



Latrobe Health  
**Advocate**

QUARTERLY UPDATE  
JANUARY - MARCH  
2019



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## Jane Anderson, Latrobe Health Advocate

I am pleased to present this update from the Office of the Latrobe Health Advocate for the period January to March 2019. In this report I highlight the conversations I have had with people across Latrobe and the ways I have amplified the voice of communities who have shared with me their experiences, aspirations and concerns for their health and wellbeing and that of their communities.

This report includes insights into what communities are telling me and how these issues are being managed and actioned within my office. I also report on how we are progressing with the priorities of my initial Statement of Intent.

As always, I'm looking forward to having many more conversations in the coming months and encourage you to contact me on 1800 319 255 or via email at [info@lhadvocate.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@lhadvocate.vic.gov.au) any time.

Please visit and like our Facebook page where you can keep up to date with the events I'm attending and information on health and wellbeing issues that may be of interest to you. You can also follow me on Twitter and our Website is where you can find copies of the reports we publish along with this quarterly update.



## Activities January to March 2019

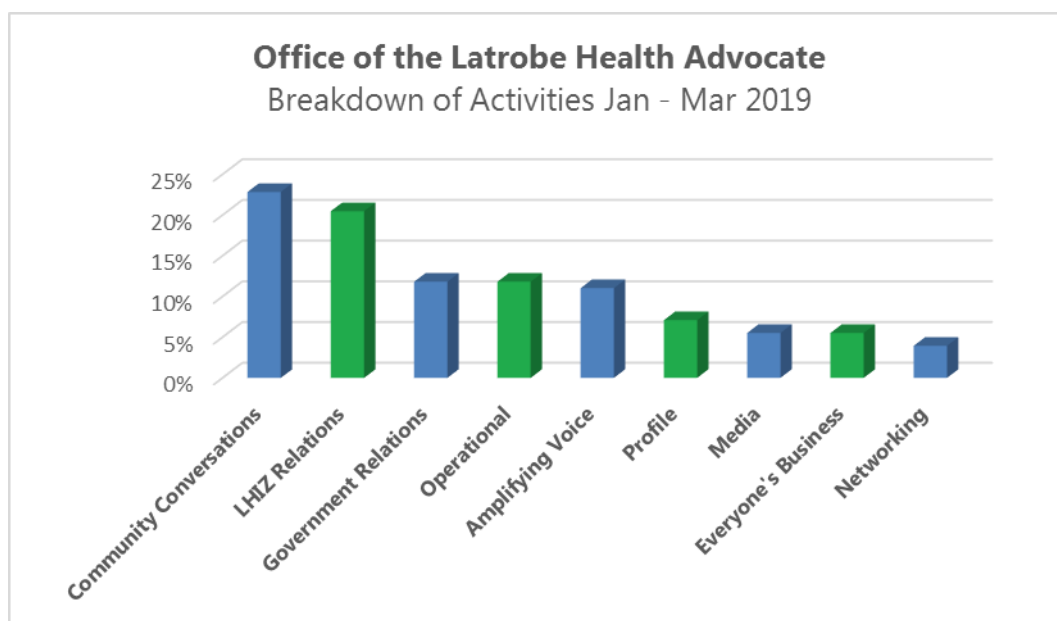
During this quarter the office of the Latrobe Health Advocate has continued to focus on raising awareness and building relationships with Latrobe communities, local health and social services and Government. Where appropriate, it has facilitated connections between communities, local service providers and Government.

In the first quarter of 2019 there has been a shift in momentum with the volume of community engagement activities increasing, Government and Latrobe Health Innovation Zone relationships strengthening and priority projects well underway.

The format for community conversations remains consistent with three key questions; to hear about aspirations, barriers and suggestions related to health and wellbeing in Latrobe. Additional engagement activities have focused on specific priority areas, in particular mental health and wellbeing.

Discussions with local services and Government are beginning to shift from introducing the role of the Latrobe Health Advocate, to hearing and responding to the voice of communities.

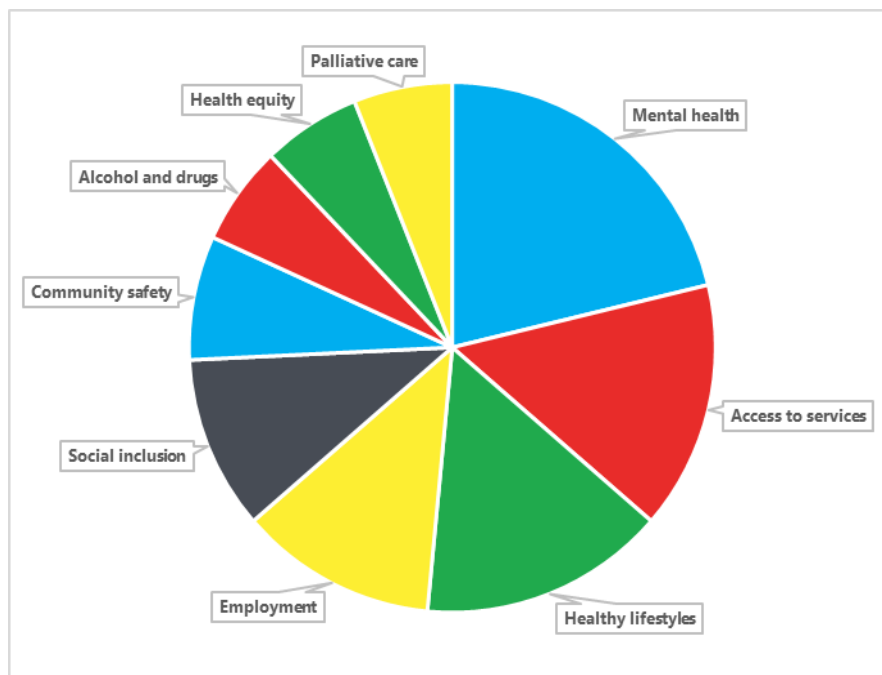
Between January and March, the Office of the Latrobe Health Advocate interacted with more than 300 people from Latrobe communities and held discussions with approximately 100 representatives from local health services and Government.



Community voice has been amplified in various ways including a submission to the Victorian Government about the Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and a submission to the Productivity Commission Mental Health Inquiry.

The Latrobe Health Advocate has been commissioned to Chair the Latrobe Valley Asbestos Taskforce which has generated significant interest from Government and local stakeholders. Regular meetings have been established and some administrative and communications supports have been provided by WorkSafe Victoria.

## Community Voice



### The Top Five

1. Mental Health
2. Access to services
3. Healthy lifestyles
4. Employment
5. Social inclusion

## Mental Health

People have noted the important role that employers have in promoting good mental health and wellbeing. They have said that workplaces and training programs can bring people together and they can talk and feel comfortable with each other, which is good for their mental health. Workplaces are seen as a place where the stigma about mental ill health can be challenged.

People have described a cycle of hopelessness and related this to unemployment and the negative impacts it can have on mental health. They have also said, that in some instances work can have a negative impact on mental health, when employees feel frustrated or undervalued.

People have expressed a desire for action to happen at a community level to address the impacts of self-harm and suicide. Some people have said that there is nowhere to go beyond the hospital and that there needs to be more supports at a community level.

People have shared their aspirations for a mental health system that is inclusive of families, friends and social networks and values their contribution. They want this to be a focus for the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.

The relationship between physical and mental health has been talked about and people have described the mental health benefits of yoga, walking and other recreational activities. They have shared their own experiences of taking small steps to improve their physical health through exercise and diet and how this has improved their self-belief and mental health.

## Access to Services

When people talk about access to services, they share their frustrations about how long it takes to see a doctor and their concerns about not being able to build a longer-term and trusted relationship with them.

People have talked about referrals and waiting lists to access a GP and develop a mental health plan. They have said that sometimes there is a long wait between the GP and a psychologist and that on occasion, the cycle needs to begin again. Long wait times and the process for aged care assessments directly impacts their ability to access services which may result in their physical or mental health deteriorating while they wait.

People have described their struggles to understand health services, how they interact with each other and the language that they use. They want health services to be more approachable and communicate in a language that is easy to understand. There is a common view that health services and health professionals are not familiar with each other and therefore, their ability to work together to benefit communities is limited.

The challenges faced by people who need to travel to Melbourne for specialist appointments have been raised. People have said there is no consideration for the costs and time associated with regional travel and the difficulties caused by early morning appointments.

When people in the community share their positive experiences of local health services they often suggest that services need to develop a better understanding of each other and that there needs to be greater community awareness of the services that are available.

## Healthy Lifestyles

Latrobe communities have shared their aspirations for more opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to participate in recreational activities. There is a consistent message from communities that activities need to be designed to cater for specific ages and needs, and a desire for activities to be available in all towns. Cost and transport are seen as a barrier to participation. People have specifically shown an interest in walking clubs, group fitness classes, playgroups, bicycle groups and aquatic exercise classes.

People have recognised the physical and mental health benefits of recreational activities. Parents have described Latrobe Street Games activities as fun and positive for children and their parents. They have said that the activities have been a great way for young people to come together in an inclusive environment that is stress free. Parents have said that Street Games gets children away from their phones and TV and is a great way for them to meet other children before they transition to high school.

People from community-based exercise groups have talked about how valuable it is to come together on a regular basis to move their bodies and to spend time with each other. It has been suggested that there needs to be more exercise therapists in Latrobe and that they should be recognised as a key part of the local health workforce.



## Employment

People have talked about how important it is to have a sense of purpose, and recognise that education, training and employment are good for health. People have shared their frustrations about looking for work and expressed a desire for employers to be more inclusive of younger people, people with a disability and people from a multicultural background.

A number of people have expressed the view that they want to work and contribute to their family and society. There is a general desire to see more education and employment opportunities afforded to young people, new arrivals and other job seekers.

People have noted the impacts that the job seeking process itself can have on a person's mental health and wellbeing.

## Social inclusion

Latrobe communities have said that people may experience social isolation or exclusion for a range of reasons which may include physical or geographical separation, inability to access social events and activities, a lack of events and activities on offer to suit their interests or needs, or an inability to interact with others due to physical or mental ill health.

People want to see more supports for people with a disability, young parents and new arrivals. They have shared suggestions about creating community gardens and raised questions about the accessibility of local sporting clubs.

## Community Safety

People have consistently expressed their concerns for younger people and older people and shared their aspirations to address antisocial behaviour in public places. People want to see more respect within their community. They recognise that often; antisocial behaviour can be seen as socially acceptable and that something needs to be done to 'break the cycle'.

People have suggested that part of the solution could be to have more authorised officers and supports on public transport and at bus stops, to support vulnerable people including older people and people living with mental ill health.

## Alcohol and drugs

People are interested in the recently announced drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility and want to have their say about what this will mean for Latrobe communities and what is important for them. There is a common concern that there is a lack of detox facilities in Latrobe and a view that this is an essential part of the pathway for people in Latrobe before they can access the rehabilitation facility.

People have shared their aspirations for a more coordinated, whole of community response to alcohol and drug issues and recognise that things need to be done differently.

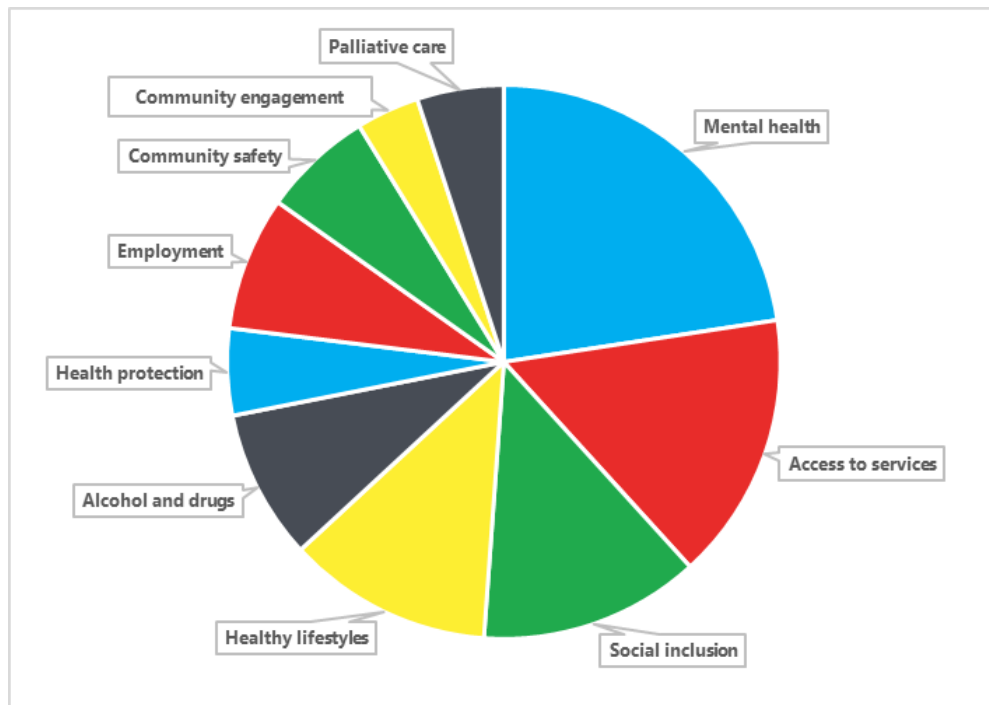
## Health Equity

People have shared how difficult it can be to look after their health when they are struggling financially. They have talked about the costs of medications and inconsistencies in financial supports that are available, describing an unbalanced health system. They have expressed concerns about wanting to participate in community activities and access transport but not being able to for a range of reasons. Most of the time when people are expressing these concerns there are multiple and complex health and social factors contributing to their circumstance.

## Palliative Care

There is consistent feedback that the hospital environment is not suitable for end-of-life palliative care and that it is not inclusive of families. There are concerns that everything is directed by the GP and that they are not as available or responsive as they need to be due to competing demands on them. People have shared their aspirations for a palliative care experience that feels caring and nurturing, with consistency of nurses and supports for families.

## Community Voice - year to date 2018 / 2019



### The Top Five

1. Mental health
2. Access to services
3. Social inclusion
4. Healthy lifestyles
5. Alcohol and drugs



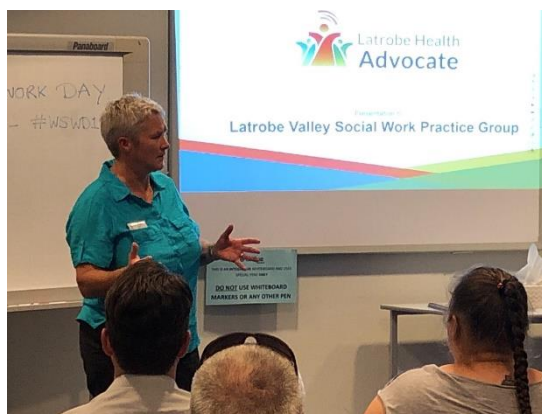
## Amplifying the communities' voice



During this quarter the Advocate made a number of presentations to service providers; including board members, executive team members, and staff. The Advocate presented community voices to these organisations and encouraged them, when considering the design and delivery of services, to be aware of people's aspirations and concerns for their health and wellbeing and for that of their communities.

Presentations included:

- Latrobe Community Health Service (LCHS) Board and Executive team
- DHHS Mental Health Forum Consultation
- CEO Latrobe Regional Hospital
- Gippsland PHN suicide prevention project
- VECCI Mental health Briefing to local workplaces
- World Social Workers' Day
- Mental Health Royal Commission Round Tables and Productivity Commission consultation



## Research and Information Sharing

In response to community conversations the Office of the Latrobe Health Advocate has undertaken research and shared information or resources with communities including;

- Latrobe City Council strategies and policies
  - Public Open Space Policy, Events Calendar, Community Gardens Policy, Aged and disability services and assessment, Water management policy re Waterhole Creek
- DHHS complaints process
- Royal Commission into Family Violence
- Victoria Police Code of Practice for the investigation of family violence.
- Worksafe and EPA regarding Asbestos disposal
- West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority & Gippsland Water re Waterhole Creek
- Employment services for people living with a disability
- Gippsland Employment Skills Training (GEST)
- Foundation of Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) promoting funded projects

## Indicators of System Change

- Several organisations have complimented the approach to engaging with communities on the buses and suggested it has prompted them to think differently about their own approaches to engagement.
  - The EPA was one agency that sought to engage differently when it asked The Advocate to join Victoria's Chief Environmental Scientist, Dr. Andrea Hinwood at a local café where community members asked questions about environmental safety and health matters.
- Feedback from communities about access to GPs has gained momentum with local media and triggered discussion amongst local health services. One local clinic has responded by initiating recruitment of a Nurse Practitioner as well as an additional GP. Enquiries are being made about the training and accreditation requirements that result in GPs and locums relocating every 3 – 6 months and the impact this has on communities.
- Based on feedback from drivers and communities about community safety, enquiries are being made to increase the number of Multi Modal Authorised Officers (MMAOs) on Latrobe buses
- The Latrobe Health Advocate has been commissioned to Chair the Latrobe Valley Asbestos Taskforce which has generated significant Government interest and support.

### Chance to chat with health advocate

LATROBE Health Advocate Jane Anderson and Victoria's chief environmental scientist Dr Andrea Hinwood will visit Nick's Café in Manny's Market, Morwell tomorrow to chat with communities about their experiences and any health concerns they may have.

It follows the release of the Health Advocate's quarterly report, in which Ms Anderson outlines community concerns shared with her regarding the impact that environmental and industrial developments can have on the health and wellbeing of communities in Latrobe.

Ms Anderson was appointed to the new role of Latrobe Health Advocate in May last year by the Health Minister - the role was a key recommendation of the Hazelwood mine fire inquiry and followed the designation of Latrobe as Australia's first health

innovation zone, along with the formation of the Latrobe Health Assembly.

The assembly and the advocate are key structures within the health zone to empower communities to have an influence on health and wellbeing planning, promotion, priority-setting and service program and design.

Ms Anderson's role as the Health Advocate involves providing independent advice to the state government on behalf of Latrobe Valley communities on system and policy issues affecting their health and wellbeing.

She encourages people to phone her on 1800 319 255 or email [info@lhadvocate.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@lhadvocate.vic.gov.au), concerns in the Latrobe Valley.

Ms Anderson and Dr Hinwood will be in Manny's Market from 1:30 until 2:30 on Friday.





## Out and About



Early in January the Advocate joined an enthusiastic crowd at the Summer Nights Festival in Traralgon. There was a fantastic range of activities including music, market stalls and a variety of sports showcased on the day.

People shared their ideas on health and wellbeing as the Advocate walked around the stalls. They shared their stories about accessing local health services and the pressure on GP services in particular.

Events where people can come together and enjoy themselves with family and friends are being requested by the community.

In March the Advocate spent time with kids and their families at Latrobe Street Games events in Boolarra and Morwell. It's a fantastic program with a range of activities to suit different needs and interests

Children played with their friends and parents looked on, chatting with each other and enjoying the relaxed atmosphere. People spoke about the activities giving their kids a chance to meet other kids outside of school and the fact that the games were free and in their local area meant they could access them easily.

One parent said, "People are coming together and are happy".



The Advocate also spent some time with another enthusiastic group of people at Yinnar's Health and Wellness program on a Wednesday morning in March.

Funded by the Foundation of Rural and Regional Renewal this program brings upwards of 30 people together each week to enjoy the benefits of gentle physical exercise and sharing a cuppa and a biscuit.

The group's founder Glenys and qualified exercise instructor Kathleen welcome people each week to this great venue.

While the program generally caters for older people, anyone looking for a welcoming smile and gentle exercise is encouraged to come along.





In March, Latrobe communities were again faced with the danger of bushfires and Latrobe City Council set up relief centres and then once the danger had passed recovery centres for those still coming to terms with their loss.

People were welcomed and supported from the time they registered, through individual support and friendly faces offering care, refreshments and practical support.



Families with children, older community members and even pets were welcomed. Everyone will remember the glad distraction of this friendly duck and the warmth and support of the volunteers.

Another event the Advocate attended during the quarter was the inaugural We Are Latrobe, My Valley My Home festival. This festival brought people together from across Latrobe to celebrate what it means to live, work and study in Latrobe.

Among the many stalls that provided information, activities and of course food, the Advocate found Tracie Lund and Honeybell from Morwell Neighbourhood House. Honeybell is training to be the first therapy dog specifically trained to work in a Neighbourhood House.

Chatting with people at the event, the Advocate heard about the importance of approachable and accessible services, respectful relationships and employment.



Along with many other community members, the Advocate was welcomed at the Hidayah Mosque Open Day, late in March.

There were messages of welcome, peace, gratitude, support and happiness for all those who attended. There was food, smiles and families enjoying each other's company.

People shared their gratitude for living in Latrobe "where everyone is equal".

## Mental Health in Latrobe

The Advocate's Statement of Intent, which was released in September 2018, identified three key areas to prioritise for the 2018/2019 year. These areas, Alcohol and Drugs, Palliative Care and Mental Health, have featured heavily in the conversations had with people throughout the year, with mental health being the most talked about topic.

Following the announcement of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, the Advocate provided a submission to the Minister for Mental Health regarding the terms of reference for the Commission. The submission shared what had been heard from Latrobe communities and research undertaken in the office of the Advocate.

The Advocate identified the most important themes for the Commission to be:

- Prevention and early intervention
- Social isolation, depression, anxiety and trauma
- Accessibility and navigating the mental health system
- Preventing suicide
- Workforce development and retention

The Advocate encouraged Government to consider three additional themes when determining the terms of reference: a health equity model; place and community; and social determinants of mental health.

The Advocate acknowledged that many of the challenges facing the mental health system and Victorian communities will be universal in nature however consideration of place and community will enable the Royal Commission to explore the context in which people live their lives and to understand the factors effecting mental health within this context. This may highlight differences between regional and metropolitan Victoria or identify challenges and opportunities that are specific to an area such as the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone.

The Mental Health Royal Commission is an opportunity to hear the stories and aspirations of people in Latrobe and the Advocate offers a direct point of contact to Latrobe communities.



In late March, the Advocate's office prepared a submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into the effects of mental health on people's ability to participate in and prosper in the community and workplace, and the effects it has more generally on our economy and productivity.

Building on what had already been heard and the research to date, the Advocate's office developed a digital survey to inform this submission and asked four specific questions.

What are the health benefits of education and employment for people in Latrobe?

How might families, friends, neighbours and colleagues support people in Latrobe to enjoy good mental health?

Besides traditional service providers, who else might support people in Latrobe to enjoy good mental health and why?

How might workplaces, decision makers and government support people in Latrobe to enjoy good mental health?

...without employment, people struggle with boredom, health and financial issues.

Community groups – connection reduces loneliness, helps people feel valued and supported and enables individuals to share their passions skills and knowledge with others

Recognise the link between physical and mental health and know that community connectedness is a key factor in good mental health

The powerful must act on community concerns and requests. The experts are the service users, therefore it must be led by them

The responses received, along with other conversations informed the substance of the submission, which includes 12 recommendations. These recommendations reflect the complex nature of mental health and wellbeing and identify areas for change, including:

- Improve the pathways to employment for people with a multicultural background, and those experiencing disadvantage and identify what can be done to accelerate their transition into the workforce.
- Consider ways other than employment, to help local communities provide what is described by people as a 'sense of purpose' or 'reason to get out of bed'.
- Recognise the value of local communities and bring them into decision making processes. Design policies and funding models that enable organisations at all levels to be responsive to communities putting them at the centre of interventions and solutions.
- Understand more deeply the existing pressures and expectations on GPs and consider ways to boost mental health supports in the GP setting and ways to reach out to communities with GPs and mental health professionals available at times and places convenient to them.

You can see the full submission here: <https://www.lhadvocate.vic.gov.au/publications/>





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