all communities, not necessarily on their traditional Countries.

Arts, Culture and Events

Participation in arts and culture can improve our health and social connection and economic participation. A creative community provides opportunities for connection by sharing stories that increase understanding between different groups.

Multicultural Communities

Multicultural communities are characterised by people of different races, ethnicities and nationalities living together in the same community. Having a diversity of cultures and backgrounds allows for different perspectives and new ideas.

Community Participation

A participating community can take many forms, including involvement in democratic processes and volunteering. Participation in community life leads to a healthier, more informed and more connected community.

Community Safety

Community safety creates a sense of security for all people who live, work and play in our community. Feeling safe improves levels of social connection and trust.

Life Stages

Life stages are the different phases that individuals pass through in their lifetime. It is important to promote and respond to the specific needs of all people in the community, stages of life.

Access, Inclusion and Discrimination

An inclusive and accessible community supports people of all backgrounds and abilities and reduces vulnerability to marginalisation, isolation and discrimination.

Physical and Mental Health

Taking care of physical health is closely linked to improving mental wellbeing. Physical and mental health can each be improved through exercise, recreational activities, healthy eating, connection with others and nature, and access to health services.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander



We will be respectful of Aboriginal communities, acknowledging and embracing their history, culture, heritage and the talents Aboriginal people bring to our community and our business – City of Whittlesea Aboriginal Inclusion Charter 2020



Communities

- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people live across the City of Whittlesea and have a culture that is holistic in approach, this includes a strong spiritual connection to land, waters and Country.
- Building better relationships between the wider Whittlesea community and local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people will ensure that they are supported to live, work, learn and play in safe environments that promote their cultural identity, free from discrimination.
- The number of residents identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander has doubled from 2011 to 2021 in the Whittlesea municipality and its neighbouring local government areas. This is a greater rate of increase than recorded across the Greater Melbourne area and Victoria.
- Racism is widely experienced by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.



City of Whittlesea Data



Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population in the City of Whittlesea has grown by 37.8% from 2016 to 2021

Census of Population and Housing 2016/2021



Younger age profile of under 10 years of age, larger proportion of 18-year olds, fewer older adults, 50 years or over

Census 2021



102% increase in residents identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

Census 2021



46.5% of adults in Whittlesea report feelings of being valued by society, compared with 51.6% for Victoria

Victorian Population Health Survey 2020



What have we done so far?

- Planned for future construction of the Aboriginal Gathering Place in South Morang which will be a welcoming, inclusive and culturally safe space where Aboriginal people can enjoy a sense of belonging, with access to programs and services that strengthen culture and enhance wellbeing
- Adopted an Aboriginal Inclusion Charter which will continue the process of reconciliation between Council and Aboriginal people living, working or visiting the City of Whittlesea
- Council created an Aboriginal Communities Department to support self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the City of Whittlesea
- Implemented a new Child Safe Policy, improving culturally safe environments for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people
- Reviewed the Maternal and Child Health service to improve cultural safety for our Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities
- Developed Aboriginal online community hub on Engage Whittlesea that identifies projects that Council is working on to support the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities



Our priorities for action

Building respect

Council is committed to reconciliation and supporting opportunities for improved cultural, social and health outcomes for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Council will continue to build respect for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the community, allowing for self-determination and equity by providing opportunities in areas of socio-economic participation and cultural development free from discrimination.

Improving health and wellbeing

Council will continue to lead and support initiatives and activities that build better relationships between the wider Whittlesea community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, increasing opportunities to develop and implement culturally responsive programs for families, young people and children, and Elders.

Celebration and acknowledgement of culture

Council is committed to continuing to support our Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples to live, work, learn and play in safe environments that respect and promote their cultural identity. Council will continue to work towards increasing the visibility of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities and culture by building awareness through events and education.



Arts, Culture and Events

When people are drawn into something from a place of fun, then barriers are reduced, and people are open to other experiences – Community Consultation June 2023



Communities

- Arts, cultural activities and events encourage social cohesion by creating avenues for cultural awareness and community connection.
- Participation in activities and events helps people from all backgrounds feel included and welcome in our community.
- Arts, cultural activities and events provide links to support services, foster safe spaces and create opportunities for shared enjoyment and fun.
- Participating in arts, cultural activities and events works in many ways to strengthen our sense of community and support us on every level: physical, mental, emotional and social. The benefits are many and the provision of free and/or low-cost activities is important to encourage participation by all.
- Celebrating contemporary cultural and community heritage and connecting with traditions and the past through public art, community festivals and participation in local heritage programs and groups, helps to foster a sense of shared identity and belonging.



City of Whittlesea Data



86% of residents feel that it is important to have access to artistic, cultural and lifestyle community events

Community Research Sivlerlining Strategy 2021



44% of people participate in community-based arts and culture activities

City of Whittlesea Household Survey 2021



Whittlesea residents who participate in arts or cultural activities are almost 10% more likely to report very good general health than those who have not participated

City of Whittlesea Household Survey 2021



What have we done so far?

- Developed the Whittlesea Arts Hub online portal providing information on a diverse arts program, including exhibitions, festivals and performances
- Delivered an annual program of mural commissions that has enhanced the vibrancy of place
- Worked with communities and local artists to increase creative participation in Council events, providing a prominent platform for community members at key events
- Delivered arts programs and events with a place-based approach, ensuring local characteristics are celebrated and recognised
- Utilised the City of Whittlesea's key cultural facilities, Plenty Ranges Arts and Convention Centre and Ziebell's Farmhouse Museum and Heritage Garden as hubs for community connection.



Our priorities for action

Enhancing opportunities for participation and community delivery of arts, creative and cultural activities

Council will continue to support the delivery of free and low-cost locally based and municipal-wide arts and creative activities, programs and events that encourage participation and engagement. Council will also enhance the delivery of, and participation in, creative and cultural experiences, by strengthening avenues of support that enable our community to deliver their own art, culture and heritage activities.

Enhancing Council's cultural infrastructure as hubs of community connection and creativity

Council will continue to promote community access to arts and cultural spaces. A place-based approach will be central in increasing access to the arts and cultural expression opportunities for our community, supporting community-led initiatives and delivering programs that contribute to neighbourhood vibrancy.



Multicultural Communities

We need to educate one another on culture, to discourage racism and encourage acceptance of each other – Community Consultation June 2023



- City of Whittlesea has a diverse, growing multicultural population from 114 countries.
- A multicultural community allows us to look beyond ourselves. It gives people different experiences of diversity, inclusion and culture.
- A connected multicultural community enhances opportunities for work, education, friendship, understanding and compassion.
- Community connections across cultures help people to feel safe and supported in their lives. They also help people to proudly stay connected with their culture.



City of Whittlesea Data



37.6% of people in City of Whittlesea were born overseas

Census 2021



Almost half of all local residents (more than 86,000 residents) spoke a language other than English at home

Census 2021



13.6% of people in Whittlesea speak English not well or not at all

Census 2021



City of Whittlesea residents come from 114 countries, speak more than 93 languages and follow more than 40 faiths

(2021, Census, compiled by .id)



59% of culturally and linguistically diverse residents have experienced racism

City of Whittlesea Anti-racism community Project, Vic Uni, 2022



34% of culturally and linguistically diverse residents have difficulty or are not able to access health or social support services

City of Whittlesea Household Survey 2021



What have we done so far?

- Celebrated various cultural dates of significance, such as Refugee Week, to inform the community about different cultures and promote acceptance and harmony
- Delivered place-based programs to build the capacity of our multicultural communities, liaising with community members, community groups and faith leaders to increase skills, improve access to interpreting and translation support and build confidence to be actively involved in decision-making
- Provided information sessions for multicultural groups on a broad range of topics, such as parent visa information sessions and heart health sessions
- Established the International Student Information Hub to provide easy access to support and information for international students
- Partnered with Belgravia Leisure to offer concessions at leisure centres for people seeking asylum
- Implemented a swimming program for culturally and linguistically diverse women to improve swimming skills
- Delivered the Program for Refugee Immunisation Monitoring and Education (PRIME) which increases the ability of refugees and people seeking asylum to receive catch-up immunisation, information and support.



Our priorities for action

Celebrating diversity and creating connections and understanding between cultures

Council will work with the community to provide welcoming places for people to come together, creating opportunities to celebrate and acknowledge our diverse heritage and culture.

Fostering cultural safety through partnerships and a community-wide approach

Council will bring together communities, organisations and service providers to address racism and cultural safety, empower communities and improve support for those in the community who experience racism.

Enhancing access to inclusive and culturally appropriate services and facilities

Council is committed to improving the cultural responsiveness of planning and equitable access to health and community services for our multicultural communities.



Access, Inclusion and Discrimination



Recognition of the needs of diverse minority groups is important
– Community Consultation June 2023



Communities

- Access, inclusion and freedom from discrimination support people to have safe, healthy and connected lives. They allow people to feel a sense of belonging and to feel valued and respected.
- The health and safety of all community members depends upon timely and equitable access to services and infrastructure.
- Feeling included and connected is essential for physical and mental wellbeing. Social isolation and mental ill-health can occur when people are not included in community life.
- Creating a community free from discrimination is important, where the unjust or prejudicial treatment of people, based on age, race, ability, colour, immigrant status, sex, gender or other qualities, is challenged and addressed.
- In the City of Whittlesea there are people for whom access, inclusion and freedom from discrimination are a significant issue.
- There is an increase in the demand for services, social connections and support for vulnerable members of our community.



City of Whittlesea Data



Almost 60% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and multicultural residents, have experienced racism

City of Whittlesea Anti-racism community Project, Vic Uni, 2022



21% of Whittlesea residents have a permanent or long-term disability

City of Whittlesea Household Survey 2021



62% of Whittlesea residents said 'Yes, definitely' in response to whether multiculturalism makes life in their area better

Tolerance of diversity VPHS, 2021



63% of women are in the lowest and medium-lowest income quartiles compared with 43% of men

Census 2021



6.3% of the population in City of Whittlesea reported needing help in their day-to-day lives due to disability

Census 2021



In Victoria

34.2% of LGBTIQ+ adults experienced discrimination or were treated unfairly by others compared to less than half that proportion in heterosexual, non-LGBTIQ+ adults (15.6%)

Victorian Agency for Health and Information 2017



What have we done so far?

- Gained Rainbow Tick accreditation for Council's Youth Service, which ensures that our youth programs are safe and inclusive for the LGBTIQ+ community
- Supported the Whittlesea Disability Network (WDN), including the establishment of a new WDN online hub
- Engaged with and supported community initiatives and events that raise awareness and celebrate inclusion for all people, regardless of gender, sex or sexual orientation
- Participated in a local Anti-Racism Project 2022, which informed the development of a Roadmap⁵ on how to improve reporting and support services for those in the City of Whittlesea impacted by racism.



Our priorities for action

Embedding gender equality

Council is committed to advancing gender equality across our community. Gender equality supports our community to be inclusive, respectful, fair and safe for people of all genders. We seek to ensure that all people have the same rights, opportunities and responsibilities, and that everyone's contributions and efforts will be valued equally regardless of gender. Council will enhance the delivery of gender equity initiatives within the community, through grants, events and partnerships.

Continuing to provide equitable access to council services, facilities and programs

Council recognises the importance of equitable access and equal opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their circumstances or abilities. Council will continue to support the planning and development of inclusive and safe spaces, services, activities and events for all members of the community.

Supporting and sustaining freedom from discrimination

Council will continue to improve our community's understanding of what discrimination is, the impact that discriminatory behaviour can have on the health of those affected and to focus on opportunities to better address discrimination, so that all residents can feel safe and supported.

⁵ Whittlesea Anti-Racism Community Project Report - Whittlesea Community Connections



Physical and Mental Health

There is a need for Council to promote local health services, information and activities – Community Consultation June 2023



Communities

- Physical and mental health are interconnected. Taking care of physical health is closely linked to improving mental wellbeing and vice versa.
- Exercise has been shown to increase wellbeing as well as reduce the symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- Mental health is both influenced by and can influence community connections. When people are socially connected, they are more likely to make healthy choices.
- Regular physical activity is one of the most important things we can do for our health. Inclusive sporting opportunities contribute to positive physical and mental health and create a sense of belonging.
- The ability to meet everyday living expenses creates a sense of wellbeing, whilst financial hardship impacts our mental health, raising levels of distress, anxiety and depression.
- Community experience of gambling harm can lead to financial hardship for some households, along with impaired relationships, social life, employment and poor mental health.⁶
- Travelling outside the region for work and study causes time and other pressures, which directly influence wellbeing.



City of Whittlesea Data



The most common long-term health condition is mental health. Just under one -in-10 Whittlesea residents report a mental health condition

Census 2021



The incidence of a self-reported mental health condition is notably higher amongst females than males

City of Whittlesea Household Survey 2021



41% of residents meet physical activity guidelines

City of Whittlesea Household Survey 2021



Ranked the sixth highest among Victorian local government areas for poker machine losses

VLGA 2023



Ranked 12th of 79 Victorian local government areas for homelessness. Of all people experiencing homelessness those aged 12-24 years are at most risk

Census 2021



In 2020 10% of Whittlesea adults ran out of money to buy food

Vic Health Survey 2020



Fifth most socio-economically disadvantaged of Victoria's 31 metropolitan municipalities

Census 2021



What have we done so far?

- In partnership with government and non-government agencies, planned for the development and construction of a First Response Youth Service in South Morang. This will provide housing and support services for young people
- Supported the establishment of the Whittlesea Mental Health and Wellbeing Local Service for adults and older adults, which supports people aged 26 and over to get mental health and wellbeing treatment, care and support closer to home
- Endorsed a new Community Grants Framework to ensure more funds are available to more people in the City of Whittlesea to support local programs, projects and activities
- Built and upgraded a range of community centres, sporting and leisure facilities to provide our community with opportunities to participate in physical activity and connect socially
- Advocated for poker machine reforms to reduce the impact of gambling harm on our community
- Established a Financial Hardship Policy that aids those in our community experiencing financial difficulties.



Our priorities for action

Adapting opportunities for physical activity in response to changes in participation

Council will continue to facilitate, advocate and plan for the delivery of spaces, programs and activities that increase community participation in formal and informal physical activities, ensuring communities are inclusive, active, healthy and connected.

Working with partners to support mental wellbeing

Council will continue to work with our partners in the community services sector and connect people to services, monitor service gaps, create opportunities for collaboration and advocate for additional investment in mental health services, including addressing homelessness and gambling harm prevention.



Life Stages

We need to respond to the different needs across life stages - having spaces and opportunities for everyone to connect and share skills and experiences
– Community Consultation June 2023



- Life stages are the different phases that individuals pass through in their lifetime: infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood.
- Creating multigenerational and flexible spaces, programs and activities where children, youth, adults and older adults can interact, assists in building community participation and connections.
- Young families with mortgages are particularly susceptible to increasing costs of living pressures and family/work commitments.
- A life stage approach recognises that a person's capacity fluctuates throughout their life and an integrated range of interventions may be required.
- The number of young children with a disability in the municipality has increased significantly requiring the delivery of targeted support services.
- Young people in growth areas can face increased social isolation and require spaces, programs and activities to foster social connection and wellbeing.
- As people age and are no longer working there is an increased risk of social isolation and loneliness impacting physical and mental health.
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the social and emotional development of children and young people is an ongoing concern.⁷



City of Whittlesea Data



All age groups are forecast to grow in number over the next 20 years with the greatest proportion occurring amongst 75+ year olds
Census 2021



One-fifth of Whittlesea's population are young people aged 10-25 years
Census 2021



Just under a third of older adults are aged 50+
Census 2021



26-49-year-olds are our largest population group
Census 2021



Young people missed critical socialisation development years due to COVID-19 lockdowns
aced 2021



7.4% of children in their first year of school are developmentally on track for social competence
aedc 2021



What have we done so far?

- Partnered with Headspace National and Mind Australia to open a Headspace service at Plenty Valley Westfield to support young people's mental health
- Supported residents to transition to the National Aged Care and disability systems
- Continued the business transformation of the City of Whittlesea aged care services in response to aged care reforms
- Provided sector support for Commonwealth Home Support Program providers to prepare for aged care reforms
- Completed the Mernda Social Support Centre and Council, with partner organisations, will provide services to older people
- Delivered the Bringing Up Kids Expo which brings together family support agencies to provide information on services, programs and events available to the City of Whittlesea community
- Implemented the Best Start Best Life program, including increased hours for 3- and 4-year-old kindergartens.



Our priorities for action

Enhancing intergenerational connections

Council will enhance opportunities for our community to live well by encouraging intergenerational activities and relationships between young and older people which have long-term mutual benefits. Council will continue to find ways for people in the community to connect, learn and teach new skills across all stages of life.

Provide services and facilities for all life stages

Council is committed to ensuring that all community voices are heard across the life stage journey and that all residents be given the opportunity to access relevant Council services. Council will continue to maintain strong partnerships to enhance collaborative planning for intergenerational services and facilities where all ages and stages of life are valued, supported and connected.

Supporting older adults to live safely, independently and participate in community

Council will continue to take a proactive approach to positive ageing through the planning and delivery of spaces, programs and activities that provide connection with others and maintain physical and mental wellbeing. Council will also continue to work with our partners and provide high quality and responsive aged care services in line with aged care reforms so that older adults can live safely and independently.

Supporting families, children and young people to thrive

Council will continue to support avenues for children and young people to engage in programs that enhance their social and emotional wellbeing and deliver programs and services that promote positive wellbeing, development and community connections for families, children and young people.



Community Safety

We need to connect with neighbours and locals to feel safer
– Community Consultation June 2023



Communities

- Ensuring a safe environment to live, work and play builds and strengthens communities and leads to better physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- Family violence is a significant safety and health issue in our municipality and has a considerable impact on individuals and on the community.
- A resilient community is one where strong community connections can minimise the impacts of disasters and build safer communities.
- Nuisance animals can have an impact on the safety of our communities and require close management to prevent damage to the environment and wildlife.



City of Whittlesea Data



In 2021, 77% of family members affected by family violence were female

Vic Gov, Crimestatistics 2022



26.15% of residents reported they felt “somewhat unsafe” or “very unsafe” in the municipality at night

City of Whittlesea Household Survey 2021



30.44% of women feel somewhat or very unsafe at night; 6.98% of women feel somewhat safe or very safe at night; 21.61% of men feel somewhat or very unsafe at night

City of Whittlesea Household Survey 2021



75.66% of residents know what types of emergency risks or hazards can occur in the community

City of Whittlesea, Preparing for an emergency survey 2022



Libraries are increasingly recognised by users as a hub for community activities and connections, providing a safe space that welcomes people from all walks of life

Background Research Report 2022



What have we done so far?

- Partnered with Whittlesea Community Connections to deliver the Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project that supports culturally and linguistically diverse communities, newly arrived migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to break the cycle of family violence and empower those communities to respond to the challenges of preventing violence against women
- Partnered with the Men’s Project at Jesuit Social Services to deliver the Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) project, an innovative training program to address the harmful gender stereotypes that are linked to violence against women and help participants to become active role models for other men and boys
- Partnered with Monash University YX Lab to deliver the Your Ground Project to identify public places where people do not feel safe
- Partnered with Neighbourhood Watch public awareness program, Remove It, Lock It or Lose It, to reduce thefts from vehicles
- Reviewed the Community Local Law and delivered the Community Local Law and Safer Communities Road Show
- Introduced the 24-hour Cat Confinement Law to help protect our wildlife
- Piloted person-centred emergency preparedness training, as part of the Resilient Communities Project, and launched new video series to help residents understand and prepare for emergencies
- Facilitated the review and update of the Municipal Fire Management Sub-Plan and the Municipal Storm and Flood Management Sub-Plan
- Prepared for the establishment of the Community Sub-Committee of the Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee (MEMPC)
- Prepared the Climate Change Action Plan 2022 -2032 that outlines Council’s role in supporting the community to respond to the impacts of climate change.



Our priorities for action

Improving perceptions of safety

Council will respond to perceived and actual safety concerns by collaborating with local police and relevant agencies to implement initiatives that provide a safer environment for our community.

Prevent family violence for all our community

Council will continue to promote gender equality through partnering with our community in prevention awareness raising programs and working with our community partners to prevent and respond to family violence. Our Maternal and Child Health service will continue to provide a response to parents experiencing family violence, while promotion of equality and respect in our sporting environments remains a key priority.

Improving preparedness and resilience to emergencies

In partnership with emergency services and relief agencies, Council will support our community to be more connected, prepared and safe, and more resilient to emergency incidents, climate change and natural disasters through increased access to information and education.

Promoting responsible pet ownership

Council will continue to promote responsible pet ownership to reduce the adverse impact of nuisance animals on the community, improving safety around animals, protecting both our wildlife and the environment.



Community Participation

Building confidence in people, giving them the ability to speak up, have their say and put forward ideas – Community Consultation June 2023



Communities

- Participating in community life strengthens community connections and helps to build strong and resilient communities.
- Participation by the community in both political and non-political ways increases the capacity of individuals and communities to build connections and influence matters affecting their lives.
- Participation through volunteering assists in building strong and resilient communities by providing opportunities for individuals to support those in need, connect with others and learn new skills.
- Supporting organisations to find ways to make volunteering easier increases vital volunteer support in the community, which leads to a healthier and more connected community.



City of Whittlesea Data



7.6% of the Whittlesea community volunteer
Census 2021



Digital inclusion in Whittlesea is improving faster than the national average and performing well against other LGAs

Aust Digital Inclusion Index 2022



35% of residents have participated in local decision-making opportunities

City of Whittlesea Household Survey 2021



What have we done so far?

- Enhanced the *Engage City of Whittlesea Hub*, providing an online platform for our community to have a say about the future of our municipality
- Delivered an inclusive Community Leadership Program, supporting individuals to develop leadership skills
- Funded Whittlesea Community Connections to build the volunteering capacity of community service organisations
- Established the Youth Advisory Committee to bring issues of importance to local young people to Council
- Delivered the “Love Where We Live” campaigns to promote community participation in improvements in their local area
- Reviewed our community grant guidelines to improve access to funding for community groups and individuals.



Our priorities for action

Enabling participation

Council will enhance the provision of resources, information and education about activities and programs available in our community that support social connections.

Participation in governance and democracy

Council is committed to building the capacity of local and diverse community members to participate in decision-making through leadership programs and community development opportunities.

Valuing and facilitating volunteering

Council will continue working with our partners to support and promote opportunities for participation in volunteering across the community.



Making it happen

The Strategy will be delivered through implementation of a Connected Community Action Plan, which will be developed every two years. The first Action Plan will be developed upon endorsement of the Strategy by Council.

The Action Plan will outline the specific actions Council is committed to delivering, based on the priorities for the future outlined in this Strategy. The Action Plan will also help to facilitate and strengthen our partnerships and collaborations with key stakeholders to increase our collective effectiveness in achieving positive community outcomes.

Gender Impact Assessment Statement

In the development of the Strategy consideration has been given to the impact of gender and other characteristics such as culture, Aboriginality, age and disability on community connection, participation and safety. The action plan (to be developed) will include specific actions to address inequality, including key gendered inequalities and/or barriers.



Monitoring progress

Council has prepared an evaluation framework to monitor the trends and performance of our work to promote a connected community.

The priority indicators below provide an overview of the change we want to see overtime. Measures are being developed to assess our progress towards meeting the outcomes identified in this Strategy.

Council will continue to monitor the priority indicators and will work with other levels of government, as well as partners in the private and non-for-profit sectors and our broader community, to influence these indicators for the better. The Strategy will be reviewed in 2028 to update demographic profiles where needed and update challenges and opportunities in response to changing community needs and aspirations.



Key direction 1:

A socially cohesive community

- Improved feeling of being valued by society
- Decreased loneliness
- Decreased experience of discrimination
- Improved attitudes to multiculturalism
- Increased participation in creative and cultural experiences
- Increased community-led creative initiatives
- Increased cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities
- Increased visibility and accessibility of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage



Key direction 2:

A healthy and safe community

- Improved knowledge and skills to take preventative health actions
- Increased participation in physical activity by target population groups
- Delayed loss of physical and cognitive functions that impact daily activities of living in older adults
- Increased life satisfaction
- Decreased developmental vulnerability of children
- Increased rates of participation in education, training and employment pathways
- Reduced proportion of population that experience financial stress
- Improved awareness of the risks and harms of gambling
- Increased responsible pet ownership
- Increased perceptions of safety
- Improved understanding and awareness of family violence and elder abuse
- Improved community readiness for emergencies
- Improved social connections



Key direction 3:

A participating community

- Increased confidence to engage in democratic processes
- Increased volunteering

Glossary

Accessibility – Is the quality of being able to be used by people of all abilities, commonly referring to the built environment, modes of communication and technology.

A human rights and social justice approach – “Social justice and human rights both highlight the importance of equality, democracy, participation, transparency, accountability and inclusion. And both place the concept of “justice” front and centre in efforts to forge a more stable and equitable world.” (UN)

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity – Encompasses a range of aspects including a person’s country of birth, their ancestry, where their parents were born, what language/s they speak, and their religious affiliation.ⁱ

Community participation – Refers to how individuals and groups involve themselves in their community in both political and non-political ways. This includes volunteering, joining community groups and participating in local decision-making processes.

Digital Inclusion Index – Measures digital inclusion across three areas of Access, Affordability and Digital Ability.⁸

Disability – A permanent or long-term impairment, not related to ageing, that causes substantially reduced capacity in at least one area of daily life (for instance, around self-care, self-management, mobility, communication).

Discrimination – The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of ethnicity, age, sex, or disability or other attributes protected under law.

Elder abuse – Has been defined by the World Health Organisation as “a single, or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person”. Elder abuse can take various forms, including financial, physical, psychological, emotional and sexual abuse, or neglect.ⁱⁱ

Financial hardship – A person or household experiences financial hardship when they have difficulty meeting everyday living expenses (e.g. food, housing, transport, utilities and telephone bills, insurance, healthcare, education, leisure or recreation activities), managing debts and/or raising funds in an emergency.

Genderequity – Entails the provision of fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities based on gender. It is not about the equal delivery of services, or distribution of resources – it is about recognising diversity and disadvantage and directing resources and services towards those most in need, to ensure equal outcomes for all. Gender equity acknowledges that women and men have different access to resources, power, responsibilities and life experiences and that different strategies are often necessary to address disadvantages and achieve equal outcomes for women and men, girls and boys.

Gender equality – Is the outcome reached through gender equity – it means equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for women, men and trans and gender diverse people. Equality does not mean that women, men and trans and gender diverse people will become the same. Rather, it means that the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of all people will not depend on their gender and that all people’s contributions and efforts will be valued equally, regardless of gender.

Inclusion – Occurs when people feel, and are, valued and respected regardless of their personal characteristics or circumstance.

IDAHOBIT – Is the International Day Against Homophobia Biphobia and Transphobia, also known as International Day Against LGBTQIA+ Discrimination.

LGBTQIA+ – Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Intersex Asexual+

NDIS – National Disability Insurance Scheme

Outcome indicators – Specify what changes we need to see to achieve the outcomes statements; they set the direction of change. Outcome indicators reflect the key drivers and influences on progress towards an outcome.

Racism – Is the process by which systems and policies, actions and attitudes create inequitable opportunities and outcomes for people based on race. Racism is more than just prejudice in thought or action. It occurs when this prejudice – whether individual or institutional – is accompanied by the power to discriminate against, oppress or limit the rights of others.ⁱⁱⁱ

Social cohesion – Refers to positive and happy social relationships - it is the bond or ‘glue’ that binds and connects people.

Social isolation – Is seen as the state of having minimal contact with others. It differs from loneliness, which is a subjective state of negative feelings about having a lower level of social contact than desired.^{iv}



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