



Health Promotion Strategic Plan



2025-2029



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Introduction

Our CH-HP program, as stated within the guidelines, is uniquely positioned to promote primary and secondary prevention across community-based services and settings. Its role enables breadth and depth, with a focus on targeted interventions for priority population groups, while also delivering universal interventions within our funded region.

The CH-HP program aims for sufficient reach to achieve population-level impact, while providing more support to settings and subpopulations to ensure impacts are equitable. The program's strengths are in its ability to provide flexibility to accommodate local priorities and contexts.

It is important to note that this work cannot be achieved through operating in isolation, with networks, partnerships and stakeholder engagement being key in identifying community need, strengthening local actions and advocating collectively, all contributing to better health outcomes for our community.

For the next four years, 2025-2029, the BCHS vision for our CH-HP work is:

“People living in the City of Greater Bendigo to experience the best health and wellbeing possible.”

The CH-HP program aims to:

“Achieve impact at scale and maximise best possible outcomes by strengthening efforts towards chronic disease prevention through increasing healthy eating, increasing active living, and reducing tobacco and e-cigarette related harm priority areas, and in doing so integrating climate change and health.”



Partnerships

At the core of our work, collaboration is key. BCHS works closely with a range of partners to create change at scale by coordinating efforts, listening to and being directed by community need and pooling resources.

The partnerships that the BCHS Health Promotion team work with include, but are not limited to:

Within CoGB region

- BCHS internally
- Bendigo District Aboriginal Cooperative (BDAC)
- Bendigo Health
- Bendigo FoodShare
- Centre for Excellence in Rural Sexual Health (CERSH)
- City of Greater Bendigo
- Community & Neighbourhood houses
- headspace Bendigo
- Heathcote Health
- Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit
- Sports Focus
- Thorne Harbour Health
- Womens Health Loddon Mallee
- Coliban Water

Outside CoGB region

- Achievement Program
- Cancer Council
- Oral Health Victoria
- Healthy Eating Advisory Service
- Alliance of Rural and Regional Community Health – Health Promotion Community of practice

Alliance of Rural and Regional Community Health

BCHS is a proud member of the Alliance of Rural and Regional Community Health (ARRCH). Established in 2022, the focus of ARRCH is to reduce health inequity in rural and regional Victoria by addressing the social determinants of health.

Currently led by BCHS, we are an active participant in the ARRCH Health Promotion Community of Practice (CoP). The CoP provides health promotion leaders with peer support, networking and opportunities for advocacy and collaboration with a focus on Department of Health CH-HP funded activities.

As the CoP operates at an upstream level, no funding is shared between ARRCH partner organisations. However, the CoP offers a strategic platform to advance health and wellbeing by learning together, aligning, and integrating our collective health promotion knowledge and actions to achieve population and systems level change.



BCHS Health Priority Areas

Increase Healthy Eating

Increase Active Living

**Reduce tobacco and
e-cigarette harm**

Improve Wellbeing

**Tackle climate change
and its impacts on health**

**Improve Sexual and
Reproductive Health**

**Preventing all forms
of violence**



Increase Healthy Eating

Evidence and rationale

Dietary behaviours play a large role in risk factors for chronic health conditions, mental health and overall wellbeing. Specific types of food such as those high in saturated fats, sugar and refined grains and oils have links to increased risk for chronic disease (Springmann., Mozaffarian, Rosenzweig & Micha, 2021).

The link between the food we eat, our oral health and overall wellbeing are pivotal in health outcomes and can lead to a cycle of negative interrelated health conditions. It is recognised that animal-based foods have greater environmental impacts than plant-based foods, such as greenhouse gas emissions, water footprint and resource requirements (Global Nutrition Report, 2021). However, there are many factors that affect an individual's eating habits, including physical, economic, cultural and social factors. This can include growing barriers such as food insecurity which can also negatively impact physical, mental, and social health of adults and children (AIFS, 2020).

Food insecurity has been rising alongside rising living costs. In the Greater Bendigo region, 1 in 10 households are food insecure, with the most recent food insecurity rate in CoGB at 9.6% of the population (CoGB, 2019). Within the CoGB, 10.6% of people ran out of money to buy food in the last 12 months (DHSV, 2024) and 30.6% of adults were worried about running out of money to buy food (VAHI, 2023).

Within the CoGB, only 21.8% of male and 23.8% of female children met vegetable intake guidelines, declining moving into adolescence, further into adulthood. (VAHI, 2023). Additionally, 31.9% of children aged 3-5 and 41.5% of children aged 6 experienced at least one decayed, missing or filled primary or permanent teeth (DHSV, 2024).



Actions to improve healthy eating

Goal: People living in the City of Greater Bendigo to experience the best health and wellbeing possible

Objectives:

- Increasing access, availability and consumption of a wide variety of nutritious foods such as fruit and vegetables
- Prioritise implementation of statewide programs and policies that promote the uptake of healthy foods and drinks in key public settings such as schools and early childhood services
- Advocating to reduce children's exposure to marketing of discretionary foods and drinks to reduce consumption
- Promote healthy and more equitable sustainable food systems across CoGB through collaboration and partnership
- Increase access to and consumption of affordable and nutritious food for populations at greatest risk of food insecurity

Programs:

- Smiles4Miles
- Vic Kids Eat Well (VKEW)
- Food Security Project
- Greater Bendigo Catering Guide
- FoodShare Cooking for Change Program
- Elmore Community Garden Project
- McKern Foundation's Fresh Fruit program
- Greater Bendigo Healthy Sports Rewards (supporting City of Greater Bendigo)
- Healthy Eating for Karen and Afghan communities

Settings

- ECS
- Primary and secondary schools
- Outside of school hours care (OSHC)
- Workplaces
- Sporting clubs
- Health providers and health services
- Community organisations
- Neighbourhood houses.





Increase Active Living

Evidence and rationale

Physical inactivity is a major modifiable risk factor for lifelong health and wellbeing. Within the CoGB, there are higher rates of obesity and chronic disease than the Victorian average (CoGB, 2021). Adequate physical activity prevents weight gain, promotes weight loss (in conjunction with a low-calorie diet) and in the elderly promotes cognitive function and reduces falls. Inadequate physical activity increases the risk of heart disease, diabetes, cancers, osteoporosis, polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), depression, anxiety, obesity and many other conditions. ([Women's Health Victoria, 2025](#)).

Population physical activity is influenced by determinants across multiple levels, from individual and interpersonal to organisational, environmental and policy. The promotion of physical activity at a community level have seen greatest success when addressing multilevel influences using mixes of coordinated approaches. Program design based in systems thinking enable identification of the barriers, assets and influences specific to the community at the centre of the program and facilitate coordinated action and partnerships between agencies to modify them (APPC, 2021).

Actions to improve active living

Goal: People living in the City of Greater Bendigo to experience the best health and wellbeing possible

Objectives:

- Promote movement and reduce sitting time in workplaces, schools, at home and during leisure time.
- Increase participation in sport and active recreation, with a focus on CoGB residents who face barriers to participation

Programs:

- Walking Groups
- Fit and Fun
- Active schools
- Free and Fee physical activity resource
- Physical activity for the Afghan and Karen community focusing on those at risk of or with Type 2 diabetes.
- Support the use of Public Transport with Karen and Dari community

Settings

- Primary and secondary schools,
- Community groups,
- Workplaces,
- Community organisations
- Neighbourhood centres
- Health providers and health services.



Reduce tobacco and e-cigarette harm

Evidence and rationale

It is estimated that 17.0% of Victorian adults currently smoke tobacco and 6% currently vape in the CoGB (Andersson et al., 2024). Additionally, data from the 2019 Active Living Census identified both male and female residents aged 35 - 49 and males aged 18 - 34 had the highest rates of smoking in this population (CoGB, 2019a). Evidence shows that tobacco industry is constantly adapting and growing to promote tobacco use (World Health Organisation, 2025). Tobacco use is one of the leading causes of preventable death worldwide and impacts many individual determinants, including employment, family, social health, income and cost of living and quality of life (World Health Organisation, 2025).

Vaping or e-cigarette use however, is a growing public health concern at a global, national, state and local level and has been a focus in recent health promotion and public health efforts, including the CH-HP guidelines, one of our key 70% funded priority areas (Gardner et al., 2022).

Actions to improve reducing tobacco and e-cigarette harm

Goal: People living in the City of Greater Bendigo to experience the best health and wellbeing possible

Objectives:

- Reduce the number of environments in which a person can smoke and vape.
- Prevent the uptake and reduce the harms associated with smoking and vaping.

Programs:

- Internal reducing tobacco & e-cigarette related harm project
- Prevention of vaping program
- Community Awareness and collaboration (Tobacco & E-cigarette Related Harm)
- Vaping and Tobacco cessation, reduction for the Karen community



Settings

- Primary schools,
- Workplaces,
- Health providers and health services,
- Community organisations
- Neighbourhood centres.

Actions across all 3 priority areas

Goal: People living in the City of Greater Bendigo to experience the best health and wellbeing possible

Objectives:

- Prioritise implementation of statewide programs and policies that promote the uptake of healthy foods and drinks in key public settings such as schools and early childhood services.
- Advocating to reduce children's exposure to marketing of discretionary foods and drinks to reduce consumption.
- Promote movement and reduce sitting time in workplaces, schools, at home and during leisure time.
- Prevent the uptake and reduce the harms associated with smoking and vaping.
- Increase social inclusion and community connection.
- Share successes and promote good practice examples of climate action.

Programs:

- Community Education (healthy eating, physical activity, smoking and vaping, sexual health, mental health, and climate health)
- Community Events
- Achievement Program (ECS and schools)
- Statewide social marketing campaigns and statewide projects communications
- Networks, Community of Practices, Stakeholders and Partnerships
- Strengthening Workforce Capacity

Settings

- Early childhood services,
- Primary and secondary schools,
- Workplaces,
- Community organisations
- Neighbourhood centres.



"We have had overwhelmingly positive feedback from staff and students about your Prevention of Vaping presentation. The teachers would love to run it annually and were really impressed by the level of participation from our students."

Epsom Primary School



Improve Wellbeing

Evidence and rationale

Currently in Australia, data shows that mental health is a concern for all age groups. However, there is a gap in recent data especially for children and young people across local, state and national levels. Nationally, 1 in 3 young people reported high/very high levels of distress (34%) (Headspace, 2020) and 40.3% of adults saw a professional for their mental health (ABS, 2023). Across the state, 13.7% of children aged 1 to 12 had emotional, developmental or behavioural problems (Department of Education, 2024).

An average of 34.3% of adults indicated they had anxiety and/or depression, noting this was significantly higher among women 42.3% vs men 25.6%). In addition, 23.3% of adults indicated that they were lonely (VAHI, 2023). Locally, a 2019 Yo Bendigo report identified that young people in Greater Bendigo are more concerned about mental health as an issue in Bendigo than young people are at a national level. For adults, 36.1% of people (aged 18-80+) in Greater Bendigo indicated they have anxiety and/or depression, with women being higher (40.8%) in comparison to men (30.9%) (VAHI, 2023). Local loneliness data demonstrate 21.5% of people (18-80+) were lonely with loneliness being slightly higher in women (22%) than men (21.4%) (VAHI, 2023).

There is strong evidence to show that scaling up high quality interventions which target parents and the early years, alongside skill-based social and emotional learning within primary learning environments can enable young people to develop social and emotional skills that are critical for life. There is also evidence to show that integrating frameworks such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) are effective in reducing anxiety and depression symptoms (Monash, 2020). Additionally, we can seek to integrate these approaches within the sector to create more supportive environments (Barry, M., Kuosmanen, T., Keppler, T., Dowling K. & Harte, P. 2023).

While targeting interventions towards the early years of life plays a crucial role in providing a strong foundation for developing positive mental wellbeing, while also picking up on early signs of mental health conditions, it is important to note that a singular approach is not enough when it comes to prevention of ill-mental health. Rather utilising a multi-modal approach integrating development of personal skills, creating supportive environments and community action, and support from government to build up public policy which target the social determinants of health is key, focusing on the entire lifespan (Carbone, S. 2020; Singh, V., Kumar, A. & Gupta, S. 2022; Barry, M., Kuosmanen, T., Keppler, T., Dowling K. & Harte, P. 2023).

Actions to improve wellbeing

Goal: People living in the City of Greater Bendigo to experience the best health and wellbeing possible

Objectives:

- CoGB school students have good mental health
- CoGB community act to protect and promote health

Programs:

- 5 Ways to Wellbeing
- FRIENDS resiliency

Settings

- Primary and secondary schools,
- Workplaces,
- Community organisations,
- Neighbourhood centres
- Health services



How have you been doing the 5?

Share your photos & tag us on:
Facebook @ Bendigo Community Health Services
Instagram @ BendigoCommunityHealth





Tackling climate change & its impacts on health

Evidence and rationale

It is imperative that all actors in health systems, including policymakers and health workers, collaborate with other sectors on addressing the determinants of health. Enabling access and availability of services to underserved groups who often live in vulnerable settings and face inequities that pose barriers to their ability to cope with the risks and impacts of a changing climate (Xu et al., 2023). It has been demonstrated that climate health poses a heightened risk of premature birth, respiratory disease, mortality and morbidity among children worldwide (Weeda et al., 2024). Young people are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change as many do not have well-developed emotional regulation skills and coping mechanisms when faced with stress induced by climate disasters (Wall & Eapen, 2025).

Climate change is having direct and indirect impacts on the community, especially vulnerable groups. Older adults, children, people with a disability, and low SES individuals face a higher risk of experiencing asthma, heat stress, cardiovascular disease, food insecurity, and mental distress from extreme weather events. As a local community health service that is recognised and trusted within the CoGB region, we have the opportunity to collaborate with other local organisations and health services to address the social, political and cultural determinants of vulnerable communities to help improve health equity.

Actions to tackle climate change and its impacts on health

Goal: People living in the City of Greater Bendigo to experience the best health and wellbeing possible

Objectives:

- Accelerate action to support communities to adapt to climate change and its impacts on health.
- Share successes and promote good practice examples of climate action.

Programs:

- Achievement Program (co-benefits)
- Community Education
- Tackling impact of climate change (targeting the refugee community)

Settings

- Primary and secondary schools,
- Community organisations and neighbourhood centres
- Health providers and health services



Improving sexual and reproductive health

Evidence and rationale

Within Greater Bendigo, the rate for Chlamydia infections is 17.86 for females and 12.43 for males, per 10,000 people in Greater Bendigo. Particularly for females, the rate is higher than the state, which is 14.8 per 10,000 (Women's Health Atlas, 2024). Data also demonstrated an approximate 55% increase in chlamydia notifications among females, per 10,000 people, from 2021-2023 (Department of Health, 2024)). In addition, rates of Hepatitis C are higher in CoGB than rest of Victoria, with 2024 seeing Bendigo 26.8 per 100,000 and Victoria 19.5 per 100,000 (LMPHU, 2025)

Rates of medical abortion have been rising in Greater Bendigo, with 5.9 patients per 1,000 in 2023, an increase from 3.9 from 2019 (Women's Health Atlas, 2025). From 2017-2021, the number of abortion services by prescriber and pharmacy location was 3.5 times higher in Greater Bendigo than the Loddon Mallee average (CERSH SWAP, 2023). Lastly, adolescent birth rates in Greater Bendigo are higher than the Loddon Mallee and Victoria state average (CERSH SWAP, 2023).

Actions to improve sexual and reproductive health

Goal: People living in the City of Greater Bendigo to experience the best health and wellbeing possible

Objectives:

- Support CoGB residents to achieve optimal sexual and reproductive health and reduce the transmission and impact of BBV and STI.



Programs:

- Condom Campaign
- Introduction to puberty
- Sexual Health Education
- CERSH's STI-X machine pilot (CERSH Lead - BCHS Support)

Settings

- Primary and secondary schools,
- Community organisations and neighbourhood centres
- Health providers and health services



Preventing all forms of violence

Evidence and rationale

“People who experience violence are affected in all areas of their health and wellbeing, including poorer physical, sexual and reproductive health outcomes, reduced mental wellbeing and sometimes loss of life.” (DoH, 2023). In Greater Bendigo, high rates of family violence incidents and violence against women are the leading cause of ill-health, disability and premature death for women aged 15 to 44 years (CoGB, 2019b).

Explicitly teaching young people about relationships supports the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable them to enjoy healthy and respectful relationships throughout their lives (OurWatch, n.d.). Research has shown school-based education on sexuality and relationships is one of young Australian’s most trusted sources of information (Ezer, et al, 2019). “Primary prevention could be considered the missing part of the jigsaw for community health to fully embrace its principles of working within the social model of health by working across the whole spectrum of prevention” (VicHealth, 2016).

Actions to prevent all forms of violence

Goal: People living in the City of Greater Bendigo to experience the best health and wellbeing possible

Objectives:

- Embed targeted setting approach to preventing family, sexual and gendered violence to ensure CoGB youth and future adults are treated equally with respect and dignity.

Programs:

- LOVE BiTES
- Consent presentations

Settings

- Secondary Schools

Our vision: Better health and wellbeing across generations.

Our purpose: Supporting you and your family to live healthy lives.

Values:



Lived and Living Experience

We value our communities, their backstories, lived and living experiences and cultures and learn from them to tailor our services.



Equity

We provide equitable and inclusive health and wellbeing services, ensuring they are culturally responsive and accessible.



People

We maintain a skilled, engaged and professional workforce, including people with lived experience, and enable a culture of continuous learning.



Integrity

We uphold the values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and approach all we do with kindness and respect. We are ethical in all we do.



Partnership

We listen and learn - and share our knowledge and expertise in collaboration and co-design with our community, ensuring we are providing local solutions to community need.

Acknowledgement of Country

Bendigo Community Health Services acknowledge we live, work and enjoy Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung Country. We extend our appreciation to the Djaara and Taungurung peoples. We pay respect to Elders past and present for their continued holding of memories, traditions, culture and community aspirations. We recognise sovereignty has never been ceded and express our sorrow for the personal, spiritual and cultural costs of colonisation and their lasting impact. May we walk forward together in harmony and the spirit of healing. It was and always will be Aboriginal land.



We support people to develop and maintain their personal, gender, sexual, cultural, religious and spiritual identity.