

Statement from Latrobe Health Advocate

Jane Anderson



When COVID-19 emerged as a global, national, state, and local issue during 2020, the pandemic became an important consideration for all work at my office.

I heard from communities, industries, businesses and governments throughout the pandemic, identified issues and gaps in the local system and reported directly to the Chief Health Officer and Minister for Health on a regular basis.

My office has partnered with the Gippsland Primary Health Network to produce a COVID impact report, which includes an analysis of conversations and engagement conducted with communities across Latrobe during 2020. The report is designed to identify system gaps, consider broader opportunities for health system reform, and will form the basis of recommendations my office will provide to the Victorian Government and organisations within the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone as we move into recovery.

COVID-19 has led to significant shifts in the way services and communities utilise technology, and I have heard from Latrobe communities about the digital divide and access to data. It is time now to consider what can be done to support people to move towards a future where technology is embraced and ensure greater access to services to drive better health and wellbeing outcomes for everyone.

I also heard that people were feeling overwhelmed with loneliness during the pandemic. People who were experiencing loneliness and isolation before were feeling even more disconnected. They were separated from friendships and community services that they depend on for their health. There is considerable work being done to reduce the longer-term mental health impacts of COVID-19 on the entire community. I am looking forward to working with services in Latrobe to find the best opportunities for people to experience better mental health moving forward.

In response to COVID-19 some community groups noticed they were transforming how they worked, but many volunteer and community groups told me they found it difficult to remain connected. Service organisation and Latrobe City Council are reaching out to these groups to consider what the future might look like for community groups and what lessons can be learnt from COVID-19. I am looking forward to learning more from groups about the innovations they have developed that have kept them connected and how those innovations can be applied in other settings.

Industry and businesses across Latrobe were impacted by COVID-19. There was a need to explore the balance between health and economy, understanding the importance of preventing further inequities in communities. Protective health and wellbeing is now seen as a common goal. In line with my Statement of Intent, I see health as everyone's business. My office will continue to encourage industry and business to support the health of its workforce and communities across Latrobe.

I heard about increases in food insecurity, financial stress, and social disadvantage from people across Latrobe. Inequalities in health can lead to inequalities in other areas of life, and this was exacerbated during COVID-19. I will be working with governments and service providers to make the connection between recovery and all the social determinants of health.

I'm here to listen and to help our health system and governments understand and respond to the needs of communities in Latrobe, and I am now preparing to support and inform recovery for our region.

Yours sincerely,

Jane Anderson