



Latrobe Health Advocate Annual Report 2019/20



Latrobe Health Advocate

PO Box 108
2 Tarwin Street, Morwell
Victoria 3840 Australia

1800 319 255

info@lhadvocate.vic.gov.au

www.lhadvocate.vic.gov.au



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Message from the Advocate

As this report goes to the publisher, we are nearing the end of another phase of the COVID-19 emergency response. Many people in Latrobe are struggling with the immediate and long-term impacts of restrictions and

for some their physical and mental health is at risk.

For others, it has been a time to reassess their priorities and tick some of those long-lasting jobs off their to do list.

My office, like many across the State, has been working remotely since March. During this time, I have been hearing from Latrobe communities about the impacts of COVID-19 on them and their families and friends. People have shared their personal experiences with me, and this has enabled me to provide insights to the Victorian Minister for Health and Victoria's Chief Health Officer throughout the response.

We have all been confronted with the ever-changing nature of COVID-19. Things can change daily, and it can be difficult to cope with the news of COVID-19 cases and deaths, the amount of change and the volume of information that is being provided.

My office has tried to keep on top of this information and through my social media and website, provide as much detail as possible.

Local responses continue to play a significant part in the management of COVID-19 in Latrobe and thanks to the work and diligence of Latrobe communities we are looking forward to an easing of restrictions over coming months.

While COVID-19 has been a priority for my office in 2019/20 a considerable amount of work has gone into the other priorities that formed my 2019/20 Statement of Intent.

In this Annual Report I am pleased to report on the continuing work to raise the voice of communities in Latrobe and to also highlight a number of priorities where systems change is progressing.

Over the coming months we can expect to experience further change as we find our COVID normal and I want to offer three important messages to people in Latrobe...

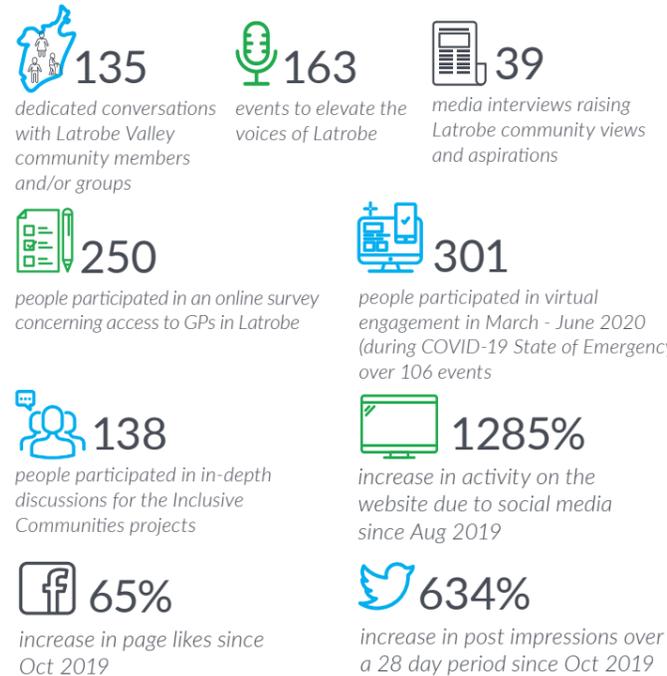
- Please continue to take the time to care for yourself and others. COVID-19 is a reminder to all of us about how important it is to look after our physical and mental wellbeing.
- Please continue to be understanding of the global and ever-changing nature of COVID19. It is impacting every aspect of our society and we really do need to work together and be patient with each other to get through this.
- If you have concerns, suggestions or feedback about how the government and health system response to COVID-19 is being implemented in Latrobe, please reach out to me to have your voice.

I will continue to advocate on behalf of Latrobe communities and do what I can to support people during this difficult time.

J. Anderson

Activities 2019/20

The activities of the Advocate's office have been wide and varied in 2019/20 and reflect the dramatic changes we have experienced in the 12 months to the end of June 2020. A snapshot of events and activities undertaken this year is highlighted in the enclosed lift out.



While the way in which the Advocate has engaged with communities has changed in recent months, what has not changed is communities' aspiration to live well and healthy in Latrobe.

The Advocate met with people as part of her "On the Buses" project early in the year and continued with face to face catch ups until March when meetings moved to phone, video chat and various online platforms. The Advocate has ZOOMed, TEAMed, SKYPED and Facetimed her way through meetings and catch ups, exercise classes and workshops and all the time in awe of the flexibility and agility of people to adapt and change as needed.

The Advocate continues to hear from and respond to the voice of communities and elevate those voices to governments and service providers working together to improve health and wellbeing in Latrobe.

In October 2019 the Advocate's office at 2 Tarwin Street, Morwell was officially opened by Harriet Shing MP and was followed by an Open Day where community members, organisations and local services met with the Advocate and her staff and reflected on the work undertaken in her first year.

The Advocate is working with VicHealth following her appointment as a member of VicHealth's Childhood Obesity Taskforce.

Inclusive Communities

In December the Advocate released a new report *Engagement Inspiration* which includes key insights and suggestions for governments and services about how people in Latrobe want to engage and be engaged. This first report offers some innovative ways to hear directly from people who may not usually have their voices heard.

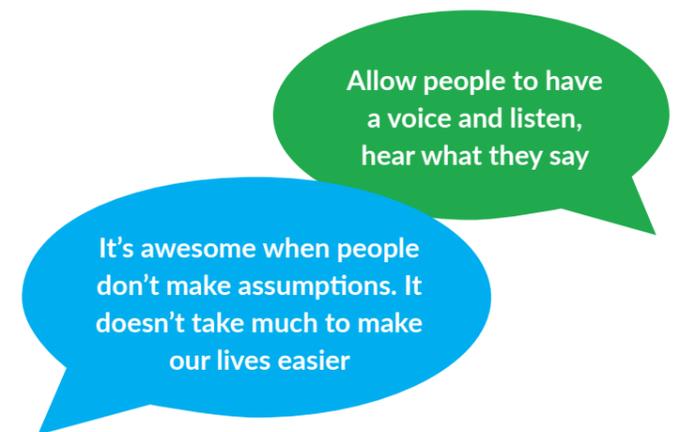
The Advocate heard from people living with disability, people living with chronic conditions and people from a multicultural background. This work informed the ongoing engagement with communities throughout the year and offered a foundation for the reports that have followed.

These conversations have reminded the Advocate that people in Latrobe do want to engage. They have something to say and they want to participate in change. People in Latrobe care about their health and wellbeing and they care about each other.

[Click on the image to see the Advocate's Engagement Model](#)

As part of her 2019/20 Statement of Intent commitments the Advocate heard from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, LGBTIQ people, and people experiencing financial stress.

There are many lessons to be learned from this work and in the coming year the Advocate will continue to reach out to people in Latrobe whose voice is often not heard.



In February of 2020 the Advocate presented her findings from her first Engagement Inspiration report in two distinct forums. As a keynote speaker at the Inner Gippsland Children and Youth Area Partnership (IGCYAP) Symposium and to a meeting hosted by Latrobe Valley Authority, influencing the Victorian Government Public Engagement Framework.

The Advocate detailed her engagement model and shared with her audiences some of what she had heard from communities in Latrobe.

People living with disability want governments and services to think ahead and plan engagement activities that are physically

and emotionally safe. People living with chronic condition have suggested keeping engagement simple and keeping it real. People who are culturally and linguistically diverse have said that face-to-face engagement is important.



[Click the image to view the video](#)



The Top Five

1. Social Inclusion – Human connections in Latrobe



When people living and working in Latrobe are aware of how they can be more inclusive of others and commit to doing this, everyone in Latrobe has the opportunity to enjoy good health.

People have talked about the value of local sporting clubs, gyms and exercise groups. They provide opportunities for people to be included and to connect with others.

People living with disabilities have said that gyms and recreational groups can help them to achieve their healthy lifestyle goals, however their experience and first impressions are not always positive.

People from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities want to see greater alignment between the way government resources are being directed and the way they want to achieve their health and wellbeing goals.

They want government to realise the true effect of people coming together, feeling safe and comfortable. They know this can have positive social benefits and want to create opportunities for good people to work together.

People from LGBTIQ communities have said that awareness and education is central to everything and needs to be at the forefront of any change.

The local hospital, community health service, Quantum, Aussie Broadband and Youth Space have been praised for the ways they openly demonstrate and promote inclusivity for LGBTIQ people.

Volunteering is important to people in Latrobe. It gives them an opportunity to utilise their skills and connect with others.

It can be good for their health. However local volunteers have expressed their frustrations about the behaviours of paid staff who can unknowingly bring poor workplace culture and politics into their discussions with volunteers.

There is no doubt that COVID-19 has changed the way people in Latrobe connect with and support each other. For some, feelings of loneliness and isolation are already familiar, and the ongoing health effects of COVID-19 physical distancing measures may not yet be fully realised.

The usual places for social connection and access to technology and resources such as libraries and other community settings have been closed.

Unfortunately, those people experiencing loneliness and isolation before COVID-19, are feeling even more disconnected. They have been separated from friendships and community services that they depend on for their health.

Latrobe communities have consistently shared their aspirations to stay connected and to help others who may be experiencing isolation or loneliness, particularly during the time of COVID-19.

Lack of digital connection fortifies isolation. We don't know about people who are not connected

2. Access to Services



People in Latrobe have shared their aspiration for local services to understand and accommodate their diverse needs. Their ability to get the help they need can be impacted by their knowledge of the health system, how well services work together, and the experience people have with health professionals.

For some people, there are barriers within the system, that can have a negative impact on their health.

The Advocate heard that in Latrobe, people can find it hard to get an appointment with a doctor. Their experience with services does not always meet their expectations and their health is being impacted.

People in Latrobe want to build trusted relationships with health services and professionals. Communities have said that when health services demonstrate an openness, and a willingness to learn and ways of working together with others, it helps to build trust.

Access to health services goes beyond government funding, locations and opening hours. It comes down to approachability, inclusivity and trust. When health services do this well people in the community are empowered to achieve their health and wellbeing goals. Without it there is a risk that people will wait or not seek out support until it is too late.

The Advocate heard from local doctors that demand for their services is high and the system seems to be working against them. Local practices have expressed their frustrations about having to turn patients away on a daily basis and shared their aspirations for changes in the training and recruitment pathways for GPs.

Access to Services was identified as a priority in the Advocate's 2019/20 Statement of Intent and further details appear later in this Report.

[Click on the image to see the Access to Services Action Plan](#)

We need more GPs, they change every three months and we have to keep telling our story

3. Mental health



People in Latrobe are aware of and talk openly about the need to improve mental health and wellbeing for themselves and others in their community. There is a consistent voice for more mental health supports and services in the area.

People have also shared some of their personal stories of accessing local mental health services and what the experience has been like for them or their loved ones. They have expressed concerns about how accessing mental health services can be frightening, particularly if it's a new experience.

They have shared their aspirations for a community-wide approach to prevent suicide and for services and supports to be more welcoming and inclusive of families and friends.

People have talked about the toll that financial stress can have on their mental health. Some people are focused on getting through one day at a time and find motivation in their children.

They have talked about services providing a hopeful environment where there is access to gardens and healthy foods.

With the global scale of COVID-19 and the way it infiltrates every aspect of society, it is hard for anyone to escape from the mental health impacts of the pandemic. Within Latrobe there is a heightened awareness of the need for people to look after their own mental wellbeing and to look out for others.

Concerns have been raised about the lack of awareness and supports for people suffering from mental illness, particularly for older people. There is a desire for more psychologists to be available for mental health inpatients to help people talk

through their feelings and to achieve a greater sense of control over their life.

Opportunities for work and to earn a living can determine how families spend their time, what supports and activities they access and how they are feeling. Some of the coping strategies people have talked about include going for a walk and dreaming about the future.

Latrobe communities have demonstrated their resilience and an ability to cope. There is more work to be done however advances in telehealth have resulted in greater and more convenient access to help for those that need it.

My mental health is impacted, even though I'm an introvert, I still need contact with others

People out there may be feeling overwhelmed for the first time and not used to those feelings

4. Healthy Lifestyles



People in Latrobe share a common goal to stay active and enjoy the physical and mental health benefits of exercise. For some this is harder to achieve than others, however with COVID-19 there may be an opportunity to help communities re-prioritise how they spend their time.

There is now a more universal focus on health and wellbeing as the basis of everything, and the economy is secondary. This presents an opportunity to reimagine how communities can enjoy and benefit from a healthy lifestyle into the future. Now is the time to address the impact of health inequities and entrenched social disadvantage that is experienced by some people in Latrobe.

People who are experiencing financial stress have shared their desires to prioritise healthy food and exercise for themselves and their families and identified some of the barriers that prevent this from happening.

People from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have reflected that some people can let their health go and that it might be difficult for men to talk about their health. Nonetheless, they share the same aspirations to live a long and healthy life.

Spend time at home without footwear and connect feet to ground – nice to feel the difference

5. Safe environment for people in Latrobe



Protecting the health and wellbeing of communities is a priority for people in Latrobe. Communities want to contribute to decisions about economic and industrial developments.

When industry and governments engage with communities in meaningful and transparent ways it can lead to stronger outcomes, harness the goodwill of local communities and prevent unintended harm to their mental health and wellbeing.

Latrobe communities were impacted by significant levels of smoke from bushfires early in 2020. Some people have expressed their concern that smoke is a part of life now and described it as something that they can taste and smell.

The impacts of COVID-19 on Latrobe communities are being realised. There is not yet a vaccine for COVID-19 and ultimately governments and health services are counting on people in the community to pay attention to public health messages about hygiene and physical distancing to prevent the spread of the highly contagious virus. People in Latrobe are worried about this and want to do the right thing. It is confronting for them when others within their community or elsewhere behave in ways that seem to disregard the public health advice.

I am being as cautious as possible and it is frightening to see people that aren't

Priority Project Campaigns

In 2019/20 the Advocate used a project/campaign approach to identify the conditions that hold a problem in place and enable change that communities are seeking. Work commenced on a Healthy Life in Latrobe and Human Connections however in March 2020 the Advocate identified COVID-19 as a priority for her office and work on these projects was postponed. These projects, along with the ongoing work in Palliative Care and Access to Services, will be carried forward to the 2020/21 Statement of Intent.

Achieving Victoria's best end of life experience for people in Latrobe



Work on end-of-life palliative care continued throughout the year and the Advocate released a Progress Report in May, highlighting the good work already undertaken and the work that is yet to be done in relation to her original recommendations.

[Click on the image to read Achieving Victoria's best end of life experience for people in Latrobe.](#)

In this progress report the Advocate described an overwhelming voice from communities for the establishment of a hospice in Latrobe and the support from Latrobe City Council for the provision for that space within the region. Further work needs to be done between the Victorian Government, services and communities to reach an understanding of what a hospice is and how it would integrate and add value to existing services and the broader Gippsland community.

I would like to see if Latrobe Valley can finally get a palliative care hospice

The Advocate highlights the importance of meeting the needs and aspirations of local communities in relation to end-of-life palliative care and has been encouraged by the commitment from Latrobe Regional Hospital to improve the physical environment for patients and families.

Work has begun to ensure a unified model of care is experienced by every patient in every place. Services are working with the Gippsland Health Alliance (GHA) to implement an information and data network to support clear communication and integrated pathways for patients across the region. A steering committee that includes key providers, is assisting in the implementation of the computer software ensuring that it is accessible across all services.

We need all our clients in one database that can be accessed by staff at the hospital, local GPs, and the community palliative care team

Provision of grief and bereavement supports remain a gap in the local system. Work needs to be done to consider the current capacity of the local system, ensure adequate staffing and the implementation of a palliative care workforce strategy.

We need more bereavement support before and after passing

The Advocate's report showed that the aspirations of local communities were on par with the policy directions of the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments. However, the structure of spreading responsibility for the delivery of services across multiple services and settings did not provide an opportunity for effective community input, making services disjointed and at times unable to meet those needs and aspirations.

The report has received support from the Victorian Minister for Health and an undertaking from DHHS to work with the Advocate in progressing the goal to achieve Victoria's best end of life experience for people in Latrobe.

[Click on the image to read Achieving Victoria's best end of life experience for people in Latrobe. – May Progress Report](#)

Covid-19



In March the Premier declared a State of Emergency for Victoria in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Since then people in Latrobe have shown resilience and supported each other as we face this significant threat to our health, community and economy.

The Advocate's office began working remotely at the end of March and continues to do so at this time.

In the early stage of the response, the Advocate reached out to communities across Latrobe to hear how COVID-19 was impacting people's daily lives.

The Advocate spoke with community groups, service providers and individuals and reported weekly to the Victorian Minister for Health and Victoria's Chief Health Officer. She shared the experiences of people in Latrobe, providing an insight into the impacts of COVID-19 and how communities were coping with restrictions. These updates highlighted what the Advocate was hearing from communities, the innovations she was observing and asked questions of government to address local concerns.

There were 12 themes identified as a result of those conversations:

1. The **impact on mental health** resulting from the effects of isolation, increased anxiety in general, and increased financial instability;
2. Some **people not hearing, understanding, or responding to behaviour change** messaging about personal hygiene and physical distancing. They may be unsure or scared;
3. People **not being aware of or utilising health and social services** that are still be available or have changed their mode of delivery;
4. **Changes to public transport schedules** and services that may not be suitable for a regional location;
5. The likely **increase in health inequities** for people in Latrobe resulting from people not being able to afford, access or have the skills to use technology and data that would enable them to stay connected with others and access health services.
6. Opportunities to **strengthen partnerships between governments, public and private operators** in Latrobe.
7. **Unchartered territory** and an unfamiliar way of responding to emergencies that is challenging all levels of government and has in impact on services and communities.

8. **Stigma and judgment** in relation to testing and compliance or non-compliance with physical distancing measures
9. The **economic impact** and **increased financial stress** within the business community.
10. Preventing people from becoming sicker (**prevention**) and empowering people to look after their health (**health promotion**);
11. Disruption to the system resulting in **many positive changes** and a desire for these innovations to continue into the future; and
12. Concerns about declining uptake in **family violence** services and a fear about limited opportunity to identify children and women at risk when they are stuck behind closed doors.

COVID-19 has created an environment for change within health services. They are reflecting on how well telehealth and other services have been utilised by communities with consideration for who has engaged or accessed a service and importantly, who has not and why. This information will support the development of existing and new services as communities recover from the impacts of the pandemic.

Over the past six months the Advocate has seen what can be achieved when Gippsland Primary Health Network, Latrobe Regional Hospital and Latrobe Community Health Service work closely together to design a local system and coordinated approach to COVID-19 testing and contact tracing.

The Advocate was also pleased to see the establishment of a Latrobe City COVID-19 helpline. Having met with some of the staff involved in this work, she has seen first hand their commitment to spending time on the phone to listen to how people in the community were feeling and answer their many and varied questions.

The Latrobe Health Assembly produced a booklet which was delivered to every Latrobe household detailing the supports and services that were available to them in this time.

We are exceptionally lucky in Australia. Everyone will be much kinder to each other in the future

As the response progressed, the Advocate's updates reduced to fortnightly and are now made monthly.

All these updates are available on the Advocate's website and information regarding restrictions and available services has been provided regularly via the Advocate's social media pages: @LHAdvocate.

[Click the image to visit the COVID-19 News webpage](#)

Improving access to services in Latrobe



In her 2019/20 Statement of Intent the Advocate names Access to Services as a priority project.

Extensive engagement with communities and systems stakeholders has been occurring since 2018 and in September 2020 a detailed Action Plan was released.

The need for this priority campaign was evident in the voices of Latrobe communities, local GPs and health services who were reaching out to express their concerns. In responding to these concerns the Advocate worked together with local communities, doctors and health services to better understand the issue.

Her office sought expertise and research beyond the boundaries of Latrobe to understand how the issue might impact other regional communities within Australia and to learn about solutions that might be relevant in Latrobe.

In identifying the systemic and underlying issues that are impacting how people in Latrobe can access doctors, the Advocate looked for opportunities to positively impact the experience that people have with medical services and identified enablers within the system which might lead to immediate and longer-term positive outcomes for service delivery in Latrobe.

In collaboration with a range of stakeholders the Advocate identified four areas for Action. These are:



Improving training and accreditation pathways for doctors in Latrobe.



Enhancing and promoting the liveability of Latrobe and strengthening local GP recruitment systems.



Building health and digital literacy and enabling greater responsiveness to community voice.



Local system design and innovation; reducing the burden on the emergency department and creating a multidisciplinary business model for the future.

The plan is supported by the Victorian Minister for Health who has committed to work with the Advocate to progress the action within the Victorian Government's jurisdiction.

The Advocate will continue to work together with the lead and support agencies that have demonstrated their commitment to Latrobe. She will advocate on behalf of these agencies and Latrobe communities to ensure the appropriate support and resources are available to bring about sustainable change.

[Click on the image to see the Access to Services Action Plan](#)

Health is everyone's business



The Advocate engages with communities across Latrobe to prioritise health and wellbeing within the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone.

The Advocate continued to Chair the Latrobe Valley Asbestos Taskforce, which was established in 2019 and brought together, for the first time, a group of stakeholders to adopt a single approach to address the complex issue of asbestos in our communities.

My aim is to influence development projects, government planning and decision-making processes in terms of how they:

- Create a health community
- Impact on climate change and the determinants of health and
- Do not adversely affect community health

Jane Anderson, Latrobe Health Advocate

Members of the Taskforce include:

- Government agencies: EPA, Worksafe, Latrobe Valley Authority, DHHS and DELWP
- Local Councils: Latrobe City, Baw Baw Shire and Wellington Shire
- Unions: AWU, AMWU, CFMEU, ETU and ASU
- Community Groups: Asbestos Council (Vic) GARDS, Latrobe Health Assembly and Resource Recovery Gippsland

The Taskforce has developed its terms of reference and 2019–2022 Strategic Plan. It has established working groups within the taskforce who focus on four key areas:

- Awareness raising
- Asbestos management
- Regulations and
- Enforcement

There is a great deal of passion from the members that are on the taskforce that share a single vision to create a healthy community

[Click here to visit the Latrobe Valley Asbestos Taskforce website](#)

In February 2020, the Advocate hosted a roundtable with the Chief Health Officer, Professor Brett Sutton and local decision makers in Latrobe. This was an opportunity to bring people together and progress discussions about responding to climate change and to consider strategies that could be implemented to protect the health and wellbeing of local communities, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

After the roundtable the Advocate and the Chief Health Officer visited Traralgon Secondary College to engage with VCE students about the impact of climate change on health and wellbeing, taking questions and encouraging them to continue to raise awareness with their peers.



This year the Advocate, who is a member of Regional Partnerships Gippsland, worked with the group to complete an Outcomes Roadmap for the region. Virtual roundtables of community and business leaders were hosted in May 2020 and insights and evidence collected at that meeting are assisting governments to better understand the impacts of COVID-19 and to put together a recovery plan that will take into account the unique challenges and opportunities that the region faces during this time.

[Click here to read about the Regional Partnerships Gippsland Roundtable](#)

The Advocate has shared the community voice at these meetings and contributed to the Gippsland Plan, COVID-19 recovery and supported community engagement focussing on health and wellbeing.

In 2019/20 the Advocate heard from communities concerned about two capital development projects – the Delburn Windfarm proposal and the Chunxing Lead Battery Recycling Plant. She sought assurances from the proponents and approving bodies that the overall health and wellbeing of Latrobe communities would be considered in the approval processes and that the community would be appropriately engaged throughout the projects.

The Advocate sought information from OSMI Australia and the National Wind Farm Commissioner, Andrew Dyer to better understand the processes for approval. She also sought to understand what was being done to communicate effectively with communities about how their health and wellbeing was being considered as part of the Delburn Windfarm proposal.

The Advocate and her staff attended public meetings and sought information from the developer before a submission was made to the EPA in relation to the CHUNXING Lead Battery Recycling Plant. The Advocate recommended:

- The EPA satisfies itself that the proponent had provided sufficient opportunity for communities to be consulted about the proposal.
- That the EPA consider the cumulative impact of the release of stated emissions on the existing soil and air quality in Latrobe.
- That the EPA consider the psychological impacts of the approval process on those people who have raised concerns around the proposal and work to mitigate those impacts by maintaining a transparent process and evidence informed communication strategies to prevent unintended harm.

The Advocate continues to monitor these projects.



The team at Latrobe Health Advocate
Alistair Edgar, Senior Advisor
Jane Anderson, Latrobe Health Advocate
Kylie Jones, Office Coordinator

Latrobe Health Advocate
PO Box 108
2 Tarwin Street, Morwell
Victoria 3840 Australia

1800 319 255

info@lhadvocate.vic.gov.au

www.lhadvocate.vic.gov.au



A Snapshot of 2019/20 Activities and Events

Engagement **2000+**

135 dedicated conversations with Latrobe Valley community members and/or groups

163 events to elevate the voices of Latrobe

39 media interviews raising Latrobe community views and aspirations

250 people participated in an online survey concerning access to GPs in Latrobe

301 people participated in virtual engagement in March - June 2020 (during COVID-19 State of Emergency) over 106 events

138 people participated in in-depth discussions for the Inclusive Communities projects

1285% increase in activity on the website due to social media since Aug 2019

65% increase in page likes since Oct 2019

634% increase in post impressions over a 28 day period since Oct 2019

[Click here to see a snapshot of events and activities conducted in our 2019-2020 period](#)



Moe

- GARDS Office Opening
- Moe Probus Club
- International Day for people with a disability
- NAIDOC Week Flag Raising and Smoking Ceremony
- Moe Multicultural Friendship Group
- Moe Life Skills
- Chief Health Officer – round table and visit to secondary school



Morwell

- NAIDOC Week Flag Raising and Smoking Ceremony
- Prostate Cancer Support Group
- CoAbility office opening
- Gippsland Dementia reference group
- Latrobe Valley Mine Rehabilitation Community forum
- Morwell Farm to Families Market
- Headspace Morwell
- Asbestos Awareness Event
- Latrobe Youth Space 1st birthday celebration
- Latrobe Health Advocate Office Open Day

Glengarry

Glengarry Community Township Association



Hazelwood/ Hazelwood North

Hazelwood North community meetings about the proposed Latrobe Valley battery recycling plant
COVID-19 engagement



Yinnar

- Yinnar Wellness Group
- COVID-19 engagement
- Engagement – People experiencing financial stress



Churchill

- Federation University campus planning
- Latrobe Food for All community lunch
- COVID-19 engagement
- Engagement – People experiencing financial stress

Boolarra

- COVID-19 engagement
- Travelling on local buses x four days in July



