

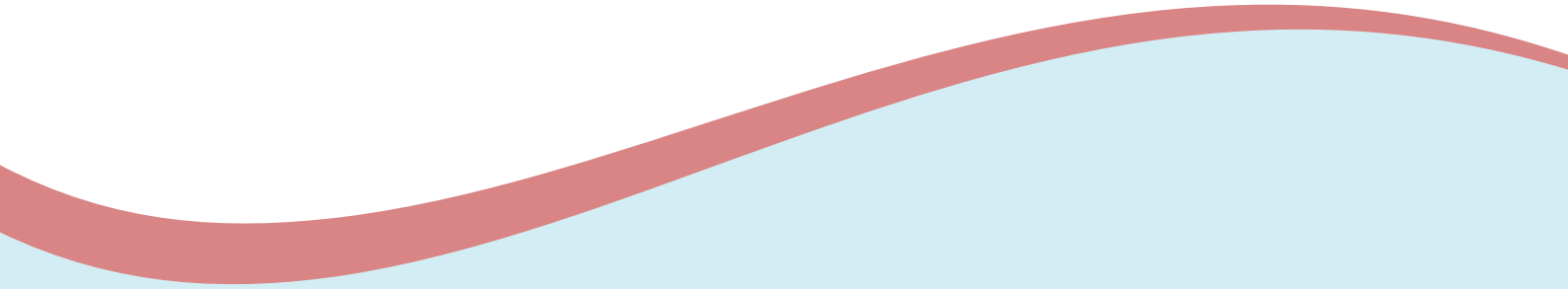
SOUTH GIPPSLAND

# Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan

2025 to 2029



**South Gippsland**  
Shire Council

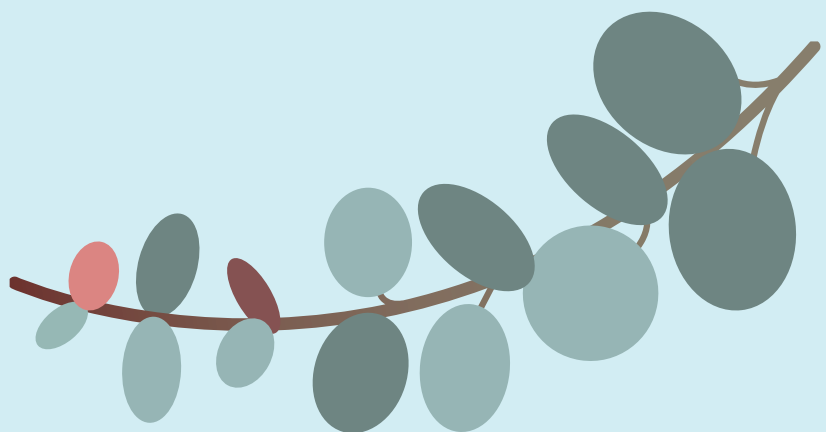


*We acknowledge the strength, resilience and community values of First Nations people, and their rich history as the world's oldest living culture as we strive for better health and wellbeing across South Gippsland.*

## *Acknowledgment of Country*

### **South Gippsland Shire Council**

*We acknowledge the Bunurong and Gunaikurnai people as the Traditional Custodians of South Gippsland and pay respect to their Elders, past, present, and future, for they hold the memories, traditions, culture, and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia.*



*Eucalyptus, (genus Eucalyptus)*

# Plan at a Glance

This Plan aims to improve health and wellbeing by addressing the broader influences on health, it aspires to reduce inequalities, increase access to healthcare, and empower individuals and communities.

## Healthy South Gippsland Strategic Framework

The following Framework ([Priority](#), Goal and Strategies), will guide our work over the next four years.



### Preventing all forms of violence

*Safe, respectful and inclusive communities.*

- Promote and support the prevention of family violence through awareness campaigns, training and community activities.
- Increase community understanding of respectful, safe and equitable relationships.
- Support opportunities to increase the involvement of men and boys in violence prevention.
- Increase gender equity in work, education and recreation settings.
- Improve access and advance inclusion in our communities.
- Actively celebrate community diversity including race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality.



### Improving wellbeing

*Connected communities that are healthy, engaged and empowered.*

- Increase opportunities for social connectedness by improving access for all people to be included in community life, work, education and recreation.
- Decrease social isolation, particularly of priority population groups, through supporting community groups, volunteers and participation in art, culture, environment and recreation.
- Enhance through partnership, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing and cultural connectedness.
- Promote mental health and resilience in individuals by increasing knowledge and promoting opportunities for wellbeing improvement.
- Reduce harm from gambling, alcohol, tobacco and drugs through policies, programs and partnerships.
- Reduce stigma associated with mental illness, disability and neurodiversity across South Gippsland.
- Improve and advocate for accessibility of support services for people across South Gippsland.



## **Increasing active living**

### ***Connected and inclusive places and spaces which promote movement.***

- Plan, deliver and support parks, open spaces and public spaces for safe active living for all ages and abilities.
- Promote and support, through a partnership approach, the increase of social prescribing across health care services.
- Promote and support initiatives that encourage participation in active movement and reduce sitting time for all people.
- Increase participation of women, girls and other groups experiencing barriers in sport and active recreation through providing support to clubs, groups and facilities.
- Advocate for active travel through improved road, pedestrian and bike safety and accessibility, including by provision of appropriate infrastructure.



## **Healthy eating**

### ***Local, affordable food and healthy options.***

- Increase the availability of healthy food and drink options through policies, programs and awareness campaigns in work, education, recreation and public settings.
- Improve access and affordability of locally grown and produced healthy food by supporting and attracting investment in local food industries and businesses.
- Reduce food insecurity in South Gippsland with targeted support to vulnerable population groups.
- Support collaborative local community approaches to production and access to healthy food, particularly those that focus on equitable and sustainable practices.
- Make drinking tap water easy, appealing and accessible in public places.



## **Tackling climate change and its impact on health**

### ***A valued environment with supported, resilient communities.***

- Build understanding of, and mitigate the risks of climate change and its impact on health and wellbeing.
- Increase community resilience to prepare, respond, and recover from the effects of severe weather events.
- Support community and business capacity in adopting sustainable practices and renewable energy by actively engaging with communities and providing education and resources.
- Work towards future proofing South Gippsland to safeguard quality of living and wellbeing.
- Preserve, protect and enhance the natural environment across South Gippsland.
- Strengthen community knowledge, skills and understanding of the importance of maintaining and/or increasing canopy cover and green spaces to support biodiversity, thermal comfort and UV protection.

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# Acknowledgements

## Thank You

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the development of this Plan, and to those who will contribute to its implementation over the next four years. Your partnership is invaluable as we strive to continually improve health and wellbeing for everyone in South Gippsland.

## Introduction from South Gippsland Shire Council

The health and wellbeing of our community is the responsibility of many different organisations, and the communities and people they serve. This Plan is tailored to our unique municipality and the specific challenges we face. As we work together on this Plan, we focus on accessibility, equity, sustainability and inclusion to ensure no one is left behind.

The health and wellbeing of our community is a shared responsibility, involving a wide range of organisations and residents.

The Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan has been developed alongside the Council Plan, which has ensured a strong alignment between these plans. The Council Plan themes of; developing a sustainable future, leading with integrity and empowering communities have been considered throughout the development of this Plan.

## Introduction from the South Gippsland Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee

The Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee plays a vital role in providing advice to the South Gippsland Shire Council on opportunities to make our community more accessible and inclusive.

As a group of dedicated advocates living and working in South Gippsland, with a diverse set of lived and professional experiences we are proud to support the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025-2029.

We're excited to be part of this journey to improve the health and wellbeing of everyone in South Gippsland.



# Context

This Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan sets the priorities and goals for the next four years, aimed at protecting, improving and promoting the health and wellbeing of the South Gippsland community.

Required by the *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*, this Plan provides a roadmap for addressing the specific health and wellbeing needs of our local community. It aims to ensure that all people have access to necessary services and support, while focusing on improving the health outcomes for groups who may be facing challenges

The health and wellbeing of our community is a shared responsibility. It involves everyone; from government, towns, communities, groups and residents. While Council takes the lead in developing and overseeing the Plan, its success depends on the collective efforts of the entire community.



## Developing the Plan

The development of this Plan has considered a variety of factors, and has been a collaborative process, involving both the community and local organisations.

Extensive consultation took place in 2022, identifying four key priority areas:

- Improving Mental Wellbeing.
- Increasing Active Living.
- Tackling Climate Change.
- Healthy Eating.

Further community input gathered in 2025 reaffirmed these same priorities, with the addition of:

- Reducing all forms of Violence.

Extensive community engagement to develop Council's key strategic documents also identified factors the community of South Gippsland believed would improve their health and wellbeing, such as more parks and green spaces, reduced health support costs, increased safety, better public transport, healthier food options, and more accessible mental health services. Key challenges to improving health and wellbeing were lack of time, limited local and accessible services and pressures from workplace and home.

A key element of developing this Plan was consultation with key partner organisations and groups who lead, service, advocate, impact, influence and support health and wellbeing in South Gippsland every day.

Local health data and the priorities set in the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023 – 2027 were also referenced, ensuring the Plan reflects both community needs and broader State health objectives.





## What impacts our health and wellbeing?

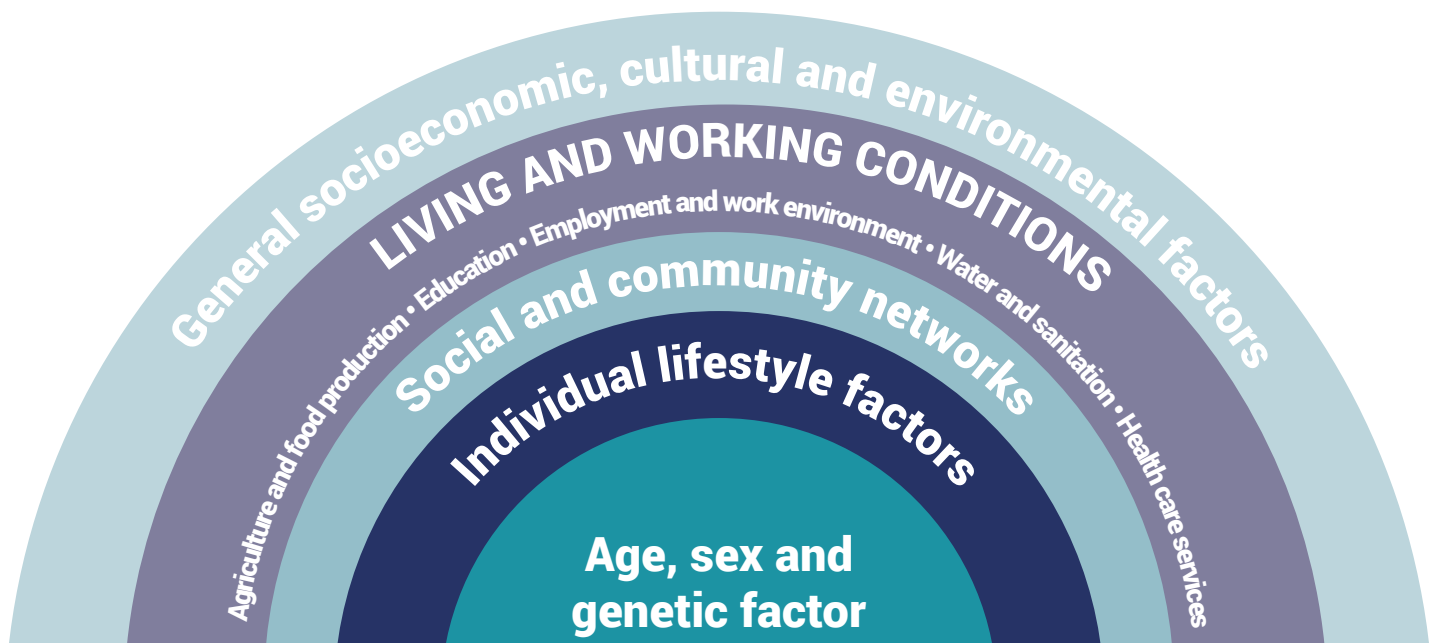
When we think about health and wellbeing, we need to consider many factors, most of which are not medical.

This includes a mix of genetic factors, personal health behaviours, access to quality healthcare, and social conditions. Research has shown that these social conditions make up the largest relative impact to our health and wellbeing, followed by our health behaviours, healthcare (and the healthcare system), and our genetics (Marmot and Allen 2014).

Health is closely linked to how people live, work, play, learn and age, and all these elements interact to influence health and wellbeing.

This diagram shows some of the different types of factors and how they interact to influence a person's health and wellbeing.

## The social determinants of health



Source: Dahlgren and Whitehead 2021

## Priority Population Groups

It is important to understand that equity is different from equality. Unlike equality, which strives for all people to have the exact same opportunities, allowances or resources, equity is fair and considers that all people start from a different place.

Considering this in health and wellbeing planning is one way of being equitable.

Just as many factors influence and interact to affect a person's health, there are factors which, when combined, will lead to cumulative disadvantage (intersectionality) and poorer health outcomes.

Strategies to address inequity in health often require an additional focus, or different, targeted approaches for population groups who may experience higher levels of disadvantage or be of higher health risk..

This Plan recognises the following priority population groups for South Gippsland:

- Early Years (0 - 5)
- Young People (12 - 25)
- People with disability
- LGBTQIA+
- Older people (particularly 70+)
- Women
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Culturally and linguistically diverse people
- People in remote/isolated areas
- People experiencing family violence
- Low income/financially disadvantaged people

## Implementation

To implement the Priorities and Strategies outlined in this Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, a detailed Action Plan will be developed.

An action plan allows for clarity of roles and measurability of impact, as well as analysis of any gaps. An action plan improves the ability to measure progress and utilise information to inform future planning.

Ownership and responsibility for the Plan is shared by a wide range of organisations and groups working to improve health and wellbeing in South Gippsland.

An action plan will be developed through meaningful consultation with these partners.

The Action Plan will;

- ▶ Reflect existing services, programs, policies, projects and supports which are relevant to the priority areas and strategies.
- ▶ Plan for ongoing monitoring of actions, including review, modification and addition.
- ▶ Include indicators to measure effectiveness, success and impact.
- ▶ Detail how we will report on progress of the Plan.



## What the data says:

South Gippsland faces a unique mix of strengths and challenges shaped by its ageing population, rural setting, and strong community values.

As of 2021, over half of households were considered low income, with 23.2 per cent earning under \$650 a week which is a much higher percentage than the Victorian average of 16.4 per cent. Despite this, unemployment is low at 2.5 per cent, sports participation is high at 20.8 per cent and volunteering rates remain one of the highest in Victoria (22.3 per cent).

The population is steadily growing, with a forecasted increase of over 7,000 people by 2046. This is expected to be mostly in the form of sole-person households and couples without children, which highlights changing family structures and a need for more diverse housing and services into the future.

Older residents now make up 34.9 per cent of the population, and many use aged care services and the pension. 6.4 per cent of people in South Gippsland are living with a disability and 9.7 per cent have a diagnosed mental health condition.

Access to services remains a key issue across South Gippsland. Approximately 44 per cent of residents live outside of townships and there are very limited public transport options available to residents. The Gippsland region has the lowest rates of private health insurance coverage in Victoria, with 30.8 per cent of people in South Gippsland having no private coverage.

Across South Gippsland 72.1 per cent of adults have not had their blood pressure checked in the past two years, only 4.8 per cent are eating enough vegetables, and rates of obesity and overweight are above the Victorian averages. The leading cause of death in South Gippsland is coronary heart disease. Alcohol-related harm is significant, with a death rate of 188 per 100,000 people and 66.6 per cent of adults drinking at risky levels, and 12.7 per cent of adults smoke cigarettes daily. South Gippsland has the highest rate of youth mortality in Gippsland. Severe food insecurity affects 11.8 per cent of people across our region, with over 20 per cent of local parents relying on low-cost, unhealthy food.

Despite this, residents of South Gippsland have reported lower rates of poor health and psychological distress (8.9 per cent) and higher life satisfaction than State and regional averages.



# Strategic Priorities 2025 to 2029







## Preventing all forms of violence

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. Violence takes on many forms including physical, emotional, psychological, financial and sexual violence. It also includes coercive control, intimate partner violence, elder abuse or actions that limit someone's freedom and independence. Some groups are at higher risk of all types of violence.

South Gippsland health and wellbeing partners identified key emerging challenges in this space including economic instability and growing social inequality, as well as risks to community connectedness.

In South Gippsland, crime rates remain below the state average but are on the rise. Family violence incidents have risen by 11.94 per cent in the past year in South Gippsland, and we know that on average in Victoria 1 in 3 women have experienced family violence. Nearly 35 per cent of the population is aged over 60, and with an ageing population, elder abuse, which is estimated to effect 1 in 6 older Australians, may present an emerging challenge in violence prevention.

*Our goal: Safe, respectful and inclusive communities.*

### Our Strategies

- Promote and support the prevention of family violence through awareness campaigns, training and community activities.
- Increase community understanding of respectful, safe and equitable relationships.
- Support opportunities to increase the involvement of men and boys in violence prevention.
- Increase gender equity in work, education and recreation settings.
- Improve access and advance inclusion in our communities.
- Actively celebrate community diversity including race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality.





## Improving wellbeing

By prioritising good mental health and wellbeing, we reduce stigma, increase social connection, improve physical health, promote productivity and create safer environments. Our mental health and our physical health are linked; people experiencing poor mental health may be at increased risk of poor physical health and similarly, people with poorer physical health may be more likely to experience poorer mental health. Wellbeing is an important determinant in overall health and a strong sense of wellbeing contributes to good mental health.

Emerging challenges to improving wellbeing were identified by South Gippsland health and wellbeing partners as; the rise of loneliness, climate anxiety and rising cost of living as challenges to wellbeing.

South Gippsland reports relatively strong social connection and wellbeing, with only 3 per cent of residents saying they have no close friends or family. Life satisfaction is high, with only 10.2 per cent of people reporting low or medium life satisfaction, compared to 19.6 percent in Gippsland and 22.3 percent across Victoria. 9.7 per cent of residents have a diagnosed mental health condition.

In contrast, alcohol-related harm is a major issue. 66.6 per cent of adults drink at levels that increase long-term risk, and alcohol-related death rates are 188 per 100,000, which is well above Victoria's 137. Hospital admissions for alcohol harm are also high at 563 per 100,000. Additionally, 12.7 per cent of adults smoke daily, and service accessibility remains a key local challenge.

Our goal: *Connected communities that are healthy, engaged and empowered.*

## Our Strategies

- Increase opportunities for social connectedness by improving access for all people to be included in community life, work, education and recreation.
- Decrease social isolation, particularly of priority population groups, through supporting community groups, volunteers and participation in art, culture, environment and recreation.
- Enhance through partnership, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing and cultural connectedness.
- Promote mental health and resilience in individuals by increasing knowledge and promoting opportunities for wellbeing improvement.
- Reduce harm from gambling, alcohol, tobacco and drugs through policies, programs and partnerships.
- Reduce stigma associated with mental illness, disability and neurodiversity across South Gippsland.
- Improve and advocate for accessibility of support services for all people across South Gippsland.





## Increasing Active Living

Active living supports everyone, at all stages of life, to live healthy, engaged and purposeful lives.

Regular physical activity is a well-known protective factor for preventing and managing chronic disease including cardiovascular disease, type-2 diabetes and certain cancers. Physical activity also plays an important role in improving quality of life, managing and decreasing pain, and promoting mental wellbeing.

South Gippsland health and wellbeing partners identified emerging challenges in this area as cost of living, safety and accessibility of active spaces.

South Gippsland loves sport! Our sport participation rate is 20.8 per cent, which is one of the highest across regional Victoria, and well above the state average of 14.4 per cent. Overall, sport participation remains lower for women and girls and declines across all genders after age 14.

Despite our sport engagement, 38.6 per cent of adults still don't meet physical activity guidelines. Whilst this is lower than the state average of 44 per cent, it remains a priority. Coronary heart disease is the leading cause of death in our region, highlighting the importance of maintaining active lifestyles across all age groups.

Our goal: *Connected and inclusive places and spaces which promote movement.*

## Our Strategies

- Plan, deliver and support parks, open spaces and public spaces for safe, active living for all ages and abilities.
- Promote, through a partnership approach, the increase of social prescribing\* across health care services.  
*\*Social prescribing involving the referral and connection of patients to non-medical activities, groups and services that improve health and wellbeing.*
- Promote and support initiatives that encourage participation in active movement and reduce sitting time for all people.
- Increase participation of women, girls, and other groups experiencing barriers in sport and active recreation through providing support to clubs, groups and facilities.
- Advocate for active travel through improved road, pedestrian and bike safety and accessibility, including by provision of appropriate infrastructure.







## Healthy Eating

Good nutrition is essential for health and wellbeing. It protects against chronic disease (including cardiovascular disease, type-2 diabetes, dementia, and certain cancers), and supports a healthy immune system as well as achieving and maintaining a healthy weight. In addition to these health benefits, healthy eating often has environmental co-benefits.

South Gippsland health and wellbeing partners identified barriers to healthy eating including cost, accessibility of healthy options, lack of locally available locally grown food and food literacy.

11.8 per cent of people across Gippsland experience severe food insecurity, while 20.4 percent of parents here, rely on low-cost, unhealthy foods, which is much higher than the Victorian average of 13 percent.

Only 4.8 per cent of adults meet the recommended five daily serves of vegetables, and 5.3 percent report drinking no water at all each day. On average, adults in Sout Gippsland consume just 4.8 cups of water daily.

Our goal: *Local, affordable food and healthy options.*

## Our Strategies

- Increase the availability of healthy food and drink options through policies, programs and awareness campaigns in work, education, recreation and public settings.
- Improve access and affordability of locally grown and produced healthy food by supporting and attracting investment in local food industries and businesses.
- Reduce food insecurity in South Gippsland with targeted support to vulnerable population groups.
- Support collaborative local community approaches to production and access to healthy food, particularly those that focus on equitable and sustainable practices.
- Make drinking tap water easy, appealing and accessible in public places.







## Tackling climate change and its impacts on health

Climate is a key determinant of health that affects other determinants and health equity. This is both related to ongoing changes and severe weather events such as heatwaves, floods, drought and bushfires. Climate change affects health in many ways – both directly and indirectly. Some of these impacts include changes in the spread of infectious diseases, worsening air quality, water quality, food insecurity and heat related health impacts including stroke, cardiovascular events, respiratory distress, and death.

Worldwide there has been significant increases in heat related deaths, particularly in older adults. Vulnerable population groups are at particular risk of climate related health impacts, contributed to by poor housing conditions and limited access to healthcare. Historically, storms and floods have been the most common severe weather events experienced in South Gippsland.

Locally, health and wellbeing partners identified the key challenges for this priority as; conflicting ideas on solutions, financial burden of climate action, potential for misinformation, and emotional and psychological impacts, particularly on young people.

*Our goal: A valued environment with supported, resilient communities.*

## Our Strategies

- Build understanding of, and mitigate the risks of climate change and its impact on health and wellbeing.
- Increase community resilience to prepare, respond, and recover from the effects of severe weather events.
- Support community and business capacity in adopting sustainable practices and renewable energy by actively engaging with communities and providing education and resources.
- Work towards future proofing South Gippsland to safeguard quality of living and wellbeing.
- Preserve, protect and enhance the natural environment across South Gippsland.
- Strengthen community knowledge, skills and understanding of the importance of maintaining and/or increasing canopy cover and green spaces to support biodiversity, thermal comfort and UV protection.



# On the Horizon

A Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan needs to adapt to changing needs within the community. There are some forecast changes to South Gippsland's built, natural and social environments which may influence elements of this Plan.

## Demographics:

The region's ageing population trend is projected to continue. Between 2025 and 2035, the number of people of retirement age is expected to rise by 30.5 per cent, with those aged 70+ expected to comprise 26 per cent of the population by 2035, up from 20.3 per cent in 2021. These changes will likely increase the demand for health and aged services, as well as create challenges in accessibility, transport, and the workforce.

There has been a growing number of sole-person and childless couple households in South Gippsland since 2001, which is likely to impact housing demand and type of housing required.

## Upcoming Major Projects:

Major projects planned across South Gippsland have the potential to significantly influence workforce, diversity rates, area demographics, as well as having flow on effects to housing, particularly rental availability and affordability.

- Operations at the Victorian Livestock Exchange Saleyards Koonwarra has expanded substantially following the closure of the Pakenham saleyards in June 2024. Future growth in this site would make it one of the largest saleyards in Victoria.
- Delburn Wind Farm is scheduled to start construction in late 2025.
- Marinus Link Electricity and Telecommunications Interconnector project is planned to commence early 2026, with construction set to last throughout the plan period.
- Bass Strait Oil and Gas infrastructure decommissioning is proposed to commence in 2027, with preparation works proposed to commence prior to this in Barry Beach Marine Terminal.
- The proposed development of several offshore wind projects in Gippsland into the 2030's, is likely to increase demand for planning and preparatory works, workforce attraction and housing demand in South Gippsland.

# Partners

The success of this Plan depends on partnerships and collaboration.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the development of this Plan, and to those who will contribute to its implementation over the next four years.

*We particularly acknowledge the following groups for their collaboration within the development stage of this Plan. Including Gippsland Centre Against Sexual Assault, Gippsland Family Violence Alliance, Gippsland Pride, Gippsland Primary Health Network, Gippsland Region Public Health Unit, Gippsland Southern Health Service, GippSport, Headspace, Latrobe Community Health Service, Latrobe Regional Hospital, Leongatha Community House, MyLi, Salvation Army, South Coast Prevention Team, South Gippsland Hospital and Victoria Police.*

A partnership approach is vital to the continual improvement of health and wellbeing for everyone in South Gippsland.

The next four years will see further engagement with organisations, services and groups as we work together to improve health and wellbeing across South Gippsland.



# Our Community

## What we heard from our community:

"[This Plan] reflects the community's values — especially around connection, safety, and access. The priorities are the right ones, and the focus on collaboration with partner organisations is essential."

"I'm concerned that the most marginalised people in our community are being left behind. Extra efforts need to be made to reach these groups. The prevalence of violence is really concerning."

"Leadership from our community leaders is required to make our area safe, improved health services (and education). [...] Many people struggle with new technology, especially the older, people with disabilities."

"I think we need to look after our community because if we don't have health and wellbeing in our community we do not function well."

"More inclusive and accessible recreation (not necessarily structured sport); parks, trails, swimming pools."

# Appendix

## Appendix One: Statistic Sources

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Shire Council