



# Health Promotion Strategic Statement 2021-2025



**Merri Health**  
Healthcare that moves with you

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*Aunty Di Kerr welcomes Merri Health staff to Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Country, 2018*

## Acknowledgement

Merri Health acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional owners and custodians of the land, water and skies where we work. For the Moreland local government area, this is the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation.

We acknowledge and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

We also recognise our role in working towards reconciliation; to listen to and be led by the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to honour truth-telling so we can learn from the wrongdoings of the past, and to do the heavy lifting to lead change.

# Health promotion at Merri Health

Merri Health creates healthy, connected communities through local health services for people at every age and stage of life.

We know that at different times, health needs change. That's why we support people throughout life, with a range of wraparound services available all through the one local network.

Our approach addresses the medical, social, environmental and economic aspects that affect health, with services spanning across:

- children and families
- young people
- carer support
- management of chronic conditions
- dental
- mental health
- disability services
- health and wellness
- aged care.

We've been the trusted health service of local communities for more than 40 years.

As a not-for-profit organisation, our focus is on partnering with people, responding to local needs, and strengthening the health of entire communities.

In late 2020, Merri Health commenced a strategic planning process for the next four years of health promotion action, including evidence reviews and community and stakeholder engagement. This strategic statement reflects the outcomes of this planning process.

Merri Health is funded by the Department of Health through *Community Health – Health Promotion* to deliver health promotion initiatives primarily within the Moreland local government area. Currently, the guidelines for this funding are under review, with new directions expected in 2022.

Health promotion initiatives at Merri Health are delivered by the Community Wellbeing team. The team comprises health promotion and community engagement professionals. In 2021, approximately 6.55 FTE staffing was funded through the Department of Health, with additional 1.95 FTE funded through other grants.

# About Moreland

The Moreland local government area is located in Melbourne's inner northern suburbs, approximately 4-14 kilometres from the Melbourne CBD. The estimated resident population for 2020 is 188,762<sup>1</sup>.

The traditional owners and custodians of Moreland are the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people.

Although much of Moreland's demographic profile at the LGA-level reflect greater Melbourne more broadly, a closer look at Moreland's northern and southern suburbs shows key differences.

Compared to their southern neighbours, residents in Moreland's north are more likely to:

- have been born overseas
- speak a language other than English at home
- be aged over 70 or under 18
- experience socioeconomic disadvantage
- not be in the labour force
- have a religion
- need assistance with core activities
- be developmentally vulnerable in early childhood

Please see an overview of selected demographic data<sup>2</sup> for the suburbs of Fawkner and Glenroy in Moreland's north, compared to Moreland and greater Melbourne or Victorian averages.

	Fawkner	Glenroy	Moreland	Greater Melbourne
Born overseas (%)	47.4	43.1	33.9	33.8
Speaks a language other than English at home (%)	63.2	51.7	38.1	32.3
Aged 70+ years (%)	14.3	12.7	10.5	9.7
Aged under 18 years (%)	24.6	20.2	18.4	21.6
SEIFA	915.6 12 <sup>th</sup> percentile	948.7 21 <sup>st</sup> percentile	1,014.0 53 <sup>rd</sup> percentile	1,021.0 57 <sup>th</sup> percentile
Not in labour force (%)	43.8	37.3	30.6	32.2
No religion (%)	10.3	17.3	31.9	31.3
Need assistance with core activities	9.2	8.0	6.2	4.9
Experiences developmental vulnerability upon starting school (%) <sup>3</sup>	25.5	32.2	20.0	19.9*

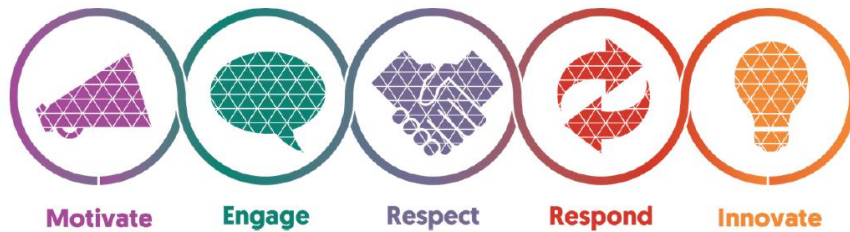
\* Please note, this reflects the Victorian average as data was not available for greater Melbourne.



Strategic statement

# Values and principles

Merri Health's organisational values underpin this strategy. To operationalise these values, we developed a series of principles to guide our health promotion practice.



We are aspirational and a leader in our field.

We collaborate and partner with communities and stakeholders.

We focus on equity and social determinants. We apply a gender lens across our work.

We are evidence-driven and adaptive.

We are creative and continually learn.

## Understanding wellbeing

As part of our efforts towards reconciliation, Merri Health seeks to understand and apply Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems to guide our health promotion action. We acknowledge the considerable efforts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners who have generously shared culturally-informed models and interpretations of wellbeing.

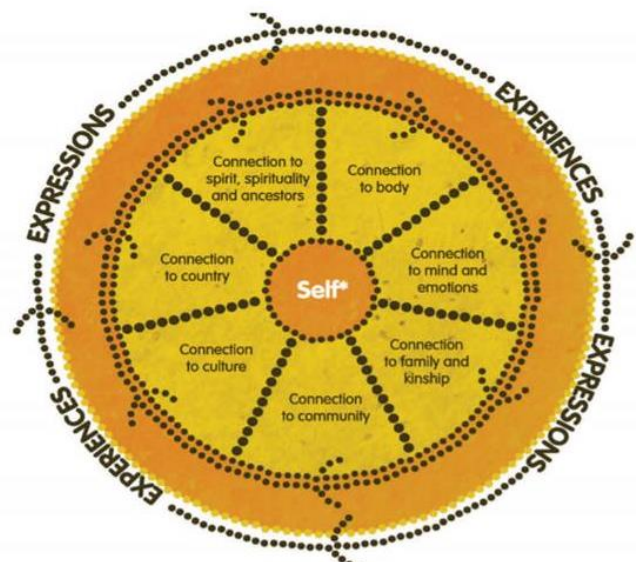
In particular, we draw on the diagram below which illustrates some of the domains of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing – namely social and emotional wellbeing – developed by Gee, Dudgeon, Schultz, Hart and Kelly<sup>4</sup>. The illustration frames individual, family and community wellbeing in the context of the term 'connection'.

It describes how connections shape our sense of self, our experiences and expressions, and our wellbeing. This includes connection to:

- body
- mind and emotions
- family and kinship
- community
- culture
- Country
- spirit, spirituality and ancestors

Gee, Dudgeon, Schultz, Hart and Kelly also acknowledge the role of social, cultural, political and historical determinants in strengthening or disrupting connections.

This holistic definition of wellbeing informs our approaches within this strategy.



© Gee, Dudgeon, Schultz, Hart and Kelly, 2013  
Artist: Tristan Schultz, RelativeCreative.

# Community vision

*Moreland is our home.*

*We respect and look after our land, air, waterways and animals.*

*We care for our people and celebrate our diverse stories, cultures, and identities.*

*Moreland is enhanced by all of us supporting our local businesses, arts communities and social organisations.*

*We work together proactively and transparently to continue to create a vibrant, safe, healthy, resilient, innovative, and regenerative community.*

*Many faces, one Moreland.*

We would like to acknowledge the Imagine Moreland Community Panel<sup>5</sup>, who developed the above community vision for the Moreland Council Plan 2021-2025. We would also like to extend our gratitude for their permission to adopt the vision for this strategy.

## Priorities

Merri Health has identified two priorities of focus from the Victorian Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019-2023 for the Moreland local government area:

1. Improving mental wellbeing
2. Preventing all forms of violence

We also recognise the interrelationship between mental wellbeing and violence, and see this as an opportunity to implement interventions with mutually reinforcing outcomes.

Recent years have again shown that we cannot always predict the challenges our community will face. It has also shown the strength and flexibility of the sector to respond to emerging issues, and the importance of being able to be responsive to community need. Merri Health will respond to emerging priorities over the four year period, as they arise.

We also acknowledge the guidelines for Health Promotion – Community Health funding are currently under review, however, at the time of drafting this document remained unfinalised. We will actively engage with the review process until final guidelines are received (anticipated 2022).

Below, we have set out key information that relates to the two priorities of focus for the Moreland local government area.



# Mental wellbeing

## Priority communities

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, particularly young people
- LGBTIQ+ communities
- Older people <sup>6</sup>
- People living with a disability
- People from refugee backgrounds <sup>7</sup>
- Culturally diverse and newly arrived communities <sup>7</sup>
- Young people <sup>8</sup>
- Children in out of home care <sup>7</sup>
- Women and men, experienced differently <sup>7</sup>

## Definition

*Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to their community.*

World Health Organization

## Key social determinants <sup>9</sup>

- Social inclusion
- Freedom from violence and discrimination
- Economic participation or income security
- Social connections, social isolation, social support <sup>10</sup>
- Experiences and development in early childhood <sup>11</sup>

## Mental wellbeing in Moreland

*“Over one quarter (27.4%) of adults are diagnosed with anxiety or depression in Moreland. Although it is equal to the proportion overall in Victoria, it nonetheless makes anxiety or depression the leading diagnosed chronic disease in Moreland.”*

Moreland Health and Wellbeing Profile 2020

### Subjective wellbeing

- Average subjective wellbeing is 76.1 out of 100 (inner metro region 77.4)
- People aged 75 and over: 71.0 out of 100 (inner metro region: 80.8)
- Also lower levels for:
  - > Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
  - > LGBTIQ+ adults
  - > people with disability

### Climate change

- Increased reports of climate-related anxiety, particularly for young people

### Resilience

- Average level of resilience is 6.3 out of a total possible of 8 (inner metro region: 6.5)
- Lower resilience score for people with a disability

### Help-seeking behaviours

- 20.9% of adults sought professional help for a mental health problem in the previous year, (Victorian: 17.6%)

### COVID

- 80% of Aboriginal Victorians reported high levels of psychological distress during COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020 (all Victorians: 44%)
- Women reported experiencing worse mental health than men

*Unless referenced otherwise, the above information was informed by the Moreland Health and Wellbeing Profile 2020 <sup>12</sup>*

# Violence

## Priority communities

- Women, particularly young women
- Children
- Older people
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- People with a disability
- People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- LGBTIQ+ communities, particularly young people
- Men (violence by a stranger)
- People from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas

## Definition

*The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.*

World Health Organization

## Key social determinants

- Social inequality, including patriarchy / gender inequality, colonisation, dispossession, racism, heteronormativity, cisnormativity, ageism, ableism, poverty (economic inequality)<sup>13</sup>
- Tolerance of violence, eg. social/peer relations, media
- Gendered drivers of violence against women<sup>14</sup>

# Violence in Moreland

## Perceptions of safety

- In 2018, 92% of people felt safe in their area during the day, and 72% of people felt safe in their area during the night
- 26% of women felt 'very safe' or 'safe' when walking alone in the local area at night (men: 68%)

## Gender equality

- One third (32.7%) of Moreland residents have a low gender equality score, which is consistent with the low gender equality score for the Inner Metro Region (32.1%)
- A higher proportion of male residents (39.3%) have a low gender equality score than female residents (26.4%)

## Racism

- There is an absence of reliable data quantifying experiences of racism in Moreland

## Family violence

- 1,977 reported incidents of family violence in 2019
- 1,064 incidents per 100,000 population (greater Melbourne: 926; north west metro region: 1,109)
- Mostly female family members and their children are affected (71% in 2019), often related to violence by current or former intimate partners

## Crime

- 11,058 criminal incidents in 2020 (+0.6% since 2019)
- 5,860 criminal incidents per 100,000 population (north west metro region: 6,688)

## COVID

- Experiences of racism increased three-fold during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020)
- Family violence services report increased incidences of violence in the home

*Unless referenced otherwise, the above information was informed by the Moreland Health and Wellbeing Profile 2020<sup>15</sup>*

# Policy context

This strategy aligns with local and state government policies, strategies and frameworks.

## Moreland Council Plan

Merri Health has worked in collaboration with Moreland City Council to identify alignment with the Moreland Council Plan 2021-2025; a four-year strategic plan that describes the priority issues, objectives and actions for Moreland until 2025. The Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan is integrated with the Council Plan.

A community vision was developed by a panel of Moreland residents to inform the Moreland Council Plan 2021-2025<sup>5</sup>. With their permission, we have adopted this vision to guide our work.

### Strategic objective:

- To support Moreland to become a more inclusive, connected, healthy and caring community through providing equitable access to community facilities and services and facilitating local partnerships and programs

### Strategies:

- Enhance social cohesion by developing opportunities for cultural and social connection and addressing the physical, cultural, financial system barriers to access, inclusion and participation by all people including measures to address racism
- Support programs and specify measures to prevent family violence and respond to the needs of victims of family violence in the local community

## Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan

### Mental health goals:

- A reduction in the prevalence of mental illness, and increased resilience among Victorian individuals, families and communities
- Reductions in the gap in social and emotional wellbeing for at risk groups, including Aboriginal Victorians, with an emphasis on loneliness and increasing social connectedness
- Reductions in the occurrence of suicide deaths, suicidal ideation and suicidal attempt, and the gap between the suicide rates for vulnerable groups and the general population

### Violence goals:

- Women, men, girls and boys are treated equally with respect and dignity
- All parts of the community are engaged in practical and creative ways to learn about respectful, safe and equitable relationships
- Women and children are resourced, supported and empowered to make decisions regarding their safety and wellbeing
- All Victorians feel safe and empowered to take a stand against family violence

# Priority communities

Based on local data, evidence reviews and the local and state policy context, Merri Health has identified the following priority communities in Moreland:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- LGBTIQ+ communities
- Older people
- People living with a disability
- Multicultural communities, including people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and newly-arrived communities
- Children and young people
- People experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage

The above communities were identified as more likely to experience negative health outcomes related to mental wellbeing and violence. Some communities were also prioritised due to their relative size as a proportion of the Moreland population, for example people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

We have also identified the need to apply a gender lens to our initiatives, to understand the ways in which gender influences experiences of mental wellbeing and violence.

Evidence shows us that:

- women – particularly those from the communities identified above – are more likely to experience some types of violence, particularly intimate partner violence and sexual abuse
- women's increased experiences of violence significantly impact mental health
- women are more likely to be diagnosed with particular mental illnesses
- women have increased risk to their mental health during pregnancy and following childbirth
- men are more likely to perpetrate violence, against women, men, people who are non-binary or gender diverse
- men are more likely to experience violence from a stranger
- men are also less likely to seek treatment or support for mental health concerns, and are more likely die from suicide





*Photo by [Stewart Munro](#), [Unsplash](#)*

## Social determinants

Aligning with our values as a community health service and best-practice, Merri Health has a long history of applying a social determinants approach and equity lens to its health promotion action.

Informed by evidence of the key determinants of mental wellbeing and violence, and the experiences of priority communities identified above, we have chosen the determinants of discrimination, violence and exclusion as areas of focus for this strategy.

We also recognise the contribution of the above determinants towards other health and wellbeing priorities under the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, including the focus areas of increasing healthy eating, increasing active living, reducing tobacco-related harm and tackling climate change.

Merri Health has developed a theory of change, illustrating the link and logic between actions taken to address the social determinants and our chosen Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing priorities. The theory of change is included as an attachment to annual action plans.

# Places and settings

Merri Health recognises the value of place-based and settings-based approaches within this strategy.

The following places and settings have been prioritised:

- northern Moreland, particularly the suburbs of Fawkner, Glenroy and Hadfield
- schools
- early years services
- sporting clubs
- Merri Health, as a workplace and health service

# Partners

Moreland residents are our primary partners for initiatives, particularly community members from identified priority communities.

Merri Health will also continue its commitment to collaboration with local and regional partners, including:

- Moreland City Council
- schools
- early years settings, for example kindergartens and childcare services
- sporting clubs
- neighbourhood houses
- Inner North West Primary Care Partnership (and Public Health Units, once integrated)
- Women's Health in the North
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations

We will also actively participate in local, regional and internal networks and committees.

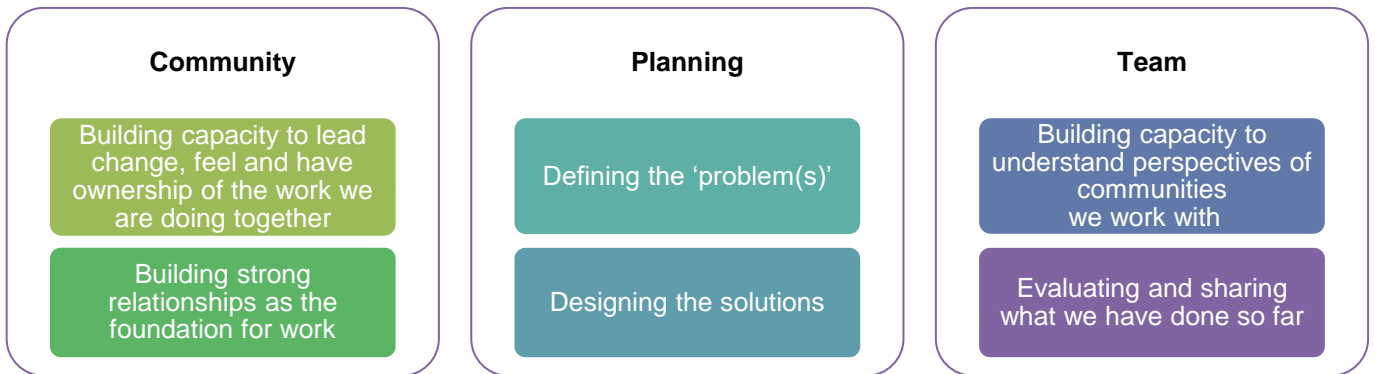


# Community engagement

Meaningful community engagement is central to this strategy.

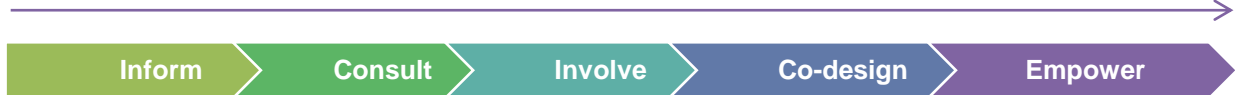
Community engagement puts community in the driver's seat and creates a sense of ownership and empowerment. This occurs through community involvement in a spectrum of activities, from information sharing to decision-making.

At Merri Health, we know that community engagement is a key method to inform and improve the quality and efficacy of different aspects of our work. Effective community engagement should realise impacts for community, our planning processes, and our team, including:



Informed by the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum<sup>16</sup>, Merri Health uses different approaches to community engagement that reflect the initiative, its aims, the community, timeframes and resources.

Increasing community impact on the decision →



	Inform	Consult	Involve	Co-design	Empower
<b>When to use</b>	We need to tell people about something. We are not seeking feedback.	We want to gather new ideas or are seeking feedback.	We need in-depth discussion about an issue. We seek input and influence on a decision.	We want to develop a solution in partnership with people.	We want to empower people to generate a solution and manage the process.
<b>What it might include</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>E-newsletters</li> <li>Social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber)</li> <li>Campaigns</li> <li>Translations</li> <li>Flyers/QR codes</li> <li>Sharing project/evaluation outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews</li> <li>Surveys</li> <li>Meetings with existing groups</li> <li>Data 'sense-making'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community Forums</li> <li>Support group</li> <li>Working group</li> <li>Most Significant Change</li> <li>Community advisory groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community champions</li> <li>Participatory evaluation</li> <li>Community steering groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community-led projects</li> <li>Community steering groups</li> <li>Community champions</li> <li>Deliberative engagement</li> </ul>

Merri Health's community engagement activities will also be evaluated as part of the broader strategy, with findings shared with community and stakeholders.

# Goals

Our strategic goals align with the domains of the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Outcomes Framework. Ultimately, our goals are:

1. Moreland residents have good mental health
2. Moreland residents live free from abuse and violence, including discrimination and disrespect
3. Moreland residents have the access and capacity to participate in community life, learning and essential services
4. Moreland residents are connected to others, community, Country, culture, identity, information and services
5. Moreland is an inclusive community



# Objectives

In order to achieve these goals, the key objectives for this strategy are to:

1. Increase capacity for leadership, social and civic participation
2. Increase social connections within and between communities
3. Increase understanding and celebration of diverse communities in Moreland
4. Increase capacity to act against disrespect, discrimination, violence and exclusion
5. Increase quality and inclusiveness of local settings
6. Increase access to and participation in health, community, education and early years services, and social activities

More detailed objectives and targets are included in Merri Health's annual action plans.



# Strategies

## Community leadership and empowerment

Initiatives that empower community to lead action, or develop leadership capacity, are a critical strategy for health promotion action.

Effective empowerment strategies can lead to a greater sense of community ownership, control and agency. It can also enable community members to develop personal leadership skills relevant for social, education, economic and civic participation. Community-led action also enables more effective and meaningful engagement of 'hardly reached' communities.

Merri Health will use the following key strategies to strengthen community action and develop personal skills:

- resourcing and supporting community-led action
- steering groups with decision-making power
- community champions

## Organisational development and systems change

Local organisations – and the people in them – are essential partners for health promotion action.

We work with local settings so they have the knowledge, skills and confidence to change their practices to be health promoting and better respond to community need. As a local health service and large employer, we must also lead by example. Beyond changes made within individual settings, we will also strengthen partnership action that builds better local systems for all.

Merri Health will use the following key strategies to empower change within local settings and systems:

- capacity building and training for staff from schools, early years services and Merri Health
- communities of practice for staff from local settings
- shared measurement and monitoring that promotes collaborative reflection and quality improvement

## Targeted interventions

Merri Health also delivers targeted interventions in partnership with community members and local services to address an identified community need.

Often delivered through peer-based group programs, examples of these strategies include:

- peer support to strengthen social connections
- awareness-raising about services or supports available, for example: mental health, children's health services, COVID-19
- building knowledge and skills that support health needs, for example: mental health self-care, early childhood development, English literacy

## Healthy public policy

Without supportive public policy that put community need first, sustainable change is not possible. Although we have limited direct influence over policy change, Merri Health aims to ensure community voices are heard or represented in the policy process.

Key strategies include:

- advocacy submissions to local and state government, representing community voices
- advocating to and supporting government representatives to engage directly with community

## Communications

Communications are an important mechanism to support health promotion action. Merri Health uses a range of communications mechanisms to:

- promote our programs/services
- raise awareness about local opportunities, services or supports
- provide a platform for community voices to be shared with the broader community

Communication channels include: social media, eg. WhatsApp and e-newsletters

# Evaluation

Merri Health will develop a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework for work implemented under this strategy, in line with its theory of change.

This theory of change aims to illustrate the link and logic between activities delivered by Merri Health and our chosen Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing priorities. The theory of change is included as an attachment to annual action plans.

We will also work with local and regional partners to identify and monitor shared measures.

Key measures include:

- Social connections
- Knowledge about cultures/communities different to their own
- Opportunities to celebrate culture
- Positive attitudes towards diversity
- Feelings of connection
- Participation in community activities
- Leadership skills
- Capacity to take community action
- Knowledge, skills and confidence to prevent, reject or respond to disrespect, discrimination, violence or exclusion
- Changes made within settings to reduce discrimination and improve inclusiveness
- Partnerships for collaborative health promotion action



A global health context

# Climate change

Although not identified as a priority of focus for this strategy, Merri Health recognises climate change as a global threat to the health of our community. We also acknowledge that we can play a role in addressing climate change and mitigating its effects on the communities we partner with.

Existing evidence shows that action on climate change has co-benefits for mental wellbeing, violence and other health priorities. Given this, we have committed to applying a climate change lens to project planning.

Below are some examples of actions that could be integrated with Merri Health's planned health promotion initiatives:

- engage with and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems to inform priority-setting and ways of working
- foster community connections with Country and nature
- recognise Country and nature as an essential setting for health, and address access barriers for priority communities
- better understand and value the impact of ecological health on priority communities in Moreland
- support community-led action that addresses ecological health
- minimise our contribution to climate change

# COVID-19

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the community are significant and ongoing.

Through community engagement in late 2020, community members identified the substantial impact that COVID-19 and associated restrictions had on them, their families and the broader community.

Merri Health is committed to continuing its support to priority communities during the pandemic, and towards recovery. The needs identified by community have also informed the selection of strategies and initiatives to be implemented under this strategy.

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