

Leading the Way

Councils creating healthier communities

A Resource
Guide for
Councillors

P A R T

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Developed with funding from the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation in partnership with the Municipal Association of Victoria and the Victorian Department of Human Services.

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FOREWORD

VicHealth Strategic Directions 1999-2002 sets out to address inequalities in health that are evident in the Victorian population, and the underlying social factors that influence these inequalities. It also emphasises the importance of partnerships with sectors other than health to promote the health of Victorians.

VicHealth acknowledges the key role that local government plays in creating the environment for communities to prosper and enjoy improved health and wellbeing. Local government can directly influence things like employment, social support, access to sports and cultural activities which are key ingredients in the health and wellbeing of the community.

In partnership with the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), VicHealth held a consultation forum with senior representatives from local government and the Department of Human Services to determine how we could support councils in promoting health. More than simple health awareness messages, the focus was on addressing the social and economic factors that determine the health of a community.

Participants agreed on the need for a resource package that could explain the factors influencing health and wellbeing, and equip councils to respond to local circumstances with practical solutions.

This resource package provides councillors and senior managers with a considerable amount of information and tools. These will help them to develop policy and strategic priorities to address the social and economic issues of health and wellbeing in an integrated way across the planning processes of council, particularly municipal public health planning. It has been developed to complement the *Environments for Health* framework for public health planning, produced for local government by the Department of Human Services.

Representatives from the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), the Department of Human Services, Victorian Local Governance Association, the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, local government councillors, and senior managers and planners have come together to form a Project Advisory Group. This group in turn has worked together with consultants, PDF Management Services, to develop *Leading the Way: Councils Creating Healthier Communities*.

Given the diversity of communities and the range of approaches used by councils to manage their strategic and business plans, the resource package had to be highly flexible. It was particularly important, therefore, to test the resource package with a range of councils. The seven councils who participated in the pilot were the Shires of Corangamite, South Gippsland, Towong, and Yarra Ranges, and the Cities of Banyule, Brimbank and Greater Dandenong. Councillors, Chief Executive Officers and Senior Managers of each of these councils involved themselves in the pilot and feedback process.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank all those who have contributed to the development of *Leading the Way: Councils Creating Healthier Communities*. I encourage you to use this resource to strengthen the core planning processes of council and provide improved health for your community.



Dr Rob Moodie
Chief Executive Officer

1 INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade it has become increasingly clear that our health and wellbeing depend on a number of factors. Many things contribute to our capacity to enjoy good health. These include our genetic make-up, the neighbourhoods, families and communities we grow up in, the lifestyle choices we make, the work we do and the medical care we use.

Local government plays a key role in creating the environment for communities to prosper and enjoy improved health and wellbeing. Acting at a local level, councils can directly influence factors like municipal planning, employment, social support, transport, community participation and access. Research has shown that all of these are key contributors to the good health of the population.

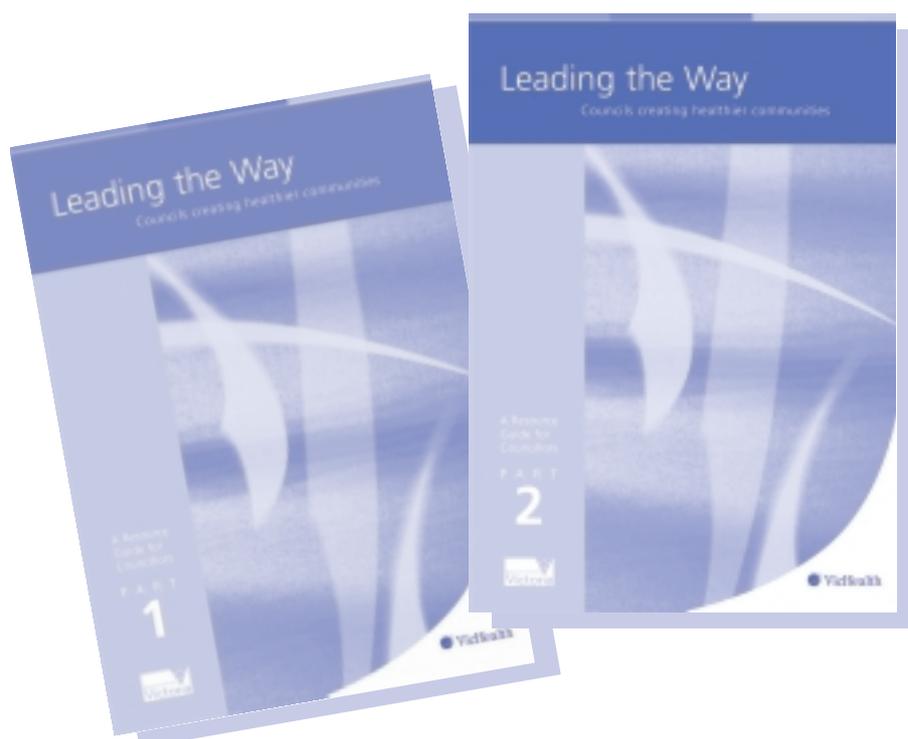
Understanding how these ingredients all work together is the first step for councils to take towards a healthier future. One of the ways to ensure that councils make good decisions about the health and wellbeing of their communities is for councillors to ask the right questions about the community, its needs and its strengths.

The Resource Package

This Resource Package is designed to provide councillors and senior managers with the information and tools they need to develop policy and directions that will create healthier communities.

Part One provides an overview and practical insights into the social influences on the health and wellbeing of communities.

Part Two provides questions and other tools to help in making decisions about policy, strategic planning and performance management.



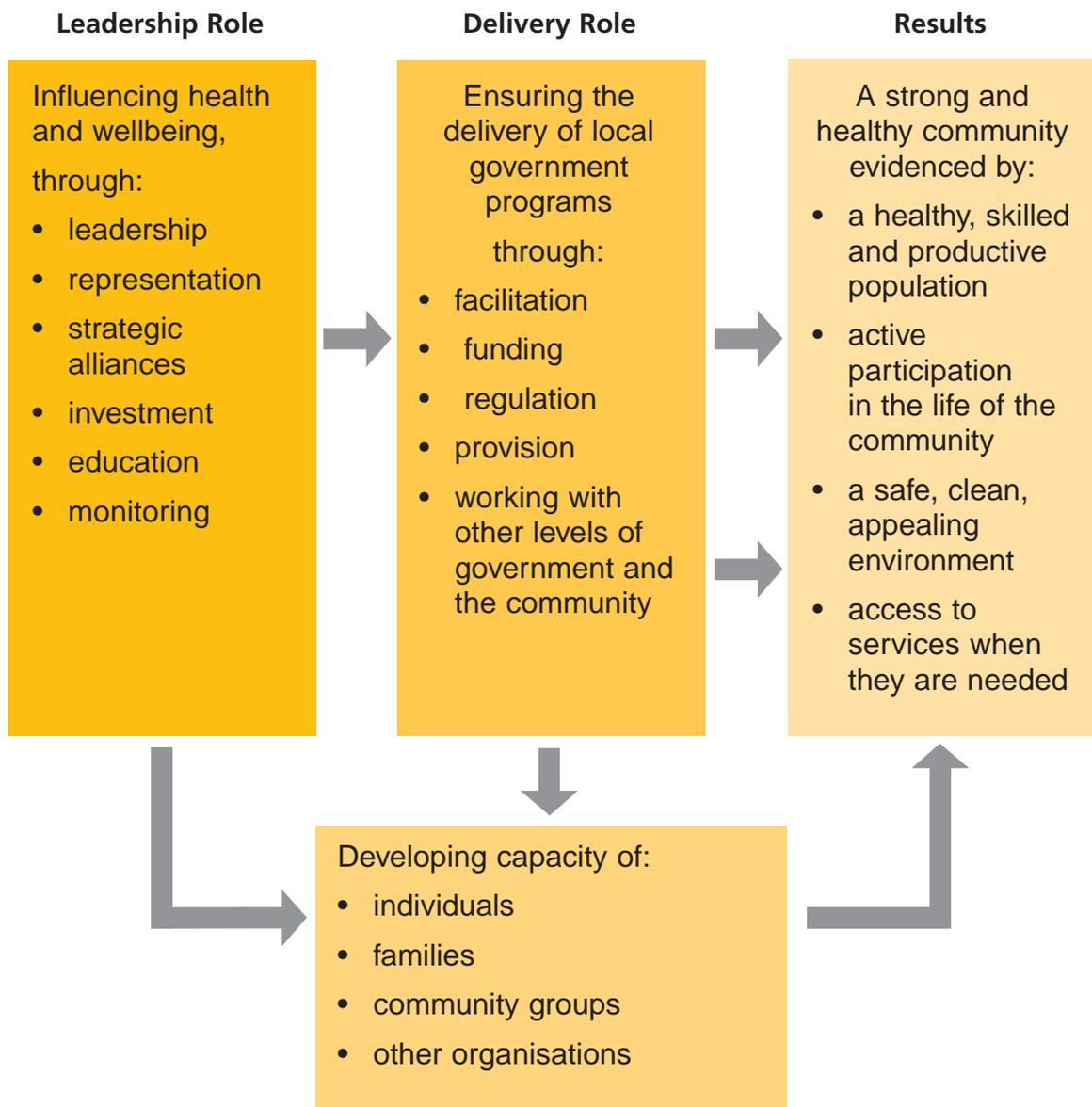
2 THE LEAD ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Providing the leadership to deliver results

Local government's role in the life of the community is broad. Under the law, councils have a clear responsibility to make sure that their communities are able to function properly. Councils also have an equally clear duty

to create an environment in which people not only survive, but thrive.

The model below illustrates the roles local government might take, and how councils can act as 'community builders' to achieve the desired result: a strong and healthy community.



Sometimes the role of council is to encourage others to do the right thing.

Councils are not the only ones responsible for achieving these results. The Federal Government, the State Government and the business and community sectors each have a part to play.

Recent examples where councils have taken up the leadership challenge include:

- campaigns to support the clothing and footwear industries
- lobbying against the closure of banks
- monitoring the sale of tobacco to minors
- resisting the inappropriate siting of a toxic waste dump
- driving community renewal and community building initiatives.

Investing in health and wellbeing is investing in the future

Community prosperity enables councils to provide a healthy and caring environment for their residents. In turn, healthy and active communities can pursue the economic opportunities that create prosperity. This leads to a 'cycle of prosperity' as shown below.

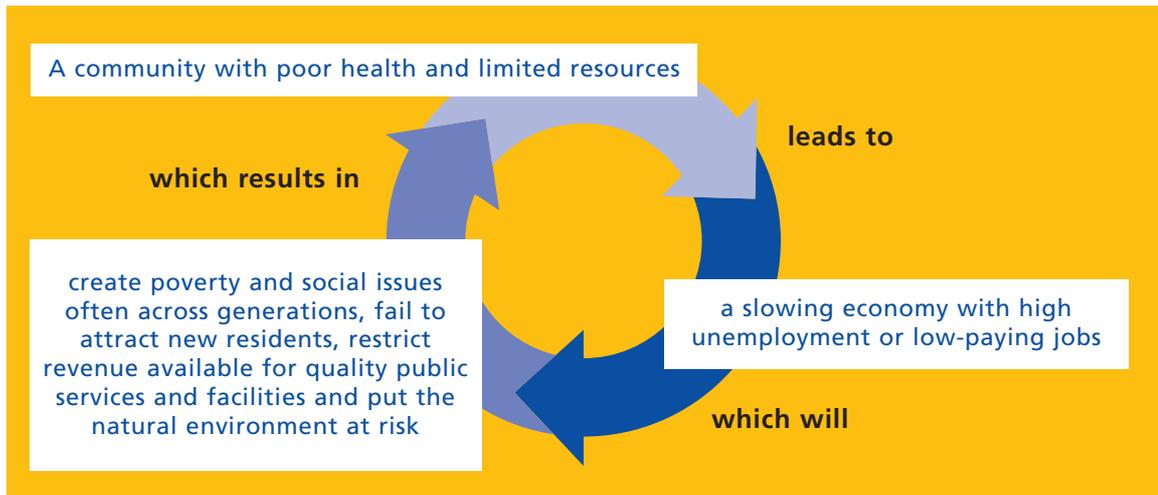
The Cycle of Prosperity



Adapted from *Oregon Shines* 1989 www.econ.state.or.us

The cycle of prosperity can also operate in reverse. When poverty and poor health combine, it becomes a difficult cycle to break. In marginalised urban communities or depressed rural areas, where low income and unemployment have continued across generations, levels of wellbeing become markedly lower and the community has a reduced capacity to break the cycle.

The Reverse Cycle of Prosperity



Adapted from *Oregon Shines* 1989 www.econ.state.or.us

Sometimes the cycle of prosperity needs a 'kick start.'

This may mean council working with other levels of government and the business and community sectors to find practical solutions and to stimulate local activity.

Something to think about

FACT:

People with low incomes are more likely to die early (and to suffer more illnesses) than people with high incomes, regardless of age, sex, race and place of residence.



QUESTION:

How can your council 'kick start' the creation of job opportunities for men and women in the community?

3 INFLUENCES ON HEALTH & WELLBEING

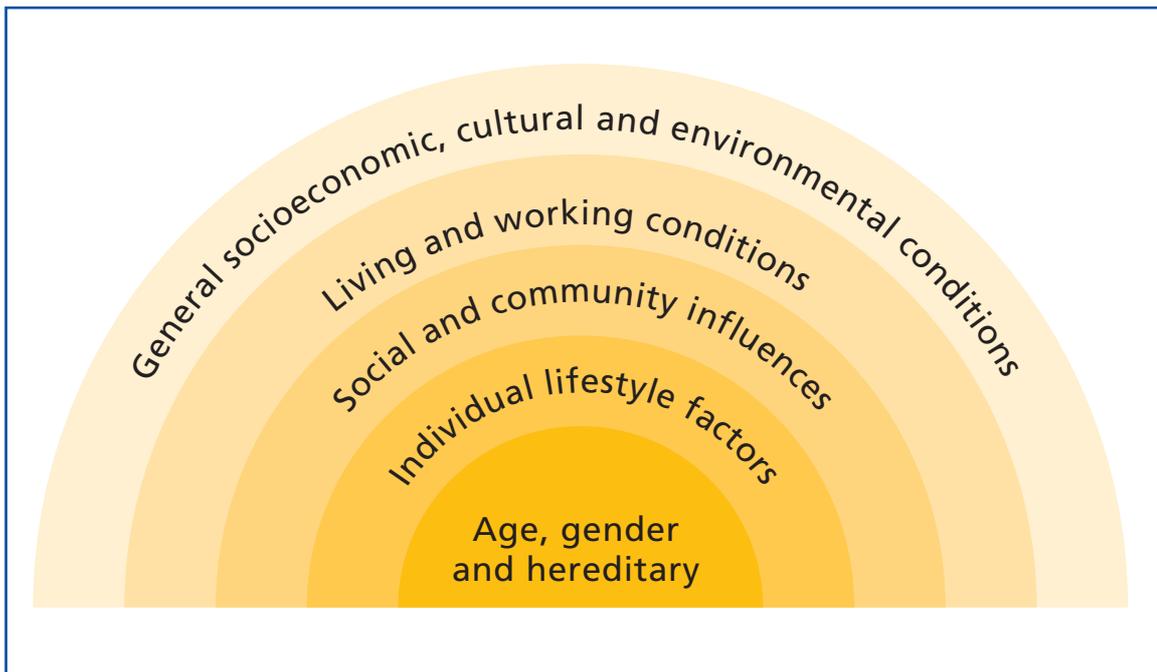
Enjoying good health and wellbeing is not just good luck

Enjoying good health and wellbeing means

- **Good start** genes, food, water, air, housing, space, transport, safety
- **Good future** education, skills, work, income, self-esteem
- **Good care** life skills, health care and community services, social policy
- **Good support** parents, family, friends, social connections

These influences are often referred to by people working in the health sector as the **'social determinants of health'**: that is, those social, economic and environmental factors that can determine whether we are likely to enjoy good health.

Determinants of Health



Source: Dahlgren and Whitehead (1991)

The state of our health makes a huge difference to the way in which we participate in our community, the work we do and the way we spend our time.

Enjoying good health enables us to

- enjoy life
- take on change and challenge
- survive injury, illness, pain, disappointment and sadness
- have confidence in ourselves
- participate in social and economic life

What is 'health'?

The World Health Organisation definition of health is:

'...health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'

Enjoying good health and wellbeing means more than just good medical care

While high-quality medical care is a key component of good health and wellbeing, it is only part of the story. Paying attention to the other factors that influence health can help avoid the need for medical care. This is widely acknowledged by the medical profession itself.

More than medicine

It is one of the great and sobering truths of our profession that modern health care probably has less impact on the population than economic status, education, housing, nutrition and sanitation. Yet...we have fostered the idea that abundant, readily available high quality health care would be some kind of panacea for all the ills of society and the individual. This is a fiction, a hoax.

'Improving Health: It Doesn't Take a Revolution'; 2000 Auerbach et al

Good health and wellbeing is council's business

The *'...economic status, education, housing, nutrition and sanitation'* mentioned above, are everyday concerns of council. Many councils will be involved routinely in job creation, home and community care services, sewerage and health inspections.

Council also influences the way in which people can take part in the life of the community through such things as the election process, consultation and other public accountability mechanisms, and cultural and recreation activities. A sense of participating in the community is itself a factor influencing health.

As a leader, council must understand how it affects the health and wellbeing of its community, and identify what it can do proactively to create a healthier community.

Be proactive

'Governments should not just pull drowning people out of the river, but they should move upstream and see who or what is pushing them in – they should focus on the determinants of disease and not the disease itself.'

'Using the Investment Triangle – Towards Process Guidelines' 2000 McMahon et al

Something to think about

FACT:

Being socially isolated costs lives, while strong, supportive social networks improve health at home, at work and in the community.



QUESTION:

Has your Council developed safe, communal places for people to gather and interact?



4 CREATING A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY

Identifying areas for action

The ways in which council can influence health and wellbeing will depend on the population make-up of the community and its priorities, but will involve the following:

- altering our surroundings – for example, through buildings, parks and facilities, roads, paths, and other infrastructure.
This is the **Built /Physical dimension**.
- creating opportunities for people to participate in the life of the community.
This is the **Social dimension**.
- encouraging economic development and distributing our wealth.
This is the **Economic dimension**.
- looking after our natural environment so that it continues to nurture us.
This is the **Natural dimension**.

The following table illustrates the activities councils carry out under these different dimensions.

Action Areas

Environmental Dimensions	Components	Council Action Areas – Examples
Built / Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of infrastructure • Amenities: parks, street lighting, roads, footpaths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land use planning • Transport and traffic management • Recreation facilities
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of community • Participation • Perceptions of safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community support • Art and cultural development • Library services
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic policy • Industrial development • Employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community economic development • Access and equity
Natural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geography • Air & water quality • Native vegetation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water quality • Waste management • Energy consumption

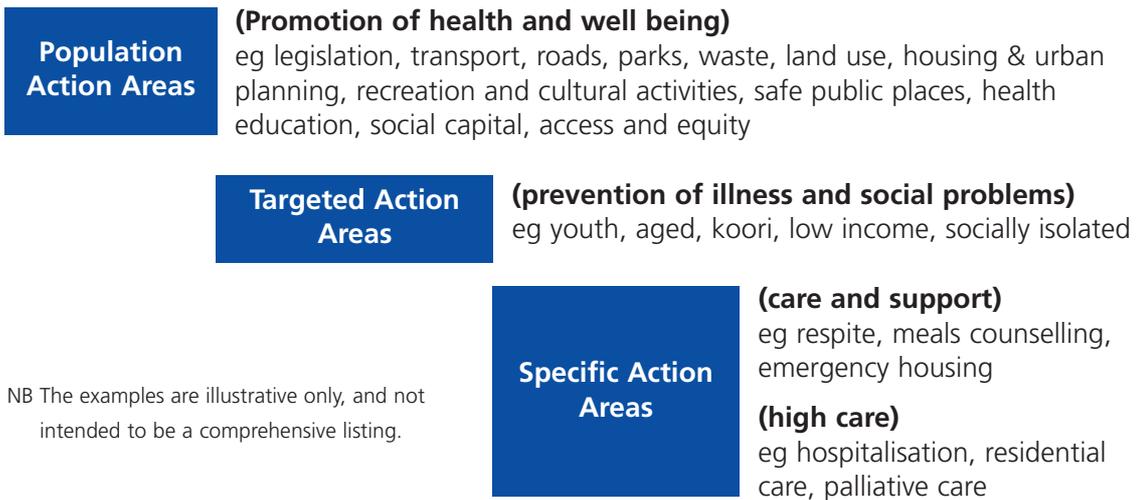
Adapted from *Environments for Health* – Department of Human Services Victoria

The breadth of activity that is possible across the four dimensions means that there are many opportunities for councils to directly or indirectly influence the health and wellbeing of their communities.

Focusing on everyone in the community

Council can contribute to the health and wellbeing of the entire community. This occurs at a range of levels as illustrated below and provides a focus for council 'action areas'.

Level of Action



NB The examples are illustrative only, and not intended to be a comprehensive listing.

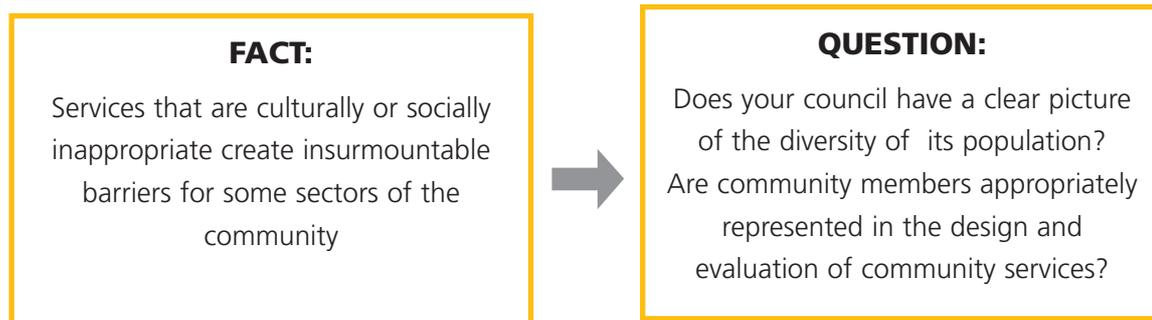
Some members of the community are more vulnerable to poor health, and are therefore less able to participate fully in the community. This might be the result of illness, injury or lack of mobility. It may also result from lack of income or skills. This is often described as experiencing 'health and wellbeing inequalities'. Typical members of this group are people with a disability, aged people, young people and Koori people. The following diagram illustrates the risk that people in these circumstances might face without an effort on the part of councils and others.

Risk of health and wellbeing inequality



Local government has a particular responsibility to ensure that:

- vulnerable people in the community are protected and cared for
- physical or cultural barriers that prevent people from sharing in the prosperity of the community are removed.



Local government can contribute to the health and wellbeing of its residents at each of the levels and in any of the environmental dimensions illustrated in the table below.

Examples of Action areas

Level	Action areas			
	 BUILT	 SOCIAL	 ECONOMIC	 NATURAL
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • land use • transport & traffic • facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • arts & cultural development • library services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • industry development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • waste • air quality • stormwater • safe beaches
Targeted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • access • specific facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • access and equity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • community gardens
Specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emergency housing • residential facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • personal support • drug services • carer support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • housing subsidies • employment 	

NB These examples are illustrative only and not intended to be a comprehensive listing.

These 'action areas' are not necessarily isolated from one another. A single strategy (an economic renewal initiative, for example) may cover several of them at once.

A Case Study

Renewal of Donald

Responding to the decline of services, business life and population, the town of Donald decided to face the challenge. Economic initiatives were launched to attract residents to the town and keep them there. Packages including relocation assistance and six months' free rent were offered to skilled people, and cash incentives were provided to build a home in the town. In the first ten years of the strategy, Donald supported the establishment of 23 new businesses and reversed its population decline.

Since then the Donald 2000 Committee, with the continued support of the Shire of Buloke Council, has successfully campaigned to keep the bank open. It continues to offer prizes and other incentives to encourage home building in the town. Besides recognising the value of home-building, the community recognised the employment value of having a strong building industry in the town. Similarly, there has been a strong focus on aged accommodation; it keeps people in town and also releases homes for younger people.

'The case study of the Donald Development Committee is a great example of what can be achieved when an active community group, together with a forward thinking local Council, combines to stimulate and initiate community self help projects.' Greg Cahill, Social Researcher.

Adapted from 'A Kit for Small Town Renewal' by Kenyon et al, 2001 Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation Publication No 011043

The initiative described in the story of Donald might be mapped in 'action areas' as follows:

Examples of Action areas

Level	Action areas			
	 BUILT	 SOCIAL	 ECONOMIC	 NATURAL
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • housing subdivision development • facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attracting residents • library services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • industry development • keeping banking services • housing incentives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • land use
Targeted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • aged accommodation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keeping young people in the town 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • employment • affordable housing 	

Finding and using community resources

Economic restructuring, changing demographics, patterns and types of illness and social issues continue to affect virtually every community. Some have been harder hit than others.

For example:

- many rural communities have lost their economic base, and even much of their population
- many suburbs on the urban fringes have continued to grow, but without services, cohesion, identity or focus
- some urban communities have struggled with huge pockets of disadvantage that seem overwhelming.

The traditional response to communities in trouble has been to focus on needs, deficiencies and problems.

Responding to the local issues means understanding both the needs and the capacities that exist within the community and making the most of them.

The benefit of this approach is that not only are needs identified, but as the assets available to the community are explored and examined, solutions are often uncovered too.

Sometimes these assets are going to be existing facilities, sometimes they will be about people prepared to help each other out, and at other times there might be an economic opportunity that benefits the whole community. In the story of Donald, the community recognised the simple value of vacant land and the immeasurable value of the entrepreneurship and commitment of its residents.

There is no one recipe for how to mobilise community strengths

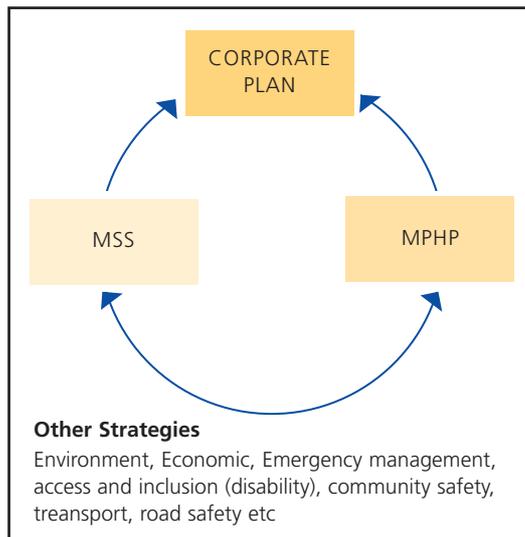
However, there are numerous examples of what communities have done through innovation, creativity, ingenuity and sheer collective will.

See Part 2 case studies for other examples



5 PLANNING WHAT TO DO

Councils have a number of legislative requirements to produce public plans. Each of these plans deals with issues that will impact on the health and wellbeing of the community – some explicitly, like the Municipal Public Health Plan (MPHP).



However, it may be the Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS), or the Corporate Plan that best expresses council's commitment to a health and wellbeing focus.

Of course these plans may not be known by these titles.

They may be called the 'community plan' or the 'health and wellbeing plan' or some other name that the council considers best describes them.

Environments of Health
– Department of Human Services Victoria

The planning process itself can be complex. Planning can occur at a broad level over a long time frame – expressing strategic intent and priorities, for example – or it can cover the short and medium term: expressing business activities for the coming year or two.

Planning can also have quite different subjects

- **a particular target group** e.g. Aged Plan or Youth Plan
- **an outcome** e.g. an Access and Equity Plan
- **a product** e.g. Housing Plan
- **a business unit** e.g. Parks and Reserves Plan.

It can be difficult, too, to undertake planning that covers all the issues relevant to the particular area being covered, while still being aware of broader impacts. The key to successful (and frustration-free) planning is understanding what issues need to be considered, and ensuring that the right questions are asked about the groups that may experience health and wellbeing inequalities.

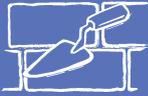
It doesn't matter where these questions are asked – simply that they are asked and that the 'root causes' of an issue are exposed.

The important thing is to ask the right questions and to ensure that the answers are available for any other planning activities.

For example, if there is a Youth Plan, a Housing Plan process would simply take into account the action areas relating to housing. If no Youth Plan exists, then the Housing Plan process would need to ask questions (and have them answered by residents and other experts) about the housing needs of young people.

Youth Plan	Action areas			
	 BUILT	 SOCIAL	 ECONOMIC	 NATURAL
Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> skate park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> youth council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> training housing subsidy 	
Youth at risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> youth shelter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> drug counselling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> emergency relief 	

Housing Plan	Action areas			
	 BUILT	 SOCIAL	 ECONOMIC	 NATURAL
Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> youth shelter 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> housing subsidy 	
Aged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> aged units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> home visitor referral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> housing subsidy relief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> safe streetscape

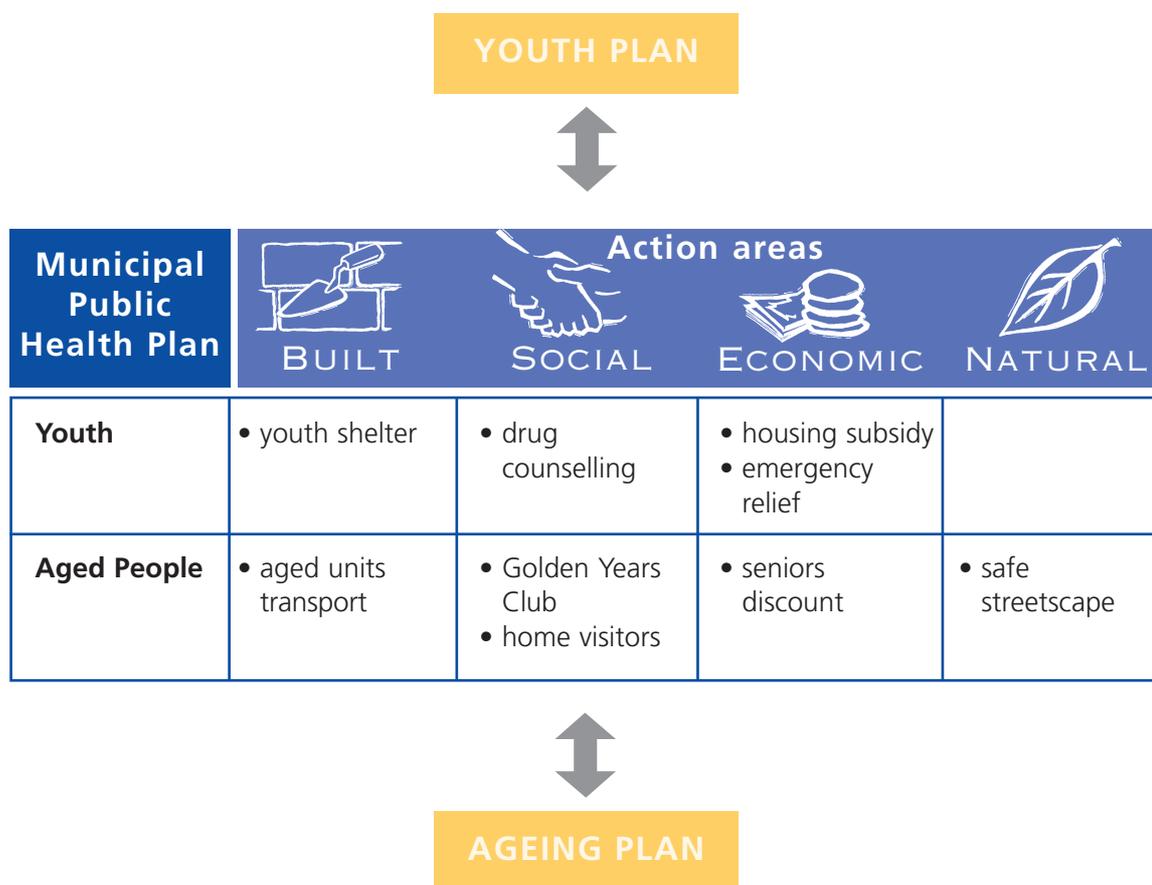
Ageing Plan	Action areas			
	 BUILT	 SOCIAL	 ECONOMIC	 NATURAL
Aged People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> aged units transport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Golden Years Club 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> housing subsidy seniors discount 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> safe streetscape
Frail elderly		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> home visitors 		

Integrated Planning

This integrated approach to planning means that links can be made immediately between various action areas. It avoids the costly duplication of separate planning for all the different council activities.

That is, the information from the Youth Plan and the Ageing Plan are used in the Housing Plan. Had the Housing Plan occurred first, the information from the Housing Plan could have been used in the Youth Plan and Ageing Plan respectively.

Similarly, the information from any of these sources could be used to help develop the Municipal Public Health Plan. The diagram below illustrates how different planning processes might be better integrated to streamline planning and to ensure that the issues are adequately covered.



In this way the Municipal Public Health Plan (MPHP) can capture all 'action areas' that will impact directly or indirectly on health and wellbeing.

This will reduce duplication of effort across planning processes.

Many tools and checklists are included in *Environments for Health –Municipal Public Health Plan Framework*, a manual developed by the Department of Human Services to help council officers with this task.

Planning with the community

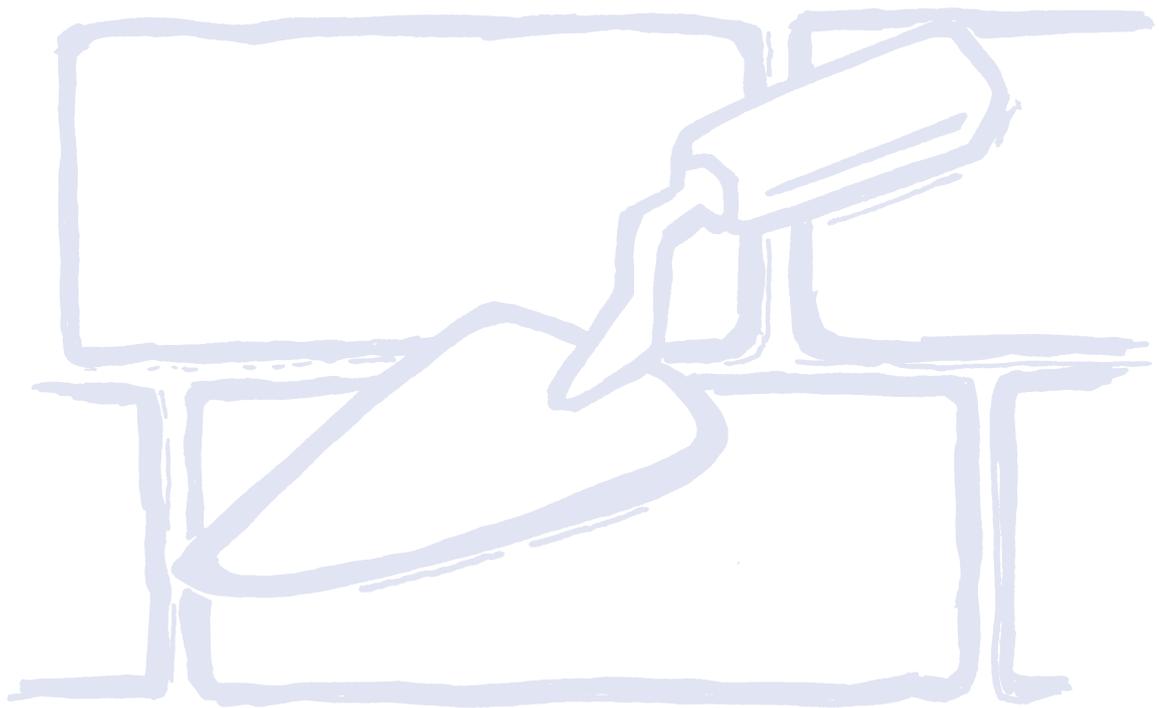
It is critical that those affected by the decisions of council are actively invited in some way into the planning process. The input of people who are closest to the issue will bring valuable perspectives and insights. This will also ensure the validity of the planning process and the action areas.

Best Value principles mean that councils must be 'responsive to the needs of the community', based on regular consultation and reporting. These principles reinforce values consistent with creating healthy communities: for example, participation, opportunities for local employment, partnership and environmental sustainability.

The role council takes, once it has identified and decided on an 'action area', will depend strongly on who else has an interest. Whether this is purely a leadership role or a delivery role, joint planning provides a firm basis for forming the kind of strategic alliances necessary to drive change.

REMEMBER

Deciding on an 'action area' does not mean council has to manage or fund the solution. As a leader in the community, many options are available, such as raising questions and issues, lobbying, facilitating and supporting other interest groups or service providers.



6 WHERE TO FROM HERE?

As a councillor or senior manager, you are involved in decisions that may impact on whether your community enjoys good health and wellbeing. It makes sense to prevent ill health and help people get on with their lives. Getting to the root causes of issues in your community (by asking the right questions) will help you to do this.

Some councils, like the ones below, are well on the way to making the improvement of health a priority.

Two Case Studies

The Brimbank Community Plan 2000-2005

Working together, council and the community developed a Community Plan. The Plan was two years in the making and involved gathering information from experts and consulting with the community at a very early stage in the planning process.

The aim of the Plan is to improve the health and quality of life in Brimbank and strengthen community ties. The Plan helps Council set priorities and balance the needs and interests of different groups in its five planning districts.

The Plan is in two parts. The first focuses on four strategies that affect the whole municipality; governing responsibility, community involvement and community safety, and celebrating cultural diversity. The second part contains action plans for each of Brimbank's five planning districts.

www.brim.vic.gov.au

Moreland City Council: Urban Villages

To accommodate change -- demographic, household composition, service utilisation and economic -- and retain a sustainable city, Moreland City Council has identified a number of "urban villages" where change will be focused and managed. The economic, environmental, social and cultural needs of the whole area and the seven urban villages -- located close to public transport, at intersections of main roads and close to other facilities -- will be considered in creating the Moreland City Plan.

In the words of the Mayor, Councillor Robert Larocca, "The challenge for the Council and the community in partnership over the next 12 months is to assess the types of change that are desirable and appropriate in these neighbourhoods. Some locations will require protection and enhancement of their character, whilst in others, more development maybe welcome."

A highly consultative process is used to decide the type of housing, shops, facilities, public transport and open space residents want. One example of a good outcome from this process is Merlynston where consultations around the urban village structure identified a Reserve as a key piece of open space in the local area. Council plans to improve the park with financial assistance from state government.

www.moreland.vic.gov.au

Both of these approaches, even though they are different, will create a healthier community for the people of these municipalities. This is because each includes a process that actively involves the community in finding solutions and looks across the built, social, economic and natural dimensions for answers.

Part Two of this Resource Package is designed to help you make a difference too.

It includes:

- questions you can ask about your local area that will guide your policy, planning and service development decisions
- case studies of how other people have approached issues similar to those you might encounter.

Help your council lead the way



