

Healthy People. Healthy Gippsland

Draft Community Participation & Engagement Plan 2024 – 2027

Gippsland Region Public Health Unit



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This document is designed to be flexible, evolving alongside the initiatives outlined in the Gippsland Region Public Health Unit Strategy 2023-2025. Underpinned by our values of being person-centered, working together, excellence, integrity, and respect. The plan outlines our commitment to collaborating with the community, our partners and stakeholders. Most importantly, it emphasises that their involvement is crucial to our collective success in making a positive impact.

Acknowledgment of Country

Gippsland Region Public Health Unit acknowledges the Gunaikurnai, Bunurong, Monero, Bidawel and Wurundjeri people, as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands on which our public health unit works across. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and future leaders. We recognise the ongoing connection to ancestral lands within and beyond Gippsland, and the strength, resilience and survival of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Gippsland Region Public Health Unit is committed to working in partnership with the community, partner organisations and stakeholders for better health outcomes for everyone, everywhere.

Gippsland Region Public Health Unit

Gippsland Region Public Health Unit (GRPHU) is led by Latrobe Regional Health to manage and respond to public health issues in the Gippsland region. GRPHU is one of nine local public health units across Victoria, working closely with the Department of Health in a state-wide system of public health delivery and response. Our service area spans from the outer south-eastern aspects of metropolitan Melbourne to the easternmost point of Victoria.

GRPHU works in partnership with local communities to deliver place-based policies, programs, and practices. Our key functions include:

- Managing notifiable diseases
- Chronic disease prevention
- Prevention & Population Health
- Environmental health
- Emergency management

These public health functions are strengthened by Aboriginal health leadership, health data analytics, surveillance, communications, community engagement, and research.

Our Values

The core values of Latrobe Regional Health and GRPHU guide our approach to engagement:

- Person-centered
- Working together
- Excellence
- Integrity
- Respect

Introduction

The Role of our Community Participation & Engagement Plan

The Community Participation & Engagement Plan, henceforth referred to as the Plan, details GRPHU's approach to community participation & engagement and helps us achieve our strategic objectives. GRPHU values the voices of our diverse communities and recognises their right to influence decisions that impact their health and wellbeing. GRPHU believe that involving the community, partner organisations and stakeholders in planning, delivery, and evaluation of projects and initiatives leads to:

- Improved health outcomes
- Enhanced trust and collaboration
- Informed decision-making
- Empowerment and capacity building for community, partners and GRPHU

By embedding community participation in our core functions, GRPHU aim to create a healthier Gippsland where every voice is heard, and every community member, partner organisation and stakeholder can contribute to shaping the public health that affects their lives.

Consultation

The Plan was developed with input from community, partner organisations, stakeholders and staff members. This involved:

- Survey questionnaire
- Review of community engagement plans at other health services
- Face-to-face community consultation

The key themes identified through consultation, engagement activities and surveys became the focus areas of the Plan.

Our Approach to Community Engagement

Engagement Principles

GRPHU is committed to the following principles, adapted from the Victorian Government Public Engagement Framework 2021-2025 (1), which guide our approach to all community participation activities:

- Meaningful: Being genuine and informing the final decision
- Inclusive: Being respectful and accessible
- Transparent: Being clear and open about what the public can and cannot influence
- Informed: Providing relevant and timely information to the public
- Accountable: Being responsive to the public
- Valuable: Beneficial for the community, partners, and GRPHU

Key Focus Areas of the Plan

- Structure and process
- Culture and shared capacity building
- Meaningful engagement
- Communication

Levels of Participation

Community participation involves different levels of engagement that offer varying degrees of input, influence, and action in decision-making. This is outlined by the Spectrum of Public Participation developed by the International Association of Public Participation (2). The levels of participation chosen are shaped by the purpose and focus of the community participation activity and the community, partner organisations and stakeholders who participate.

Our Plan

The plan outlines actions GRPHU will take over the next 3 years to achieve our focus areas and objectives.

Sharing Progress

Progress will be reported and shared with the community, partner organisations and stakeholders on our website.

Reviewing Progress

The plan will be reviewed in 2027.

Focus Area: Structure and Process

Objective:

1. Structures and processes in place to facilitate effective community engagement
2. Measure and evaluate the impact of community participation
3. Build capacity to collaborate with stakeholders
4. Share results and outcomes of activities with community, partner organisations and stakeholders

To enhance community engagement, GRPHU plans to implement structures and processes informed by community, partner organisations and stakeholders' consultation. This will include establishing roles and protocols to facilitate effective stakeholder interaction, measuring and evaluating the impact of our engagement activities through surveys and performance metrics, and building capacity for collaboration with stakeholders. GRPHU also aim to share results and outcomes of our activities, ensuring that community members, partner organisations and stakeholders see how their feedback has influenced decisions and improvements.

Focus Area	Objective	Action
Structure and process	Structures and processes in place to facilitate effective community engagement	Develop community engagement framework that includes clear guidelines, roles, and responsibilities.
		Develop process for recruitment, orientation, training and supporting community representatives.
		Develop processes to record community engagement activities.
	Measure and evaluate the impact of community engagement	Implement a system to capture and feedback engagement outcomes.
		Conduct annual reviews and publish reports on the impact of community engagement.
	Build capacity to collaborate with communities and partners	Identify ways to improve collaboration with communities in planning, designing, delivering, and evaluating projects and initiatives.
		Set up internal structures for partnering in projects with community participants.
		Establish formal partnerships with local community groups and organisations.
		Develop and implement joint initiatives with community partners to address local health issues.
	Share results and outcomes of activities with community and partners	Develop a communication plan to regularly update the community on engagement outcomes and actions taken.
		Ensure activities have a formal two-way communication process, where the community shares expertise and GRPHU shares project outcomes.
		Create and maintain an online platform where community members can view engagement results and provide feedback.

Focus Area: Culture and shared capacity building

Objective:

1. Build staff culture, knowledge and capacity to engage with the community, partner organisations and stakeholders
2. Continuously evolve community participation approach to ensure diverse engagement

GRPHU are committed to fostering a staff culture that values community engagement, which will be developed through targeted training and capacity-building efforts following community, partner organisations and stakeholders' feedback. GRPHU plans to continuously evolve our community participation approach to address diverse needs and preferences, ensuring that our strategies remain relevant and effective in promoting inclusive engagement.

Focus Area	Objective	Action
Culture and capacity building	Build staff culture, knowledge and capacity to engage with the community	Promote and communicate the Community Participation & Engagement Plan to staff.
		Promote and communicate the Community Engagement Framework to staff.
		Offer regular training and professional development opportunities on community engagement.
		Develop resources to support staff with community engagement.
		Identify engagement activities and develop a central system to track activities, participation rates, and outcomes.
		Implement evaluation processes consistently and use learnings to inform practice improvements.
		Continuously evolve community engagement approach to ensure diverse engagement
	Continuously evolve community engagement approach to ensure diverse engagement	Identify technologies and innovative practices to capture community views and expertise. E.g. Different technology platforms, new engagement methods
		Conduct regular consultation of community needs and preferences to adapt engagement strategies.
		Establish a community database to provide ongoing input and guidance on engagement activities.
		Use plain and simple language in all written and spoken communication to achieve better outcomes.
		Ensure all communication materials adhere to accessibility standards by using accessible fonts, appropriate font sizes, and high readability standards.
		Increase accessibility to translated written and spoken communication.

Focus Area: Meaningful engagement

Objective:

1. Partner with the community, partner organisations and stakeholders in planning, delivery and evaluation
2. Support a network of engaged community participants
3. Promote inclusive and accessible participation opportunities
4. Responsive Engagement

GRPHU are committed to partnering closely with the community in planning, delivery, and evaluation. GRPHU plans to support a network of engaged community participants and promote inclusive and accessible participation opportunities by addressing barriers identified through community feedback. These actions aim to ensure that our public health projects and initiatives are collaborative, responsive, and effectively meet community, partner organisations and stakeholders needs.

Focus Area	Objective	Action
Meaningful engagement	Partner with the community in planning, delivery and evaluation	Involve community representatives in design and review of project and initiatives.
		Establish project groups to provide community input into a project.
		Expand representation of those from diverse cultural backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, gender-diverse individuals, LGBTQIA+ communities, people with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups.
		Establish processes to evaluate community engagement activities.
	Support a network of engaged community participants	Develop and maintain a community participant register to track and engage volunteers.
		Develop internal resources to support community participants who work with us.
		Provide incentives and recognition for active community participants.
	Promote inclusive and accessible participation opportunities	Use traditional and social media to promote participation opportunities.
		Utilise existing relationships to share participation opportunities.
		Connect and engage diverse groups, including those often underrepresented (such as LGBTQIA+ communities, people with disabilities, and gender-diverse individuals), to ensure broad-based participation and to share stories.
		Include diverse mechanisms for engagement in all consultations (e.g., face-to-face activities at various times and locations) that accommodate the needs of different groups, including accessibility considerations.
		Use diverse communication channels to reach various community groups, ensuring that messaging is inclusive and accessible to all, including those from the LGBTQIA+ community and people with disabilities.
		Partner with local organisations to host engagement activities in community-friendly locations.
Responsive Engagement	Respond to community needs, e.g., events, emergencies or disasters, by providing a presence and/or support.	

Focus Area: Communication

Objective:

1. Increase community, partner organisations and stakeholders' confidence in GRPHU by improving understanding of our services
2. Provide community, partner organisations and stakeholders with information to enable informed decision-making

To build community, partner organisations and stakeholders' confidence in GRPHU, we plan to improve understanding of our services through clear and consistent communication, guided by community, partner organisations and stakeholders' input. Additionally, GRPHU will provide the community, partner organisations and stakeholders with relevant and accessible information to enable informed decision-making, ensuring that our messaging supports transparency and trust in our public health efforts.

Focus Area	Objective	Action
Communication	Increase community confidence in GRPHU by improving understanding of our services	Use a range of media to educate the community on health topics and promote GRPHU achievements.
		Promote benefits and outcomes of community participation in local health services.
		Launch an awareness campaign highlighting the services and successes of GRPHU.
		Promote good news stories using a range of media.
		Expand and promote volunteering opportunities.
	Provide community with information to enable informed decision-making	Provide information that helps community understand public health.
		Involve community in development and review of plain language fact sheets and guides on health topics.
		Conduct health literacy campaigns to ensure information is developed and shared using simple, plain English.
		Use of accessible formats in all materials, including adherence to readability standards, to ensure inclusivity for individuals with disabilities.
	Strengthen partnerships and improve collaborative efforts with GRPHU	Translate written and spoken communication into the five most common languages in the region.
		Develop and implement regular communication strategies, including newsletters, updates, and meetings to keep partners and community informed
		Establish formal collaboration frameworks and agreements to align priorities and objectives.
Create joint initiatives and projects that leverage the strengths and resources of both GRPHU and its partners.		
		Map community events and media connections to build GRPHU awareness and relationships.

Looking to the future

As we move forward, our next steps will focus on implementing the actions outlined in the plan, ensuring that they are informed by ongoing partner organisation, stakeholder and community feedback. We will establish clear structures and processes, enhance staff capacity for effective engagement, and continue to evolve our participation strategies to reflect the needs of the community. A core element of our approach will be transparency—measuring the impact of our actions and sharing the results with the community to build trust and demonstrate the value of their contributions.

By embedding these practices into our everyday operations, we aim to generate more meaningful engagement. The plan serves as the foundation for a healthier Gippsland where community voices help shape public health initiatives, ensuring that they are responsive, inclusive, and reflective of the needs of the people in Gippsland.

Glossary of Terms

Community: A group of individuals or groups of people that can be defined by a geographic location, shared interests, or cultural identity. People may identify with multiple communities within our region, but some may not belong to any community by choice or circumstance. Everyone has equal rights to access, equity, and participation.

Community Participant: Any individual who engages with GRPHU in any capacity, whether for a one-time interaction or ongoing involvement.

Community Participation / Engagement: Activities and processes where the opinions, concerns, needs and aspirations of community, partner organisations and stakeholders are sought and are incorporated into the planning, design and delivery of projects and initiatives.

Diversity: the things that shape us and make us unique and influence personal perspectives. Diversity can include ethnicity, gender, age, race, religion, disability and sexual orientation. It also includes unique characteristics and experiences, such as communication style, career path, life experience, educational background, geographic location, income level, marital status, and parental status (3).

Inclusion: occurs when people feel, and are, valued and respected (3).

Stakeholder: A stakeholder is an individual or group that has an interest, stake or decision-making role in the outcome of a decision, initiative or program. Stakeholders can be internal or external such as staff, government, partners, health consumers or community members.

References

1. Victoria State Government (2021) [Internet] Public Engagement Framework 2021-2025, Accessed August 2, 2024. https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-12/Public%20Engagement%20Framework%20-%202018%20November%202021_0.pdf
2. International Association for Public Participation. (2018) [Internet] IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum. Accessed September 19, 2024. [IAP2 IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum - IAP2 Australasia](#)
3. Department of Premier and Cabinet (2019) [Internet] DPC Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2019–2021. Accessed August 2, 2024. <https://www.vic.gov.au/dpc-diversity-and-inclusion-strategy-2019-2021/what-dowe-mean-diversity-and-inclusion>.

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