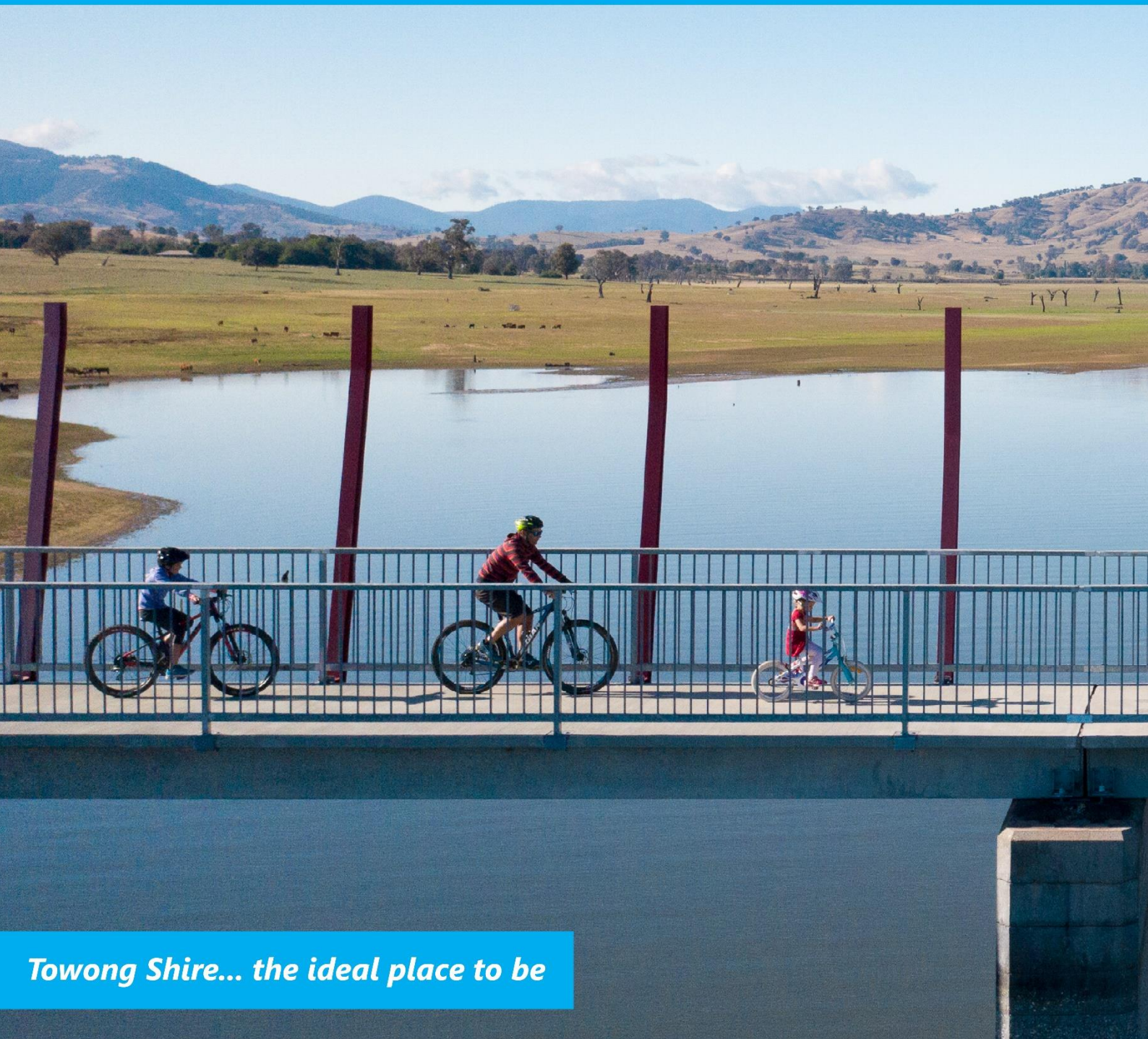


TOWONG SHIRE COUNCIL

HEALTH AND WELLBEING PLAN

2021 - 2025



Towong Shire... the ideal place to be

Front cover image: Sandy Creek Bridge at Lake Hume.

The stunning, architecturally designed Sandy Creek Bridge makes for a spectacular traverse on foot or bicycle across the Sandy Creek inlet to Lake Hume. Adjacent to the bridge are picnic tables and a viewing platform to take in the vast scenery.

The bridge forms a portion of the High Country Rail Trail, which starts in Wodonga, making its way on to Tallangatta and further afield Shelley in the heart of Towong Shire. The trail meanders along the foreshore of Lake Hume, through pine plantations and State forests, past old timber trestle bridges and Shelley Station, one of the highest railway stations in the country.

The 600m bridge was reconstructed in 2012, sitting on the original rail pylons stripped off the railway track after the Cudgewa line closed in 1981. The project was funded by the Victorian Government, Towong Shire Council, Indigo Shire Council, City of Wodonga, Parklands Albury Wodonga and associated Rail Trail Advisory Committees.

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Introduction

The *Towong Shire Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021–2025* presents a municipality wide response to the requirements of the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 (Vic.)*. The *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* recognises the significant role of councils and local health services in improving the health and wellbeing of people who live, work, study and play in their municipality. The Act requires councils to develop a municipal public health and wellbeing plan every four years (within 12 months of each general election of the council).

The plan must:

- include an examination of data about health status and health determinants in the municipality
- identify goals and strategies based on available evidence for creating a local community in which people can achieve maximum health and wellbeing
- provide for the involvement of people in the local community in the development, implementation and evaluation of the plan
- specify how Council will work in partnership with the Department of Health, DFFH and other agencies undertaking public health initiatives, projects and programs to accomplish the goals and strategies identified in the plan
- be consistent with the Council Plan and the Municipal Strategic Statement
- have regard for the State Public Health and Wellbeing Plan

The *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019–2023* is the overarching policy framework for improving public health and wellbeing in Victoria.

From this plan, councils are legislated to address:

Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021–2025

- tackling **climate change** and its impact on health
- increasing **healthy eating**
- increasing **active living**
- reducing **tobacco-related harm**

In 2021, the Victorian Government added **emergency relief and recovery** (including Covid-19) to the issues that councils should consider. This change responds to the significant impact of recent emergency events on community health and wellbeing.

Why develop a plan?

To ensure health and wellbeing is central to all that we do in Towong, Council, in partnership with the Corryong Health, Tallangatta Health and Walwa Bush Nursing Centre has developed a standalone municipal health and wellbeing plan for 2021-2025. In Towong, we approach this as an alliance, because we can achieve more if we work together. This plan is owned by all partners in the alliance, stakeholders and the community.

This plan contains actions that are designed to deliver improved population health and wellbeing outcomes, to be implemented with the Towong Alliance and other key stakeholders across the municipality. The Plan is part of the wider prevention and health service system that is run at a local and regional level. The plan sits alongside the Alliance Partner's plans and policies to deliver a health and wellbeing response across the municipality.

Towong Shire Council prepare a municipality wide plan every four years. The current *Council Plan 2021-2025* includes the community vision. Together, the plans detail the roles Council will play in broad-ranging matters, and how it will invest in the community, infrastructure and services.



Walking the High Country Rail Trail near Tallangatta

Community Vision 2031

Under the Local Government Act 2020, Council must develop, maintain and review a Community Vision which describes the community's aspirations for the future of the municipality.

We have developed the Community Vision 2031 based on the aspirations our community, which they told us as part of Council Plan community engagement activities during May 2021. In review of all responses, clear themes emerged which have been crafted into the Community Vision. The Community Vision is central to ensuring that good health and wellbeing outcomes are delivered for all people who live in and visit Towong Shire.

“Towong Shire will be the ideal place to be: welcoming, vibrant and diverse communities with quality facilities and services.”



Note: The comments above were received from community members during the Council Plan engagement activities.

How we developed the plan

We know that a good plan should reflect the community's needs, concerns, priorities and aspirations.

To develop our health and wellbeing plan goals, we considered:

- the views of external stakeholders, with the alliance and more broadly
- the views of our community identified as part of the council plan engagement process
- the views of our community recovery committees and bushfire recovery plans
- population data from many sources
- Commonwealth and Victorian Government priorities
- evidence about what works

Towong Shire Council

- Towong Shire Council Plan 2021-2025
- Towong Shire Municipal Recovery Plan

Tallangatta Health Service

- Strategic Direction 2018-27
- Service Plan 2018-27
- Accessibility and Inclusion Plan 2019-22
- Consumer Engagement Strategy
- Koolin Balit Aboriginal Cultural Health Plan 2020-22
- Community Health- Health Promotion (State)

Corryong Health Service

- Strategic Plan 2019-2024
- Service Delivery Plan 2022 – 2024 (in development)
- Access and Inclusion Plan 2021-22
- Partnering with Purpose – Consumer Engagement Framework 2021
- Safer Care Victoria Partnering with Consumers Plan 2019 - 2022
- Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (draft) 2021

Walwa Bush Nursing Centre

- Walwa Bush Nursing Centre Strategic Plan 2021-2026
- Walwa Bush Nursing Centre Service Plan 2021-2026

How do we approach Health and Wellbeing in Towong?

We know that good health and wellbeing is vital to a community's resilience. Many factors can affect our health and wellbeing and these factors are known as the 'social determinants' of health. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's (2016)¹ description of the social determinants of health is summarised below.

Socio-economic position

Educational attainment is associated with better health because it equips people to achieve stable employment, secure income, adequate housing and provide for families. Higher education increases the likelihood of higher-status occupations and higher incomes. Income and wealth improve socio-economic position and allow for greater access to better food and housing, and healthcare options.

Early life

The foundations of adult health are laid in early childhood development. Healthy physical development and emotional support during the first years of life provide building blocks for future social, emotional, cognitive and physical wellbeing.

Social exclusion

Social exclusion covers social disadvantage and lack of resources, opportunity, participation and skills. Social exclusion may result from unemployment, discrimination, stigmatisation and other factors. It can increase the risk of disability, illness and social isolation.

Social capital

Social capital is the benefits obtained from having links that bind and connect people within and between groups. It can provide sources of resilience against poor health and can help people find work or cope with hardship.

Employment and work

The stress of unemployment brings higher risk of illness and disability. Unemployment rates are higher among people with no or few qualifications or skills, those with disabilities or poor mental health, people who have caring responsibilities, those in ethnic minority groups and those who are socially excluded for other reasons.

The demands of work - hours, control and conditions - have an impact on health. Quality work is health protective and provides opportunity for social interactions and personal development.

Housing

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2016). *Australia's Health 2016*. Australian Government. Canberra.

Safe, affordable and secure housing is associated with better health, which in turn impacts on people's participation in work, education and the community. It also affects parenting and social and family relationships. The relationship is two-way, in that poor health can lead to precarious housing.

Residential environment

Communities and neighbourhoods that ensure access to basic goods and services are socially cohesive. This promotes physical and psychological wellbeing and protection of the natural environment, which are essential for health equity.

Health

Promoting modern urban environments that have appropriate housing and transport infrastructure and a mix of land use encouraging recreation and social interaction.

Many current health and wellbeing issues are the result of complex social systems and no single policy, organisation or program can change them in isolation. Collective effort, across diverse sectors and with a wide range of organisations, is important for building and sustaining effort to make improvements in health and wellbeing for the community. Therefore, our Towong Alliance is so important.



If Towong Shire consisted of 100 people there would be...



52 males



48 females



17 that were born overseas
 10 that speak a language other than English at home
 74 who have internet to their homes (of varying quality)



22 aged under 19 years
 53 aged between 20 and 64 years
 25 aged over 65 years



52 who completed higher education
 46 who did not complete year 12



58 who drove to work
 7 who walked to work
 3 who didn't have a car in their household



56 who work full time
 32 who work part time
 36 who volunteer
 5 who are unemployed and looking for work



76 who own or mortgage a house
 19 who rent
 5 who are experiencing rental or mortgage stress

Our health and wellbeing

80.8% of Towong residents rated themselves as having good wellbeing.

Things that we are good at:

- 90% of residents feel they live in a close-knit community
- 88.7% of residents trust their neighbours
- 33% of residents volunteer

The things we need to improve:

- 26% do not have internet access at home compared with 14% in Victoria
- 30% of Towong residents have been diagnosed with anxiety or depression
- 19.4% of Towong residents consume the recommended 1-2 servings of vegetables per day
- 58.9% of residents are pre-obese or obese compared with 51.6% Victoria
- 71.5% of residents are at increased risk of alcohol related harm compared with 59.6% Victoria
- 27.5% of family households are not working
- 33.5% of household income is less than \$650 weekly
- 14.8% of residents have a diploma qualification or higher, this is less than half the state average
- 13.5% of residents are current smokers

Across the shire we also have some worrying trends:

- Less than half of the population meets the daily physical activity guidelines
- More businesses are exiting the Towong economy than are entering
- Population is predicted to only increase by 0.2% by 2036
- Limited transport options aside from private vehicle
- Family violence is considered to be an issue by 78.8% of residents
- There is low support in the community for gender equality in relationships
- Community acceptance of diverse cultures is 40.8%
- The rate of disability in Towong Shire is higher than the state average, with few options for supported accommodation
- Towong Shire will experience increasing risks associated with climate change with a maximum temperature to rise of up to 1.9° Celsius by the 2030s and increasing likelihood of extreme rainfall events

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016). 2016 Census QuickStats. Australian Government. Canberra Accessed at <https://dbr.abs.gov.au>.
VicHealth (2015). Towong LGA Profile VicHealth Indicators Survey 2015 Results. Victorian Government. Melbourne. Accessed at <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au>.

VicHealth (2017). Victorian Population Health Survey 2017 results. Victorian Government. Melbourne. Accessed at <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au>.

Towong Shire Council (2019). Towong Shire Council Free from Violence Survey 2019 (Unpublished). Towong Shire Council. Tallangatta.

What does the evidence tell us about our priorities for the new plan?

The priorities for this plan emerged from:

- data on health status and health determinants in the municipality
- results of the community engagement
- priorities of the Council Plan and Municipal Strategic Statement
- regard for Victorian health priorities.

The issues of most concern that impact health and wellbeing in Towong are:

- increasing rates of chronic illness and body weight
- increased rates of physical inactivity and sedentary lifestyles
- very low compliance with recommended dietary guidelines
- increasing rates of alcohol consumption at risky levels
- the need to continue monitoring the impacts of tobacco, other drugs and gambling
- increased rates of diagnosed mental health issues
- the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 and the Black Summer Bushfires 2019-2020, including the long-term consequences of smoke inhalation.
- increasing rates of reported family violence and non-family violence
- Increased rates of youth suicide
- low rates of housing diversity for changing population needs
- the forecast doubling of the aged population as baby boomers transition to older age
- the low rate of community acceptance regarding diversity
- the low rate of community support for gender equality in relationships
- low rate of growth across the economy and the risk of families become disadvantaged
- low rates of social acceptance towards diverse populations
- the impacts of climate change on health especially the consequences of extreme weather.

We also want to ensure we maintain the things we are doing well at as part of our sustainable health and wellbeing approach. This includes:

- supporting the high levels of social cohesion and trust that already exists
- ensuring our volunteers are well supported and can continue to provide their invaluable contribution

The new priorities...

Goal 1: Our community is safe and healthy, when people are:

- 1.1. supported to eat well and be physically active
- 1.2. safe and free from violence
- 1.3. less impacted by the harm resulting from gambling, tobacco, alcohol and other drugs

Goal 2: Our community is inclusive and tolerant of diversity, when people:

- 2.1. embrace diversity
- 2.2. recognise the need for gender equality in relationships
- 2.3. have their mental health and wellbeing well supported

Goal 3: Our community is adaptable and resilient, when people:

- 3.1. commit to tackling the climate emergency and its impacts on health
- 3.2. effectively prepare for, respond to and recovery from emergencies, including COVID-19 and the Black Summer Bushfires



Goal 1: A community that is safe and healthy

Priority 1.1 people are supported to eat well and be physically active

- Enhance infrastructure that encourages activity and open spaces
- Support sporting clubs and groups to improve physical activity
- Promote and support opportunities for active lifestyle choices
- Support the development of accessible community gardens

Actions:

- Develop and implement recreational masterplan for the municipality
- Develop and implement a cycling masterplan for the municipality
- Seek funding to complete the High Country Rail Trail
- Seek funding to develop a master plan for Lake Hume
- Map and publish walking and cycling trails that connect townships, link destinations and create circular routes
- Support the ongoing operations of the swimming pools across the municipality
- Continue to deliver the strategic footpath network improvement program
- Increase the recreation opportunities for young families in Dartmouth
- Review and deliver the strategic parks and playgrounds upgrade program
- Complete streetscape upgrades in Dartmouth, Mitta Mitta, Tintalra, Towong and Cudgewa
- Market Towong as a great place to experience nature based activities and improve wellbeing
- Support the Tallangatta Community Garden to promote food security and awareness on healthy eating
- Support and promote the Tallangatta Community Garden to provide an active living space for the whole community to engage in active participation and ownership
- Facilitate and support the Vic Kids Eat Well Initiative at local schools, out of hours childcare, sports and recreation clubs
- Continue to develop health and fitness programs in the Upper Murray and Walwa to target specific demographic groups

Priority 1.2 people are safe and free from violence

- Raise awareness of family violence gendered and non-gendered violence and abuse
- Continue to build capability for a 'no wrong door' approach to family violence in partnership with Victoria Police and other key service providers
- Advocate for increased housing diversity across the municipality
- Advocate for better telecommunications and power supply across the municipality

Actions:

- Implement the Child Safe Standards to promote the safety of children, prevent child abuse and ensure processes are in place to respond to and report all allegations of child abuse
- Continue to provide family violence screening and referral through the Maternal and Child Health Service
- Ensure the ongoing operation of the Tallangatta and Corryong Family Violence Networks and contribute to actions that come out of this network
- Investigate short-and long-term options for the use of bushfire modular housing to address housing shortages

Priority 1.3 people can minimise the harm resulting from gambling, tobacco, alcohol and other drugs

- Raise awareness of alcohol and tobacco-related harms
- Work with other organisations to reduce harm from alcohol and other drugs

Actions:

- Support the development of a liquor accord
- Promote and deliver Freeza events
- Support and promote local community awareness of alcohol and tobacco-related harms



Goal 2: A community that is inclusive and tolerant of diversity

Priority 2.1 embrace diversity

- Ensure services, activities and events are accessible and inclusive
- Support opportunities through contribution and connection, particularly with culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- Raise awareness about aboriginal history and healing through cultural learning
- Apply an age friendly lens to all activities and projects
- To support future engagement with traditional owner groups

Actions:

- Identify opportunities to partner with Traditional Owner Groups
- Access School Readiness Funding to assist children with communication, wellbeing, access and inclusion outcomes prior to attending school
- Council managed kindergartens to continue to provide an inclusive program that is responsive to the individual abilities, interests and needs of children with a disability, developmental delay or complex medical needs
- Continue to strengthen the smalltalk support playgroup, and Enhanced Maternal and Child Health program to support eligible families and children
- Support all new parents/carers to join parent support groups
- Maternal and child health services continue to support families with support and referral to early intervention and pediatric specialist services
- Develop a reconciliation action plan across Towong Shire Council and Corryong Health
- Support the development of a strong arts and cultural offering throughout the shire
- Advocate for people with disability across the shire to gain equitable access to the NDIS
- Support the work of disability specific organisations, like the Green Galah, to prosper and support all people with disability across the municipality
- Ensure the neighbourhood house and early years services activities incorporate opportunities for culturally diverse activities
- Support events in Seniors Week
- Participate in Upper Hume Primary Care Rural Innovative Multi-Disciplinary Models (PRIMM) project for ensuring an Age Friendly health system

Priority 2.2 recognise the need for gender equality in relationships

- Raise awareness about the need for gender equality

Actions:

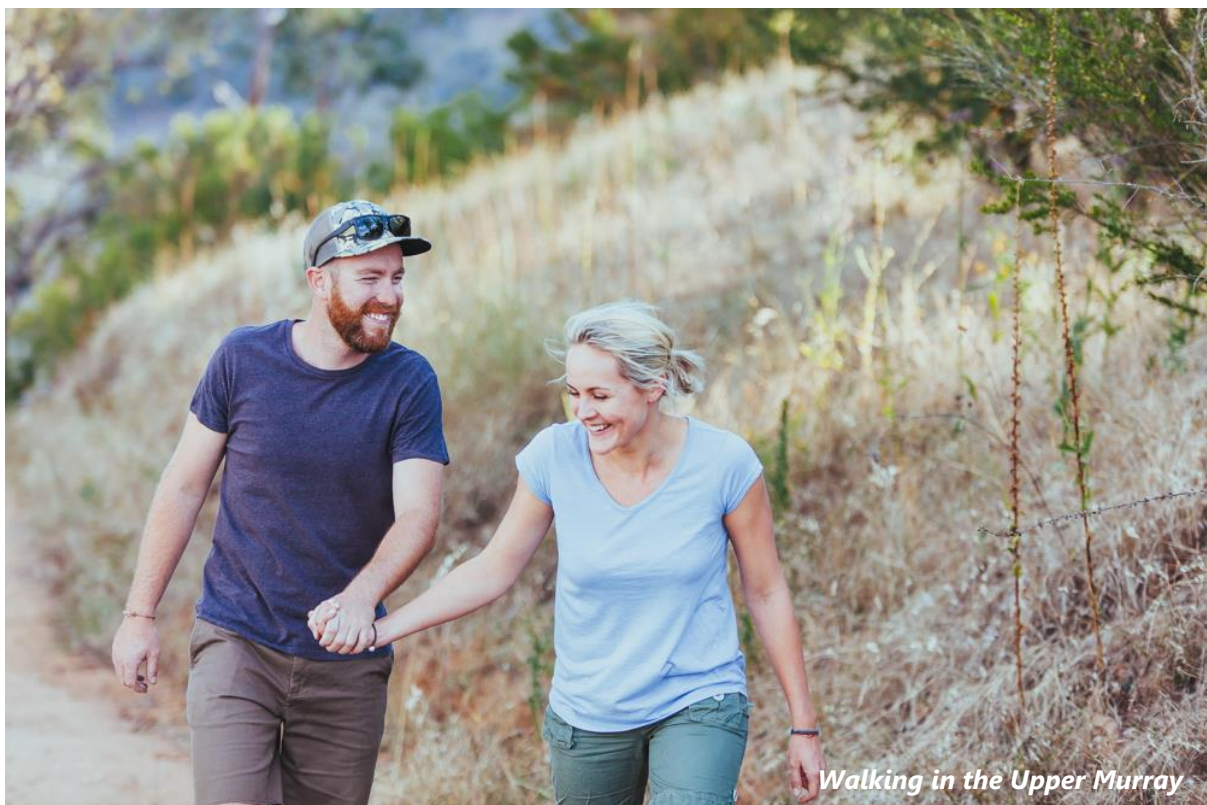
- Support the ongoing involvement of key stakeholders across the shire in 16 days of Activism
- Deliver love bites program to address respectful relationships
- Co-design with health services and community approaches to gender equality

Priority 2.3 mental health and wellbeing is well supported

- Provide education and information to promote good mental health through every stage of life
- Advocate for continuity of mental health services following the Black Summer Bushfires
- Strengthening the protective factors of the community to prevent and reduce suicide risk

Actions:

- Deliver of the Resilience Project, mental health first aid and Live4Life programs
- Support the ongoing work of the Upper Murray Post Vention Committee
- Advocate for, support and promote a suicide prevention network for the Upper Murray



Goal 3: A community that is adaptable and resilient

Priority 3.1 commit to tackling the climate emergency and its impacts on health

- Support the community to reduce emissions
- Ensure communities adopt sustainable practices to reduce the impact of climate change

Actions:

- Continue to implement the tree planting strategy to achieve 40% canopy coverage in urban streets by 2025
- Support the development and operation of community gardens across the municipality
- Develop an agriculture strategy that incorporates considerations for achieving net zero emissions
- Develop a climate change action plan
- Integrate climate risk discussion in relevant peak committees within the municipality
- Participate in Upper Murray Micro-grid power plan supporting solar renewable power supply in the region and reducing carbon footprint
- Support the use and expansion of clean energy options across the key health service and government buildings throughout the municipality
- Support the establishment of a power node pilot in Walwa

Priority 3.2 effectively prepare for, respond to and recovery from emergencies, including COVID-19 and the Black Summer Bushfires

- Support our communities to drive their recovery from bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic and improve their mitigation and resilience to future adverse events

Actions:

- Undertake the telecommunications review
- Develop community emergency management plans
- Support Upper Murray Inc to deliver the power plan
- Investigate ways of improving the power reliability
- Implement fire risk mitigation strategies through infrastructure upgrades including installation of water tanks and upgraded sprinkler systems at Corryong Health
- Continue to participate in recovery committees
- Support the ongoing delivery of COVID-19 vaccination and testing clinics