



Macedon Ranges Health Health Promotion Strategic Plan 2025 – 2028

**Macedon
Ranges
Health**
supported by **benetas**

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Acknowledgement of Country

Macedon Ranges Health acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live and work, the Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung and Wurundjeri Peoples of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

1. Health Promotion at Macedon Ranges Health (supported by Benetas)

Macedon Ranges Health is an award winning, community based not-for-profit organisation dedicated to the provision of health, community, welfare and aged care services to the communities of Macedon Ranges Shire and surrounding districts.

We offer a wide range of services for the local community and work with a range of partners to deliver high quality health services at Macedon Ranges Health locations. We have over 60 years of experience supporting clients across the Macedon Ranges region.

Our Health Care Services include:

- Allied Health: Physiotherapy, Podiatry, Counselling, Dietetics, Diabetes Education, Exercise Physiologist, Occupational Therapy
- District Nursing (Public & Private)
- Home Care Services
- Respite (In home and residential)
- Social Support Program
- Health & Physical Activity Classes
- Residential Aged Care:
- Independent Living Units
- Op Shop
- Men's Shed
- Volunteering

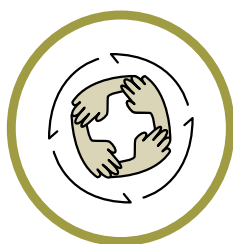
In 2018, Macedon Ranges Health officially amalgamated with leading aged care provider Benetas. Benetas has almost 70 years' experience in providing Victorians with the best aged care services. For those receiving aged-care support, Benetas and MRH share a vision of giving every person we care for a positive, fulfilling experience of ageing, and the opportunity to age well in communities of choice and support.

Our Values



Respect

We take time to understand and value each person and respect their choices



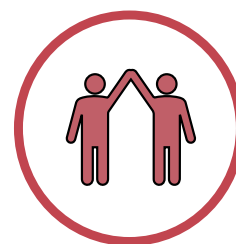
Responsibility

We act with integrity toward our clients, their families and carers, our supporters and the broader community.



Community

We strive to build strong relationships and communities of interest among all stakeholders by working together in an open, involving way



Spirit

We build a positive, energetic employee culture dedicated to creating fulfilling life experiences for older people



2. Introduction

This strategic plan outlines Macedon Ranges Health's (MRH) health promotion priorities and objectives for 2025–2028. It is informed by the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023–2027 (Victorian Department of Health [VDH], 2023) and the Community Health – Health Promotion (CH-HP) Program Guidelines 2025–2029 (VDH, 2024). The plan also incorporates local health data, community needs, and current evidence-based practice. It sets a direction for sustained, evidence-based action in promoting environments, policies and behaviours that support health equity and prevention of chronic disease.

3. Strategic Alignment

MRH's plan aligns with:

- Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023–2027 (VDH, 2023)
- CH-HP Program Guidelines 2025–2029 (VDH, 2024)
- CHHP Impact Measures Practice Guide 2023–2025 (VDH, 2023)
- Macedon Ranges Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan

These frameworks collectively inform a holistic, settings-based and equity-oriented approach to health promotion across the life course.

4. Vision

To improve the health and wellbeing of all residents in the Macedon Ranges by reducing chronic disease risk factors, supporting mental wellbeing, and enhancing equitable health outcomes for all community members.

5. Key Health Priorities (aligned with 70/30 policy)

Primary Focus Areas:

1. Increasing Healthy Eating
2. Increasing Active Living
3. Reducing Tobacco and E-Cigarette Related Harm
4. Improving Mental Wellbeing

Additional Priority Areas:

5. Preventing all forms of violence (including family violence)
6. Tackling climate change and its health impacts
7. Promoting gender equity and intersectional inclusion

6. Local Context and Health Profile

The Macedon Ranges Shire is a diverse and rapidly growing semi-rural area in central Victoria, home to an estimated 53,738 residents as of 2024 (profile.id, 2024). The population is characterised by a higher proportion of children and families compared with regional Victoria. 24.1% are aged 0–17 years and 36% of households are couples with children, significantly higher than the 25% state average (profile.id, 2024; Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2021). Approximately 35% of the population lives outside township boundaries, creating unique access challenges to services, healthy food, and active living opportunities.

Older adults are also a key demographic, with an increasing proportion of people aged 65+, many of whom live alone or in isolated rural settings. The region has a growing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents and over 16% of local young people identify as LGBTIQ+ (Sunbury and Cobaw Community Health [SCCH], 2021).

Social and economic determinants of health, such as income, transport access, housing stability, and educational attainment present distinct health equity challenges in the shire. While the area benefits from relative affluence overall, pockets of disadvantage exist, particularly in rural and fringe locations.

Key health statistics which will guide our planning:

- Smoking and vaping: 11.6% of residents are current smokers, a notable increase from 9.4% in

2020. Young people report increasing exposure to and experimentation with vaping (Victorian Agency for Health Information [VAHI], 2023).

- Nutrition: Only 6.2% of adults meet the daily vegetable intake guidelines and 34.3% meet fruit recommendations—both well below Victorian targets (VAHI, 2023).
- Physical activity: Nearly half (46.9%) of adults do not meet physical activity recommendations, and one in three children aged 5–11 years are not participating in any organised physical activity (Healthy Loddon Campaspe [HLC], 2019; Macedon Ranges Shire Council, 2025).
- Food security: 6.4% of households in Macedon Ranges report running out of food and being unable to afford more (HLC, 2019). Approximately 25% households report worrying about food insecurity (Macedon Ranges Shire Council [MRSC], 2025).
- Mental wellbeing: 32.5% of residents report experiencing anxiety or depression, and local suicide rates (15.6 per 100,000) exceed both state and national averages (Victorian Agency for Health Information, 2023). 18.5% of adults experience loneliness, particularly those aged 18–24 (MRSC, 2025). The most commonly reported health condition in the Macedon Ranges was Mental Health Condition (MRSC, 2025)

- Youth vulnerability: Local surveys highlight that 30% of youth report poor mental wellbeing, 11% feel unsafe at school, and 22% have no trusted adult to turn to (SCCH, 2021).

These findings reinforce the need for equity-led, settings-based prevention programs that address

chronic disease risk, food security, mental wellbeing and gender equity.

MRH's health promotion activities will respond to these insights through place-based, community-led initiatives tailored to local needs.

7. Goals and Objectives

Macedon Ranges Health's 2025–2028 Health Promotion Strategic Plan is guided by four evidence-based priorities identified through analysis of local health data, community consultation, and alignment with the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023–2027. These priorities are: healthy eating, active living, reducing tobacco and e-cigarette harm, and mental wellbeing. Each area will be addressed through multi-setting, equity-led initiatives that respond to the unique characteristics and challenges of our local population.

Priority 1: Increasing Healthy Eating



GOAL: Macedon Ranges Shire residents have access to affordable, nutritious food and the knowledge and skills to make healthy food choices across their lifespan.

Objectives:

- Increase the availability of healthy food and drink options in schools, early years settings, and community spaces.
- Reduce barriers to food security and nutrition literacy for priority populations, particularly older adults, low-income households, and rural residents.
- Promote and support healthy food environments in line with the Vic Kids Eat Well and Achievement Program.
- Foster local food systems and increase awareness of the benefits of fresh, seasonal produce through farmer's markets and community gardens.

Key Data & Rationale:

Despite being a relatively affluent region, food security remains a concern for 6.4% of households, particularly those in rural and fringe areas (Healthy Loddon Campaspe, 2019). Just 6.2% of adults meet daily vegetable intake recommendations, and only 34.3% meet fruit intake guidelines, both well below the state averages (VAHI, 2023). These figures indicate the need for both structural and behavioural interventions to support healthier eating patterns.

Example initiatives include:

- Expansion of Cooks Connect and Men's Kitchen, equipping residents and structured settings with practical cooking skills and increased nutritional education/knowledge.
- Partnership with Healthy Loddon Campaspe to deliver sustainable food access projects.
- School-based nutrition education using the Vic Kids Eat Well framework and dietitian-led workshops.
- Promotion of healthy food policies across sports clubs, markets, and MRH settings.

Priority 2: Increasing Active Living



Goal: All community members, regardless of age, ability or location, have the opportunity and confidence to engage in regular physical activity.

Objectives:

- Increase participation in structured and incidental physical activity, particularly for older adults, children, and people with chronic conditions or disability.
- Improve access to inclusive and culturally appropriate physical activity programs, especially in under-serviced rural areas.
- Strengthen local partnerships that support infrastructure, program delivery, and capacity-building for active communities.

Key Data & Rationale:

Almost half of adults in Macedon Ranges (46.9%) do not meet recommended physical activity guidelines, and over 60% are overweight or obese (HLC, 2019; VAHI, 2023). Additionally, one-third of children aged 5–11 years do not participate in any organised sport or activity (HLC, 2019), which raises concerns for long-term physical and mental health outcomes.

Example initiatives include:

- Free initiatives aimed at schools to promote physical activity among identified groups requiring supports or those who cannot access privately due to financial constraints.
- Strength-based exercise programs for older adults such as Strength for Life.
- Expansion of adapted physical activity in collaboration with allied health services.
- Engagement with local sporting clubs to develop inclusive policies and environments.
- Development of a community-led mosaic trail that encourages physical activity and exploration among young people and families by linking art, storytelling, and local walking paths.

Priority 3: Reducing Tobacco and E-Cigarette Harm



GOAL: To reduce the harms associated with tobacco use and vaping, particularly among young people, and to create environments where smoking is de-normalised.

Objectives:

- Increase knowledge and awareness of the harms of smoking and vaping among children, young people, and their influencers (parents, educators, coaches).
- Strengthen capacity in local settings to implement smoke-free and vape-free policies.
- Connect residents with cessation resources and promote Quit support services in community and clinical settings.

Key Data & Rationale:

Smoking rates in the Macedon Ranges have increased to 11.6%, up from 9.4% in 2020 (VAHI, 2023). Vaping use among youth is rising, with local data indicating increasing experimentation, social exposure, and access through peers and retailers (SCCH, 2021). These trends highlight the need for targeted prevention and behaviour change programs.

Example initiatives include:

- Development of a Vaping Project in partnership with schools, Macedon Ranges Shire Council and Quit Victoria.
- Advocacy for strengthened smoke-free zones and compliance in local parks, housing, and community events.

Priority 4: Improving Mental Wellbeing



GOAL: To promote mental health, prevent suicide, and foster inclusive communities that build connection, resilience, and wellbeing across all life stages.

Objectives:

- Increase understanding of mental health, wellbeing, and help-seeking behaviours among all age groups.
- Strengthen social connection, inclusion and belonging for priority populations, including youth, older adults, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and carers.
- Reduce stigma related to mental illness and suicide through awareness campaigns, education and lived experience-led projects.
- Build capacity in local leaders and services to adopt trauma-informed and mentally healthy practices.

Key Data & Rationale:

Mental health continues to be a pressing concern, with 32.5% of residents reporting anxiety or depression (VAHI, 2023), and youth mental wellbeing particularly low—30% of local young people report poor mental health and 22% say they have no trusted adult in their life (SCCH, 2021). The local suicide rate remains alarmingly high at 15.6 per 100,000—well above state and national averages (VAHI, 2023).

Example initiatives include:

- Delivery of peer based health education groups such as Chronic Pain Program.
- High school transition wellbeing expo.
- Collaboration with MRSPAG and sporting clubs to implement stigma reduction campaigns and suicide prevention strategies.
- Partnering with local high schools to facilitate youth based mental health programs.
- Internal diversity and inclusion activities for MRH staff and clients around events such as R U OK Day, NAIDOC Week, and Wear It Purple.

Priority 5: Preventing all forms of violence



GOAL: To prevent all forms of violence and foster a culture of safety, respect, and equality across the Macedon Ranges community.

Objectives:

- Increase awareness and community understanding of the drivers and impacts of violence, particularly family, gender-based, and elder abuse.
- Strengthen community-led responses and local partnerships to prevent violence before it occurs.
- Support priority populations to access culturally safe and trauma-informed services that promote healing, inclusion, and empowerment.
- Collaborate with local organisations to address intersecting factors such as gambling, alcohol misuse, and financial abuse that contribute to violence.

Key Data & Rationale:

Violence is a significant public health issue with wide-reaching impacts on physical and mental health, social wellbeing, and community safety. In 2025, family violence incidents in Macedon Ranges rose by 13.5% compared to the previous year, with 78% of victim survivors identifying as female (Crime Statistics Agency, 2025). Gambling-related harm

Priority 5: Preventing all forms of violence *continued*

is a compounding factor, with \$9.5 million in local losses recorded in 2023–24—almost triple that of neighbouring shires (MRSC, 2025). Additionally, 70% of men and 45% of women reported consuming alcohol at risky levels in a single sitting (MRSC, 2025), both of which are recognised contributors to increased violence (Commonwealth of Australia: Department of Social Services, 2022).

These figures highlight the urgent need for prevention strategies that address the root causes of violence, including gender inequality, harmful social norms, and social isolation. Evidence from the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan emphasises the importance of working with men and boys to challenge attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate violence and to embed respectful relationship education across settings.

Example initiatives include:

- Delivery of peer-led support groups for those impacted by family violence, financial abuse, or substance-related harm.
- Partnerships with local agencies to run respectful relationships and bystander education in schools, sporting clubs, and workplaces.
- Community events and campaigns aligned with national efforts (e.g. 16 Days of Activism, Respect Women: Call It Out).

Priority 6: Tackling Climate Change and its Health Impacts



GOAL: To promote health-supportive environments through local action and education.

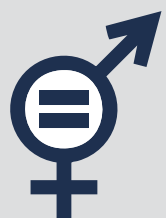
Key Data & Rationale:

Climate change is a growing threat to community health, increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, worsening air quality, and threatening food and water security. Vulnerable populations, including older adults and rural residents, are particularly at risk during bushfires and heatwaves.

Example initiatives include:

- Promoting active transport (e.g. walking, cycling) to reduce emissions and support physical and mental wellbeing.
- Supporting local food systems and community gardens to improve food security and environmental sustainability.

Priority 7: Promoting Gender Equity and Intersectional Inclusion



GOAL: To advance health equity by embedding gender equity and intersectionality across all health promotion activity.

Key Data & Rationale:

Health outcomes are shaped by gender and intersecting identities including race, disability, sexuality, age, and income. In the Macedon Ranges, over 16% of young people identify as LGBTIQ+, and local data shows women are disproportionately impacted by violence and social disadvantage (SCCH, 2021). Promoting inclusion helps reduce discrimination, improve service access, and foster community cohesion.

Example initiatives include:

- Hosting inclusive events and awareness campaigns (e.g. Wear It Purple Day, International Women's Day).
- Incorporating gender equity principles into all program design, evaluation and staff training.
- Strengthening partnerships with LGBTIQ+ organisations and Women's Health Loddon Mallee to ensure targeted support.

8. Priority communities

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

- Older People aged 60 years and over
- Young children – primary and secondary school age,
- Youth – 12 to 25 years
- People living with a disability
- Women
- People experiencing disadvantage, including loneliness and social isolation

The above communities were identified as more likely to experience negative health outcomes related to the priorities listed above. Some communities were also prioritised due to their relative size as a proportion of the Macedon Ranges population, for example young children and youth.

9. Evaluation and Monitoring

MRH will monitor progress using CHHP Impact Measures (VDH, 2023), local evaluation tools, and community feedback.

Key indicators include:

- Number and type of settings actively supported
- Vic Kids Eat Well and Achievement Program progress

- Reach to priority populations
- Qualitative feedback via Patient Reported Experience Measures (PREMs) & Patient Reported Outcome Measures (PROMs)
- Annual reporting against Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Outcomes Framework

10. Partnerships

Macedon Ranges residents are our priority partners for initiatives, particularly community members from identified priority communities.

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

- Macedon Ranges Shire Council
- Sunbury & Cobaw Community Health
- Healthy Loddon Campaspe (previously known as Healthy Hearts Victoria)
- Bendigo Public Health Unit
- Women's Health Loddon Mallee
- Local schools
- Early Years Settings
- Sporting Clubs
- Neighbourhood Houses
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations

Macedon Ranges Health will also actively participate in local, regional and internal networks and committees.



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