



# Wellbeing in Victoria: a strategy to promote good mental health

2025–2035





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Available at the [Department of Health website <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health/prevention-and-promotion/wellbeing-strategy>](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health/prevention-and-promotion/wellbeing-strategy)

# Acknowledgements

We proudly acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First Peoples and the Traditional Owners and custodians of the lands and waters on which we live, learn, work and play. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and leaders, past and present. We recognise the ongoing enrichment Aboriginal peoples, culture and communities bring to the cultural landscape of this state. We acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded.

Since time immemorial, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have practised their lores, customs and languages and nurtured Country through spiritual, material and economic connections to land, water and resources. These connections are central to Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing.

This strategy has been developed in partnership with the Balit Durn Durn Centre of Excellence and a specific engagement strategy with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians. We hope that this strategy will facilitate action to better understand and address the experiences and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in relation to mental health and wellbeing.

More broadly, we hope that it will promote healing and encourage all Victorians to learn more about the deep wisdom of social and emotional wellbeing that is held in the world's oldest continuing culture.

We know we get better outcomes when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are making the decisions that affect their own communities. Victoria's Treaty process and self-determination gives us a pathway to give First Peoples a say on the policies that impact First Peoples' lives. We commit to working proactively to support this work in line with the aspirations of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Victoria. We will continue to work with the Balit Durn Durn Centre, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria as we implement this strategy.

We look forward to a time where, through the Treaty process and self-determination, we have recognised the wrongs of the past, made peace, and can walk together with greater respect, understanding and connection, and fully celebrate the strength, resilience and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Victoria.

## Recognition of lived and living experience

We proudly recognise the lived and living experience of Victorians. We value and embrace the rich tapestry of stories, insights and expertise drawn from different walks of life, including experiences of mental illness, suicide, substance use and addiction.

In developing this Wellbeing Strategy, we spoke to people about their needs and ideas to improve wellbeing. We heard from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and leaders, people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, cultures, faiths, ages, abilities, genders, sexualities and places, as well as from practitioners and researchers. We spoke to people with lived and living experience of mental illness, substance use and addiction who have valuable insights from their approaches to recovery. While we took great

care to address potential barriers to engagement, we acknowledge our efforts can always be strengthened.

We honour those who contributed to this important work. We heard stories of discrimination and struggle, and stories of persistence, strength and hope. Every anecdote has contributed to this plan. We thank everyone for sharing their deeply held desire for positive change. Your insights and dedication are our driving force for change. Your continued interest and support will be instrumental in bringing this work to life. Thank you for leading the way.

# Minister's foreword

## Wellbeing is essential to a healthy and prosperous Victoria, now and for future generations.



When we are well, we are resilient. We function more effectively, engage with others, maintain strong relationships and work together towards common goals. It's what builds a vibrant, harmonious community and a strong economy.

The Victorian Government has done more than any Australian jurisdiction to improve our mental health services. We established Australia's first-ever Royal Commission to look into our mental health system and we accepted all Royal Commission recommendations and its vision for reform.

We are rebuilding our mental health system from the ground up. A system that will improve lives and save lives. We have already invested \$6 billion since the Royal Commission's reports—focusing

on early intervention, intensive care, and tailored support, so Victorians can get the care they need sooner and closer to home. It's the largest single investment in mental health services in Victoria's history. But improving mental health services is not enough to strengthen the wellbeing of our community and prevent mental distress.

Now more than ever, we need focused action to support everyone in Victoria to experience good mental health and wellbeing throughout their lives, and in the places they live, learn, work and play. To set Victorians up to thrive. To support those recovering from mental illness. Significantly, the state of our collective wellbeing also depends on how we view ourselves through a new relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as we walk the path towards Treaty, Truth, Justice and healing.

*Wellbeing in Victoria: a strategy to promote good mental health* describes our priorities over the next 10 years. It guides collaboration between communities, business and community organisations, service providers, and government to improve wellbeing.

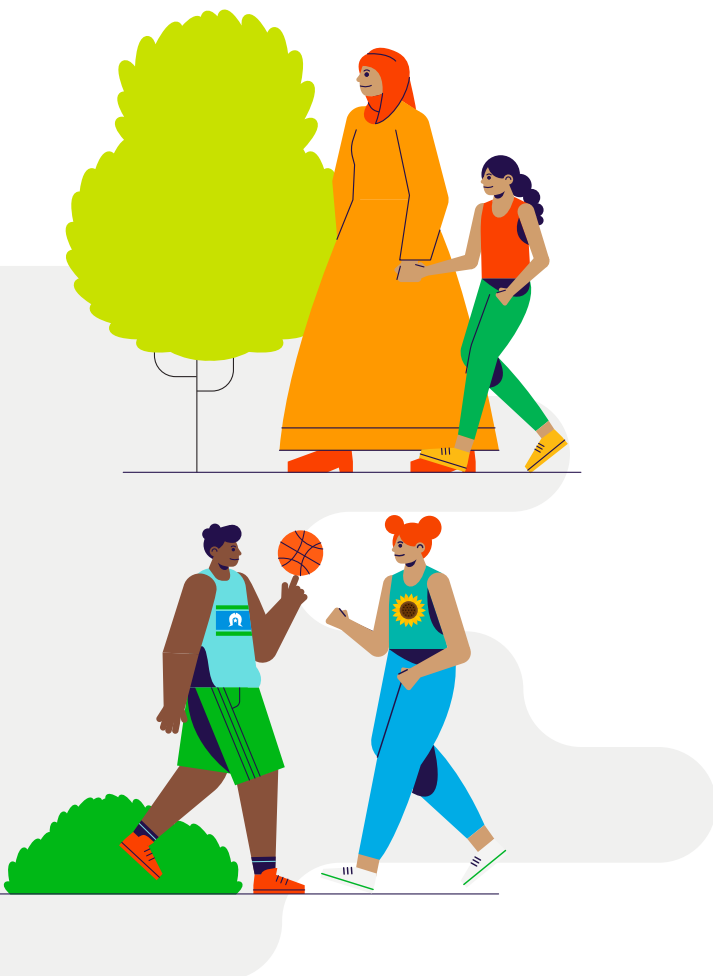
Wellbeing must be central to decision-making across government, because the wellbeing of our community is what matters most and it is driven not only by health, but across all our portfolios. It's why this is a whole-of-government strategy. The strategy will sharpen our focus on promoting wellbeing and preventing mental distress, so that all Victorians have what they need to feel and live well. Every Victorian deserves to belong and feel safe, supported and able to deal with the ups and downs of life.

Wellbeing is everyone's business, and we are laying strong foundations to make this happen. For ourselves, our friends and loved ones. For our communities, and for our future generations.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink.

**Ingrid Stitt MP**

**Minister for Mental Health**



# A message from the Expert Advisory Committee

**The Wellbeing Promotion Expert Advisory Committee represented Victoria's rich and diverse communities. We came from a range of backgrounds, experiences and occupations. And we shared a passion for strengthening wellbeing. In 2022 and 2023, we came together to guide the development of the Wellbeing Strategy.**

Every year, more than one in five Victorians will experience a mental illness.<sup>1</sup> This means that many people have been touched by mental illness, either personally or through loved ones, family, friends, or colleagues. Due to systemic inequalities, mental illness and psychological distress disproportionately impacts some communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Communities know that prevention is more effective than cure. They want to see a strong and co-ordinated commitment to prevention and promotion. Victoria's first Wellbeing Strategy aims to deliberately integrate wellbeing into the work of government, business, and community and sector partners. By focusing on wellbeing, we want to ensure that people can achieve their best possible mental health and reduce their likelihood of experiencing mental illness.

The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System highlighted the importance of including lived and living experience in every mental health response. This isn't just a moral matter but is

recognised internationally as a human right. So, in developing this strategy, we set out to listen to you.

Your voices were loud and clear. You told us that wellbeing matters and that our systems need to change. Your experiences are embedded in this strategy, backed by evidence. More than one thousand people contributed to this strategy. We appreciate every anecdote. Every story. Every insight.

Thank you for being part of our work to deliver meaningful improvement to wellbeing in Victoria.



Alliance for the Prevention of Mental Disorders

Balit Durn Durn Centre for Excellence in Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing

Child and Family Services Ballarat

Commissioner for Senior Victorians

Commissioner for LGBTQ+ Communities

Council on the Ageing Victoria

Kalinda Primary School

Municipal Association of Victoria

Prevention United

Self Help Addiction Resource Centre

South Eastern Metro Primary Health Network

VicHealth

Victorian Disability Advisory Council

Victorian Council of Social Services

Victorian Multicultural Commission

Women's Health Victoria

WorkSafe Victoria

Youth Affairs Council Victoria

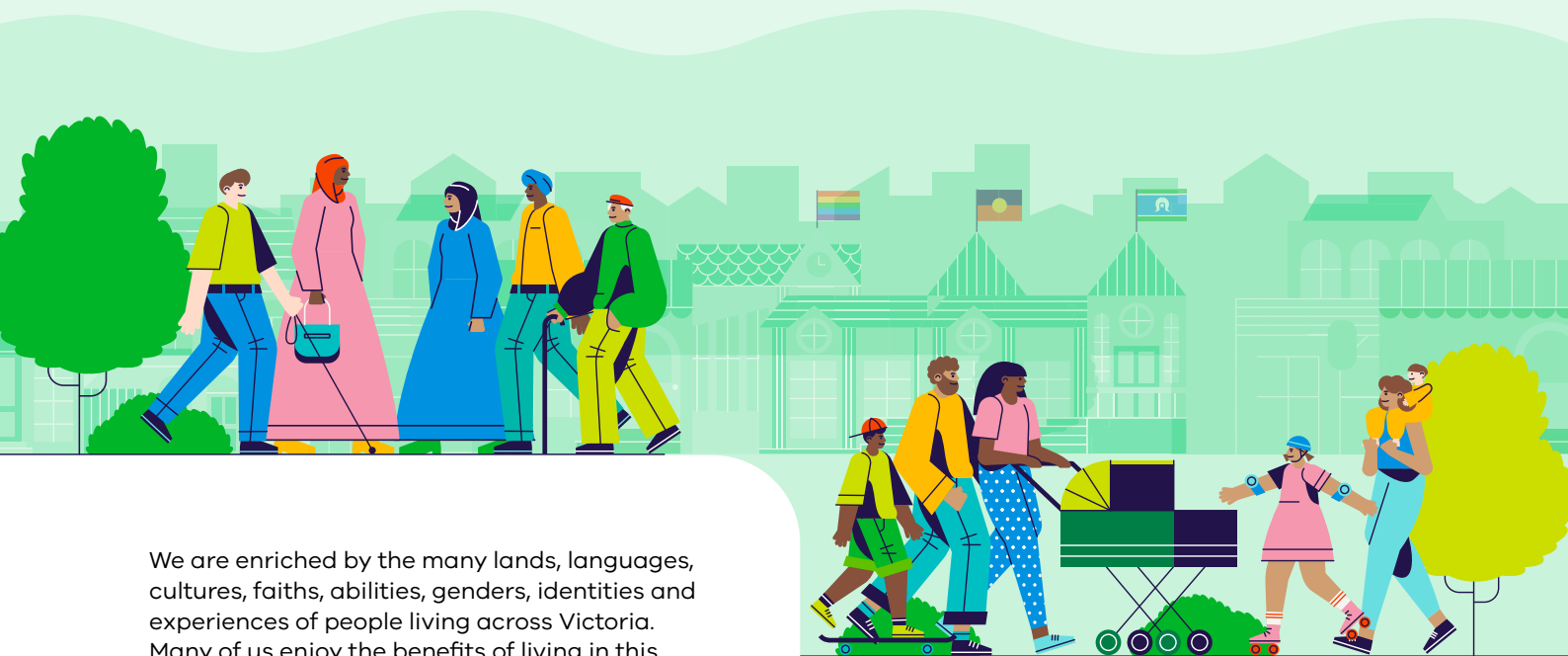
# Contents

Acknowledgements	3	9 How we'll know if we're making a difference	56
Recognition of lived and living experience	3	10 A final message from the State Wellbeing Promotion Adviser	59
Minister's foreword	4	Thank you	60
A message from the Expert Advisory Committee	5	Appendix 1: Pathway to Wellbeing – A Change Framework (Summary)	64
Executive summary	7	Appendix 2: Existing wellbeing-related initiatives in Victoria	67
1 Why Victoria needs a Wellbeing Strategy	13	Appendix 3: Definitions	69
2 About wellbeing	16	References	72
3 State of wellbeing – what the evidence tells us	22		
4 How we developed the strategy	28		
5 What Victorians need for their wellbeing	31		
6 Our vision, aspirations and priorities	47		
7 Our approach to implementation	49		
8 How we will build better wellbeing together – the foundations	53		



# Executive summary

**All people and communities in Victoria have what they need to thrive, for now and for future generations.**



We are enriched by the many lands, languages, cultures, faiths, abilities, genders, identities and experiences of people living across Victoria. Many of us enjoy the benefits of living in this safe, harmonious and economically prosperous state. However, these benefits are not shared by everyone. Systemic discrimination, exclusion and disadvantage persist, and in many areas, they are worsening. These can affect social cohesion, cause trauma and distress, and in too many cases, suicide, which affects us all.

The Wellbeing Strategy is about taking meaningful action to centre wellbeing in everything we do, prevent mental illness and psychological distress, and achieve more equitable wellbeing outcomes. So that we can walk together with greater respect, understanding and connection, and better celebrate the strength, resilience and diversity of people living in Victoria.



*Wellbeing in Victoria: A Strategy to Promote Good Mental Health* is a 10-year strategy that lays the foundation to promote wellbeing, and reduce the prevalence of mental illness, suicidality and alcohol and drug-related harms. It outlines priorities to be undertaken across the whole of the Victorian government, in multiple sectors, and in the places where we live, learn, work and play.

The initial focus is building the foundations of a wellbeing promotion system to deliver on the vision of this strategy. A wellbeing promotion system includes visible leadership, strong partnerships and coordinated approaches, strengthened capabilities, and using evidence and data to inform a sustainable and long-term approach to improving wellbeing. Future years will drive a coordinated approach to wellbeing and investment guided by evidence and need. This work will require every part of government to take wellbeing into account in decision making.

But this vital work goes beyond government. It demands collective action. We all have a role to play – individually, with family and friends, in businesses and organisations, in communities and across our diverse society.

It's important work, and we must get to it. So that everyone in Victoria has what they need to feel and function well. So that we reduce mental distress, suicidality, and alcohol and drug-related harms. Not just for ourselves, our families and loved ones, but for our future generations.

**But this vital work goes beyond government.  
It demands collective action. We all have a role  
to play – individually, with family and friends,  
in businesses and organisations, in communities  
and across our diverse society.**





## Why we need to act

Wellbeing is a major personal and community asset. Research indicates Australians have a growing expectation that government decisions should prioritise citizen wellbeing, a sentiment that has risen from 70% to 80% between 2021 and 2023.<sup>2</sup> This growing expectation is unsurprising at a time when life satisfaction among Australians is the lowest in decades, due to factors like the recent global COVID-19 pandemic, a changing digital environment, climate change and rising living costs.

Since around 2013, there has been a consistent upward trend in the proportion of Australians experiencing psychological distress at higher risk categories. This suggests a greater proportion of Australians are at a high or very high risk of

experiencing serious mental illness.<sup>3</sup> The rising experience of psychological distress may be attributable to relational, social and economic stressors.<sup>4</sup>

Experiences of financial hardship, alienation, discrimination and other contributing factors can make people feel lonely or socially isolated.<sup>5</sup> These experiences influence our wellbeing and social cohesion in our communities.

Despite these challenges, improved wellbeing is possible for everyone in Victoria. Coordinated action across government, with wellbeing promotion partners and communities will drive change.

## What wellbeing means to us

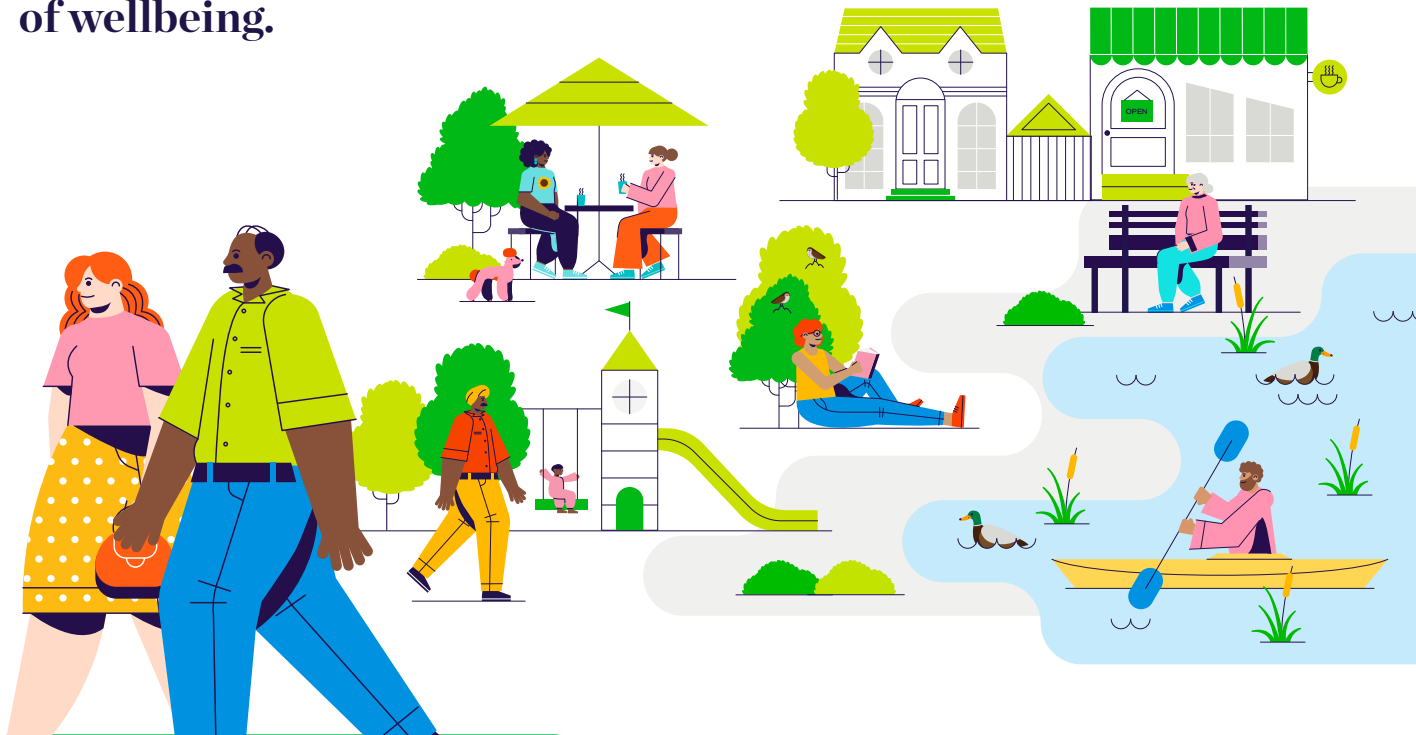
Victorians told us that wellbeing is a *positive, holistic state of being where we feel well and can function well in our personal lives, in relationships with others, and as members of our communities and society more broadly*. Wellbeing is not only a medical, social or economic issue. It is multifaceted, influenced by aspects of our lives, individually and collectively.

Many factors can influence our wellbeing, including our upbringing, experiences, identities and personalities. These influences can be personal, relational, community or societal and depend on our circumstances and stages in life. Some of us are at greater risk of poor wellbeing, including people who experience trauma, discrimination, poverty or exclusion.

***... wellbeing is a positive, holistic state of being where we feel well and can function well in our personal lives, in relationships with others, and as members of our communities and society more broadly.***



## Governments worldwide are acknowledging the importance of wellbeing.



### What we need to achieve wellbeing

When we asked Victorians about this, their answers were clear.

Victorians said they need their basic needs met before they can focus on other aspects of wellbeing. They need to feel safe and respected for who they are, and to feel connected to themselves, each other, our communities, cultures and to the spaces around them. They need the capabilities to navigate their wellbeing through life's inevitable ups and downs and to feel their lives have worth and meaning.

They told us they want leaders and decision-makers to prioritise wellbeing, not just economic growth. This isn't new, and it works. Governments worldwide are acknowledging the importance of wellbeing. They're using holistic ways to measure progress, looking beyond economic growth.

Improved wellbeing outcomes require long-term commitment. To achieve enduring and systemic change, we need more equitable social and economic systems, better connected communities and relationships, and the understanding and confidence to care for ourselves and each other.

### What influences our wellbeing?

The World Health Organisation recognises that wellbeing *experienced by individuals and societies, is **influenced by social, economic and environmental conditions.***

The World Health Organisation's European Health Equity Status Report shows that the quality, availability and affordability of health services accounts for roughly 10% of people's self-reported health, mental health and life satisfaction. Of far greater significance is risk and exposure to income insecurity and inadequacy of social protection, poor living conditions, lower social and human capital (educational outcomes and low-trust environments such as exposure to crime, social isolation and exclusion, lack of meaningful participation).

The ecological model (Figure 1) is a holistic way to think about the different influences on our wellbeing.

Figure 1: The ecological model of wellbeing



## How it will be done

The Wellbeing Strategy is underpinned by strong and collaborative partnerships across government, businesses, organisations and communities. It is led by Victoria's first State Wellbeing Promotion Adviser (in the Department of Health). The first of a series of rolling Wellbeing Action Plans has been developed in consultation with partners to set the foundations for wellbeing promotion. Subsequent action plans will outline how we will work in partnership to implement Wellbeing Strategy priorities with communities, supported by a strengthened wellbeing promotion system.

## How we will measure our impact

We will measure our progress through the Mental Health and Wellbeing Outcomes and Performance Framework, which is the Victorian Government's primary mechanism for monitoring the impact of the mental health reform agenda. Implementation of the Wellbeing Strategy will also contribute to delivery of the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023-2027 and align with the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Outcomes Framework.

Recognising that this strategy focuses beyond the health system, wellbeing action plans will consider how best to embed and measure wellbeing in future decision making across government.

Figure 2: Key partners in implementing the Wellbeing Strategy

## Who needs to play a role?

We must work together to create a future where everyone has what they need to feel and function well, to participate and benefit on a more equitable basis.

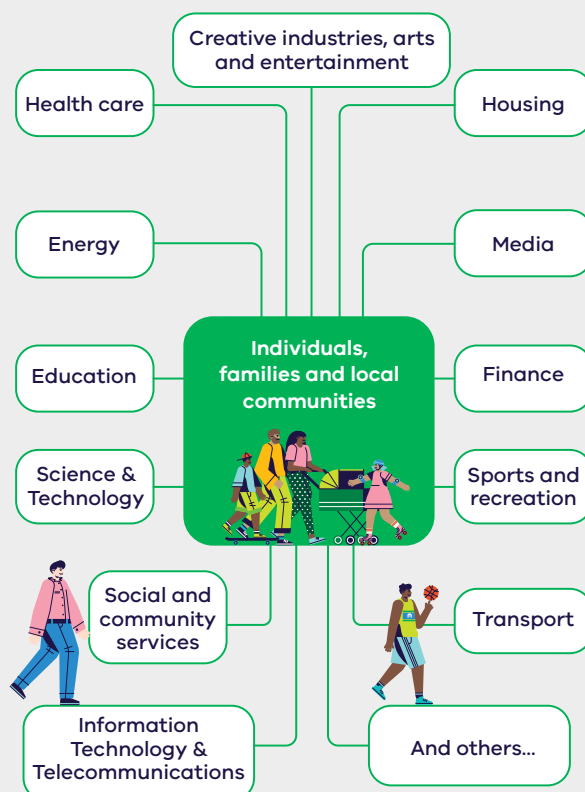
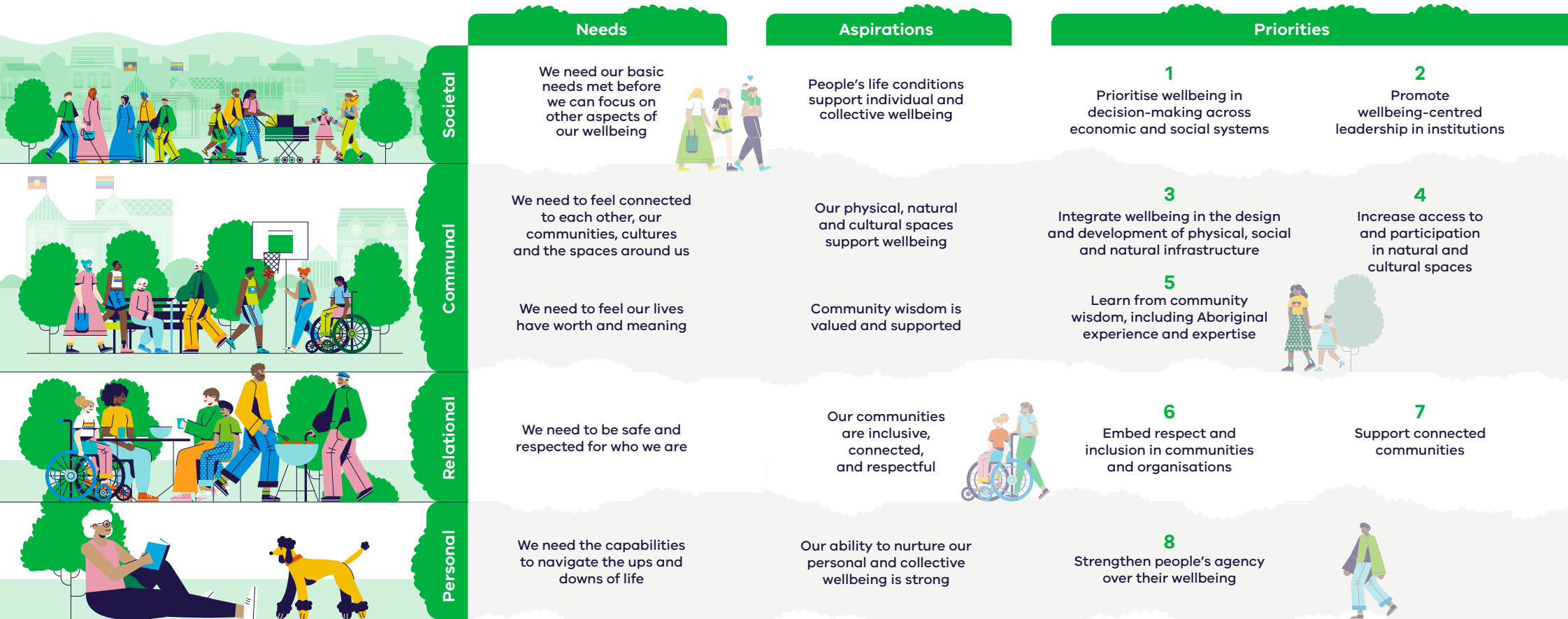


Figure 3: An overview of the Wellbeing Strategy

# An outline of Wellbeing in Victoria: A strategy to promote good mental health

Vision: All people and communities have what they need to thrive, both now and for future generations



# 1

# Why Victoria needs a Wellbeing Strategy



**‘Mental health is a basic human right. And it is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development’.**

**– World Health Organization<sup>6</sup>**

Wellbeing is a major personal and community asset. Supporting people to achieve and maintain high levels of wellbeing has considerable personal, social and economic benefits.<sup>7</sup> Good mental health and wellbeing drives social and economic prosperity, contributing to better learning, increased creativity, greater productivity, better quality relationships, improved physical health and longer life expectancy.<sup>7</sup> High levels of wellbeing also reduces the risk of developing mental illness up to 8 times and improve recovery from mental illness up to 7 times.<sup>8,9</sup>

However, the prevalence of mental distress in Victoria is high, compounded by stressors such as the global COVID-19 pandemic, the frequency and severity of climate-related disasters, rising costs of living and the growing influence of digital technology. Mental distress can have profound negative impacts on people’s lives. It impairs the way we function and interferes with our ability to take part in society and reach our full potential. The Productivity Commission estimated that mental illness and suicide costs the Australian economy up to \$220 billion a year.<sup>10</sup>

There is significant reform and investment in Victoria’s mental healthcare system. This is desperately needed to help treat the symptoms and impacts of mental distress. But we cannot treat our way to wellbeing.



### Shifting the focus towards wellbeing in Victoria

In extensive consultations to develop this strategy, people told us they want leaders and decision-makers to prioritise wellbeing, not just economic growth. This is reflected more widely – four out of five Australians want the wellbeing of the population to guide our leaders' decision-making.<sup>2</sup>

The Wellbeing Strategy articulates the needs and aspirations of Victorians in order to achieve individual and collective wellbeing. Recognising the need for long term commitment and coordinated effort, the strategy sets the course for the first 10 years of change. By establishing the foundations for wellbeing and delivering on the strategy's eight key priorities for action, Victoria will begin shifting towards a society with wellbeing and prevention-led approaches at its centre.

**Four out of five Australians want the wellbeing of the population to guide our leaders' decision-making.<sup>2</sup>**



### We know prevention works

Strong evidence supports investment in preventative measures. A recent systematic review of 65 economic evaluations consistently found that interventions for mental health promotion and prevention were cost-effective or cost-saving,<sup>11</sup> and had benefits for the mental health system and beyond.<sup>12,13</sup>

More than 30 years ago we decided too many lives were lost on Victorian roads. With concerted prevention efforts (education, legislation, enforcement, safer roads, safer cars and behaviour change), the annual number of road deaths is less than a third of what it was in 1989.

In 2024, 772 people died by suicide in Victoria, more than two and a half times the number of lives lost on Victorian roads.<sup>14,15</sup> As with the road toll, the impact of suicide, suicide attempts and psychological distress extends far beyond that number.

A stronger, more coordinated focus on wellbeing promotion and prevention is needed to effectively prevent suicide and mental distress. This approach touches all levels of society – individuals, families, communities, organisations and government. By working together, we can increase our individual and collective ability to thrive – socially, emotionally and economically, and reduce the prevalence and severity of mental distress, which also reduces the risk of physical ill health, suicide, harmful substance use and addiction.

## 1. Why Victoria needs a Wellbeing Strategy (continued)

Governments worldwide are recognising the importance of wellbeing. Many have started to incorporate more holistic ways to guide their decision making and measure progress – looking beyond economic growth. More than half the OECD member countries have some form of wellbeing framework.<sup>16</sup> We want to

keep pace with the best in the world. There are multiple stages to embedding wellbeing into government decision making which are described in resources developed by VicHealth and the Centre for Policy Development.<sup>17/18</sup> Implementing the Wellbeing Strategy is an important step on this path for Victoria.

### Wellbeing story:

## Wellbeing at the centre of policy making in Wales

**In 2015, Wales passed the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act, which requires the Welsh government and public authorities to take all reasonable steps to achieve national wellbeing goals.<sup>19</sup> Enshrined in law, the 7 goals are for Wales to be prosperous, resilient, healthier, globally responsible, more equal, cohesive, and have a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language.**

The Act requires public institutions and public service boards to account for the long-term wellbeing impacts of their decisions, including working with communities to address persistent issues, such as poverty, health inequities and climate change. Since 2017, councils, health boards, national parks, fire and rescue services, the Welsh government and national organisations have been working towards a collective 345 objectives.<sup>20</sup>

Each year, Wales tracks and reports on its progress against 50 indicators.<sup>20</sup> An independent Future Generations Commissioner reviews government activity and supports good practices, including a regular wellbeing and sustainability audit.<sup>19</sup> The commissioner has worked to connect and organise different parts of the community, the public and private sectors to identify shared principles to enable transformational change. These include advocating for wellbeing through progress towards net zero carbon emissions, using the Welsh language, reforming the education system and promoting a stronger focus on biodiversity and nature. Wales recently introduced national milestones to measure the pace of change required to achieve its wellbeing goals.<sup>20</sup>





# 2 About wellbeing



## What is wellbeing?

**‘Wellbeing’ refers to a holistic concept of positive health that integrates, mental, spiritual, social and physical wellbeing, in alignment with the Geneva Charter for Wellbeing.<sup>21</sup>**

What we have heard from Victorians is that wellbeing is *a positive, holistic state of being where we feel well and can function well in our personal lives, in our relationships with others, and as members of our communities and society more broadly.* This highlights the many ways people see wellbeing manifesting in their lives and communities.

While wellbeing encompasses physical and mental wellbeing, this strategy is focused on the distinct goal of strengthening the **mental wellbeing** of people and communities in Victoria. It provides strategic direction to guide policy development, collaborative endeavour and resource allocation, and to grow evidence and practice in this field.

We have chosen to use the term ‘wellbeing’ rather than ‘mental wellbeing’ in our work. We heard through our consultation and engagement that the term ‘mental’ is suggestive of mental illness rather than mental wellbeing. We hope that this choice of terminology helps to avoid confusion.

We recognise that mental health and wellbeing are linked to the broader determinants of health. The needs, aspirations and priorities outlined in this strategy reflect the changes needed in these areas to enable us to live our best lives, prevent and delay the onset of mental illness, and support people with mental illness to live equally well.

## 2. About wellbeing (continued)

While there are different ways to characterise, describe and measure wellbeing, many of the components that shape our wellbeing are common to us all, although we experience them differently and in our own unique ways. We each have different ways of thinking and talking about wellbeing, and our upbringing, experiences, identities and personalities are all influences on which elements of wellbeing are most important to us.

Wellbeing encompasses people's experience of their circumstances and ability to contribute to the world in a meaningful way. We can therefore experience wellbeing despite the presence of mental illness, challenges or disadvantage. Like health, wellbeing is an important 'resource for everyday life'.<sup>22</sup>

This contemporary view of mental health and wellbeing adds important nuance and captures new groupings of experiences to guide initiatives that promote wellbeing. When our wellbeing is high, we typically experience positive emotions, feel connected, secure and have meaning and purpose. Extensive evidence also shows that we can live with a diagnosed mental health condition and still have optimum levels of wellbeing, just as we can have a physical health condition and still be physically fit.<sup>23</sup>

With this in mind, two unique experiences emerge:

- **Content:** People may be experiencing symptoms of a mental illness, but they do not struggle with low wellbeing. They generally feel satisfied with life and feel they can function adequately, while managing their symptoms of mental illness on a day-to-day basis.
- **Flourishing:** In this state of optimal mental health, people are better able to navigate life's challenges and adapt to various stressors.<sup>24,25</sup> High levels of wellbeing can protect us from mental distress and can dramatically improve the likelihood of recovering from some types of mental illness.<sup>8,9,25</sup>

Similarly, we can experience low levels of wellbeing, characterised by feelings of emptiness, lack of optimism, motivation and positive relationships, with or without symptoms of mental illness. It is a feeling of isolation or disconnection, dissatisfaction with our lives, who we are, or where life is headed; with severe levels of distress where such feelings are prolonged and intensified. These experiences can be described as:

- **Languishing:** In this state, people are not feeling and doing as well as they would like, and are feeling unhappy with where their life is at. At the same time, they don't meet the criteria for

a diagnosable mental illness. "Languishing significantly impacts our day-to-day life, our relationships and our productivity at work, over and above that of other common [mental health] problems like depression, anxiety and burnout."<sup>26</sup> Importantly, people who are languishing are much more likely to develop a mental or physical illness in the future. For example, they are twice as likely to develop depression or anxiety in the next four years, compared to people who are flourishing.<sup>8,25,26</sup> People who are languishing historically have not been targeted by mental health treatment services, although evidence-based initiatives exist.<sup>27</sup>

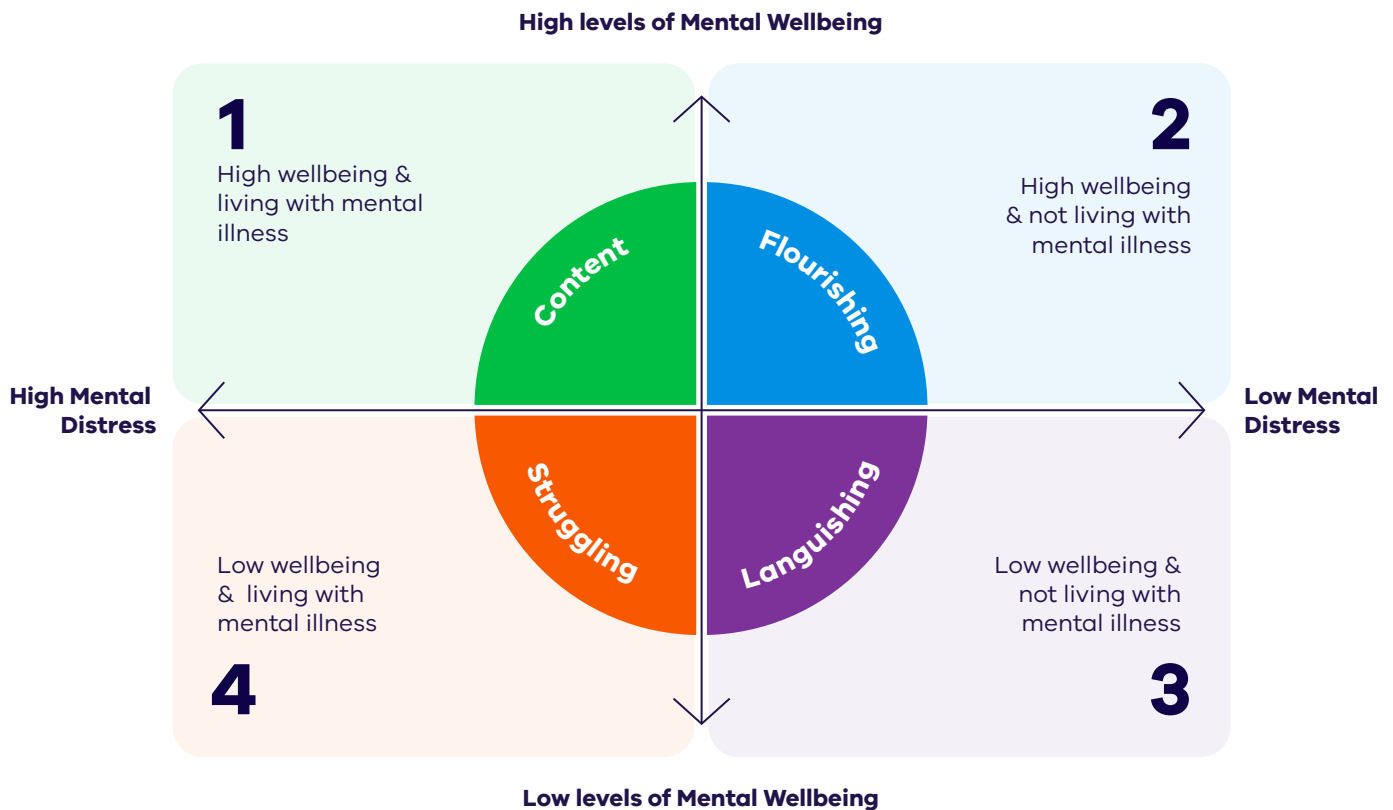
- **Struggling:** People are experiencing significant or distressing symptoms of mental illness and also grappling with poor wellbeing. They are most likely to seek or receive acute supports. This is the group the mental health service system is currently primarily resourced to support. To effectively alleviate their distress and progress towards recovery, *people in this state need care and support to treat the symptoms of mental illness and poor wellbeing.*<sup>9</sup>

**Wellbeing is more than the absence of mental illness, challenges or disadvantage. Like health, it is a important 'resource for everyday life'.<sup>22</sup>**



It is important to note that we can move between these four states in response to changes in our life circumstances, individual characteristics, and the level of care and support available to us in our time of need.

Figure 4: Adapted from Matt Iasiello, Joseph van Agteren, Corey LM Keys<sup>9</sup>



### How key terms are used in this document

There's a rich tapestry of language that reflects people's different preferences and experiences around wellbeing. It's therefore impossible to choose ideal terms to describe deeply personal concepts that feel accurate to everyone. After respectful discussion with people from different communities and our Expert Advisory Committee, we have chosen to use the following terms throughout the strategy because they resonated with most people.

**'Mental health'** refers to a person's level of emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing that it is reflected in their thoughts, feelings and behaviours, and how well they handle stress, relate to others and function in society.

**'Mental distress'** is used as a non-diagnostic, umbrella term that covers the spectrum that ranges from languishing to psychological distress, through to a diagnosed mental illness.

**'Wellbeing promotion'** refers to both:

- the *prevention* of mental distress (primary prevention)
- the *promotion* of mental health and wellbeing, regardless of whether a person has lived and living experience of mental distress.



From an Aboriginal perspective, wellbeing is holistic. It is fundamentally shaped by connections to culture, Country, extended kinship, ancestors and spirituality, which in turn are influenced by social, historical, political and cultural determinants.<sup>28</sup>

Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing is a complex, multidimensional concept encompassing connections to land, culture, spirituality, ancestry, family and community. Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing is situated within a framework that acknowledges Aboriginal Australian worldviews and expressions of culture, including the individual self, family, kin, community, traditional lands, ancestors and the spiritual dimensions of existence.<sup>29,30,31</sup>

For Aboriginal people, 'social and emotional wellbeing means being resilient, being and feeling culturally safe and connected, having and realising aspirations, and being satisfied with life'.<sup>31</sup> It also recognises the protective role of culture, identity and connection to Country.

**From an Aboriginal perspective, wellbeing is holistic.**



### What influences our wellbeing?

The World Health Organisation recognises that wellbeing *experienced by individuals and societies, is **influenced by social, economic and environmental conditions.***<sup>21</sup>

The World Health Organisation's European Health Equity Status Report shows that the quality, availability and affordability of health services accounts for roughly 10% of people's self-reported health, mental health and life satisfaction. Of far greater significance is risk and exposure to income insecurity and inadequacy of social protection, poor living conditions, lower social and human capital (educational outcomes and low-trust environments such as exposure to crime, social isolation and exclusion, lack of meaningful participation).<sup>32</sup>

The ecological model (Figure 5) is a holistic way to think about the different influences on our wellbeing.<sup>33</sup>

At the **personal (individual) level**, our wellbeing is influenced by our biological makeup, age, life experiences, preferences, physical health and personality. These impact our priorities, hopes and

dreams, and how we manage our thoughts and feelings and communicate with others.

The **relational (interpersonal) level** is about the people closest to us. The nature and quality of our relationships affect our behaviours, attitudes, the way we feel about ourselves and our expectations of others. Adverse experiences in relationships throughout our lives, including trauma and maltreatment, experiences of bullying, interpersonal violence and experiences of isolation and loneliness, all have an impact on wellbeing.

The **communal (community) level** is where we live, learn, work and play – our neighbourhoods, environments, local services and facilities. This is where our identities and roles are understood, how we are accepted and where we feel a sense of belonging.

The **societal (policy) level** is our state or country. It encompasses the governments, laws, and policies that shape the rules, social norms and resources that affect our wellbeing. This is where things like health care, education and training, housing, climate action and infrastructure fit in. It's also where decisions are made that shape society – how we eliminate stigma and discrimination, how we value and ensure equity, the impact of our media, and how we prioritise wellbeing outcomes as well as economic outcomes.

Figure 5: The ecological model of wellbeing



Adapted from Urie Bronfenbrenner<sup>33</sup>

## Connection is a fundamental aspect of Aboriginal knowing, being and doing

For Aboriginal peoples, connection extends beyond mere physical proximity and encompasses a deep and profound relationship with the land, community, ancestors and spirituality. The interconnectedness of all elements in the Aboriginal worldview forms the foundation of Aboriginal knowledge systems and ways of life. This holistic understanding of connection shapes every aspect of Aboriginal life.

Connection plays a crucial role in the Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing wheel (Figure 6), which is a holistic framework for understanding and promoting the overall health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people and communities. The wheel has interconnected domains that encompass various aspects of wellbeing. These include connection to body; mind and emotions; family and kinship; community; culture; Country; and spirit, spirituality and ancestors. The outer wheel speaks to how these factors interact with social, historical and political determinants of health and wellbeing, and the importance of each element in keeping well.<sup>28</sup>

These determinants of health and wellbeing are defined as:

- **social determinants** – the impact of poverty, unemployment, housing, educational attainment and racial discrimination
- **historical determinants** – the historical context of colonisation and its ongoing impacts, as well as the impact of past government policies and the extent of historical oppression and cultural displacement
- **political determinants** – the unresolved issues of land rights, control of resources, cultural security, and the rights of self-determination and sovereignty

The Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing wheel underscores the essential role of connection in promoting holistic wellbeing. It recognises that fostering and maintaining connections to culture, land, family, community and spirituality is vital for the emotional, mental and social health of Aboriginal people and communities.

Thank you to the Balit Durn Durn Centre for contributing their experience and invaluable expertise to developing the Wellbeing Strategy.

Figure 6: Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Wheel<sup>28</sup>



# 3

## State of wellbeing – what the evidence tells us

### Mental distress affects many of us

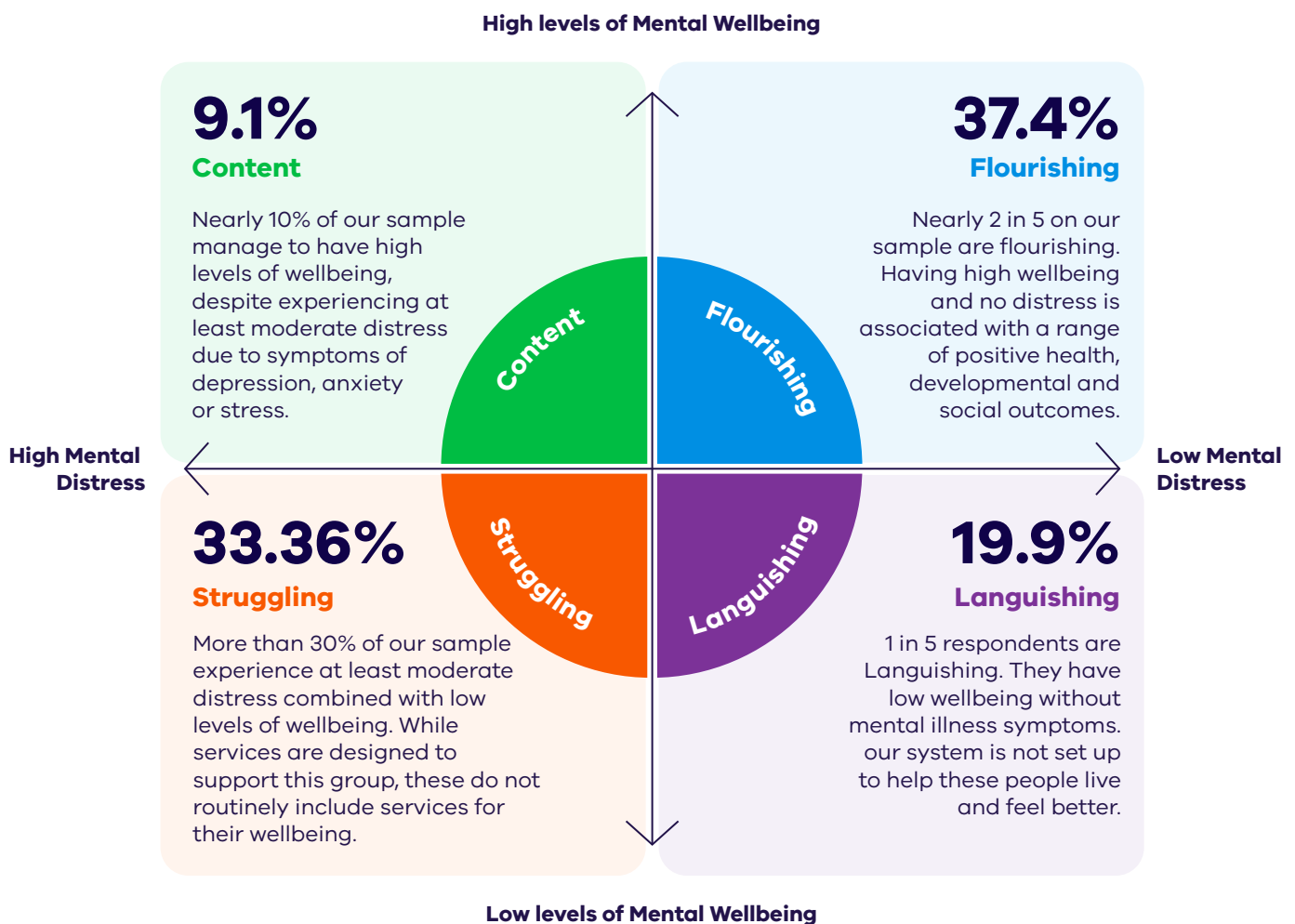
Recent research shows that nearly 45% of people aged 16 to 85 years will experience a mental illness at some time during their life.<sup>1</sup> Despite years of investment, the 12-month prevalence rate of mental illness in Australia has not improved, as the latest national study of mental health and wellbeing cited before, shows a recent deterioration.<sup>34,35</sup>

A recent Australian study involving more than 16,000 mostly working adults found that more than

half struggled with their wellbeing.<sup>26</sup> One in three people were struggling with mental distress and low levels of wellbeing, while one in five people without symptoms of mental illness were languishing.<sup>26</sup>

These statistics have flow on effects for our health services. General practitioners have already reported psychological factors as the main reason for patients presenting, increasing significantly from 61% in 2017 to 72% in 2023.<sup>36</sup>

Figure 7: Levels of wellbeing and distress in Australia, adapted from Agteren and Iasiello<sup>26</sup>





#### Some of us are at greater risk

People who experience trauma, discrimination, poverty, chronic health conditions and multiple forms of exclusion are at greater risk of low levels of wellbeing, mental distress and suicide.

Thirty-eight per cent of **Aboriginal Victorians** experience medically diagnosed depression and anxiety compared with 27% of non-Aboriginal Victorians.<sup>37</sup> Also, deaths by suicide among Aboriginal Victorians occur at a rate nearly 3.5 times higher than non-Aboriginal Victorians.<sup>38</sup>

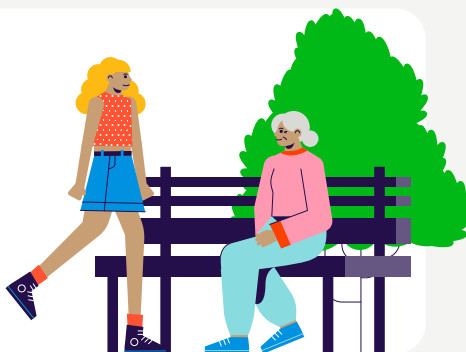


**Women** are likely to experience mental illness due to gender inequities such as the gender pay gap, gendered violence and family violence, rigid gender roles and harmful stereotypes about sexuality and body image.<sup>39,40,41</sup>

**Body image** has been rated as a top concern for young people for 11 consecutive years, especially among females and gender diverse young people.<sup>42</sup>



Twenty-five per cent of **Australian females** aged 16 to 85 years reported a diagnosed mental health condition in the past 12 months, compared with 18% of males.<sup>1</sup>



Twenty-three per cent of Victorians reported experiencing loneliness.<sup>43</sup> Persistent experiences of moderate and severe loneliness can have significant impacts on mental and physical health, including people being twice as likely to have chronic disease, 4.6 times more likely to experience depression and 5.2 times more likely to experience poorer wellbeing.<sup>44</sup>



Approximately 81% of **young Australian men** aged 18 to 34 years reported mental health concerns as a priority. Young men also reported stress (52%) and loneliness (22%) concerns more often than other age cohorts.<sup>45,46</sup>

Mental health conditions are experienced by nearly 58% of people with **profound or severe 'core activity' limitations** (such as mobility, self-care and communication) and 42% of people with other **disabilities or long-term health conditions** that restrict their daily activities.<sup>47</sup>



Victorians from **LGBTIQA+ communities** are 20 times more likely to have experienced suicidal thoughts, and eight times more likely to have attempted suicide.<sup>48</sup>



Eighty-nine per cent of people from **refugee backgrounds** experienced traumatic events before arriving in Australia. The prevalence of moderate-to-high levels of psychological distress is higher among humanitarian migrants compared to the general population.<sup>49</sup>



44% of people aged 26 to 64 using public specialist mental health services also live with **substance use or addiction**.<sup>50</sup>

In **rural communities**, rates of suicide are 40% higher and rates of self-harm related emergency department presentations 30% higher than metropolitan areas.<sup>51,52</sup>



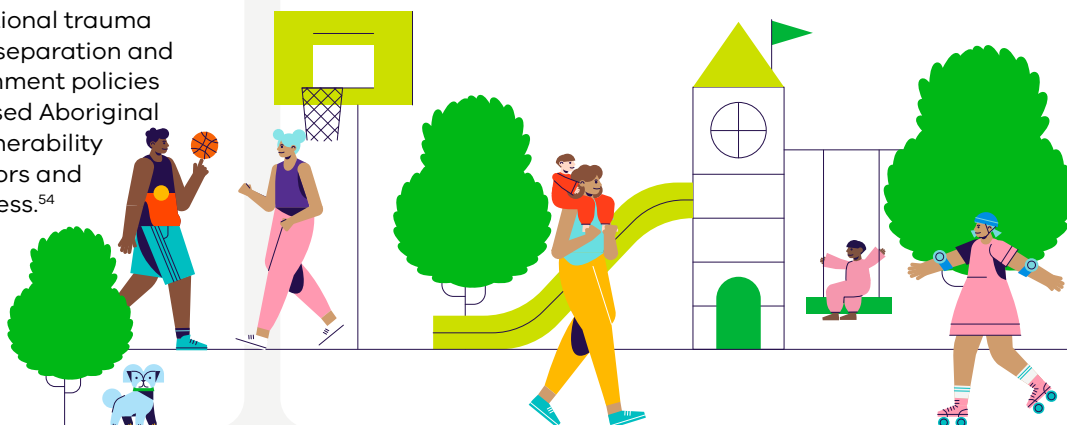
While rates of suicide amongst people aged 65 years and over have fallen since the 1990s, the overall ageing population means that the number of people reaching older age with mental illness remains significant.<sup>1,35,53</sup>

## Underlying causes are at play

There is established evidence showing the impacts on people's lives when the social, economic and environmental conditions critical to wellbeing are absent or inadequate.

The historical and ongoing impacts of **colonisation** are transgenerational,<sup>28</sup> where experiences of intergenerational trauma from family separation and other government policies have increased Aboriginal peoples' vulnerability to life stressors and mental distress.<sup>54</sup>

**Child maltreatment** is estimated to cause up to 40% of common life-long mental health conditions.<sup>55</sup>



People who are more likely to be radicalised to violent extremism may be experiencing, among other contributing factors, real or perceived victimhood, **social isolation**, **alienation** from wider society and **inequality**.<sup>56</sup>

People with lower levels of **education** and who also experience **unemployment**, **homelessness**, or **live on low incomes** are more likely to report a diagnosed mental health condition.<sup>62,63,64</sup>

People aged 18 to 24 years, from multicultural/multifaith communities who are and experiencing **financial hardship** are more likely to experience persistent loneliness.<sup>43</sup>



Due to the impacts of and high concerns about **climate change**, 51% of Australians report experiencing symptoms of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Communities most affected include rural/regional communities, young people and Aboriginal communities.<sup>65,66,67</sup>

Some groups are more likely to be unemployed due to **discrimination**, including people with a disability, and those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and multicultural communities.<sup>57,58,59</sup> These communities are also more likely to experience discrimination, violence and trauma, with further inequitable outcomes for women.<sup>60,39,61</sup>

Access to **affordable**, **culturally appropriate**, **nutritious food** is essential for our health and wellbeing. There is a significant link between food insecurity and increased risks of depression, anxiety, and sleep disorders.<sup>68,69</sup>

“We need to come together to address the global mega trend which is the decline in the mental health and wellbeing of young people. It is only through the engagement of all parts of the system in collaborative action for wellbeing promotion and prevention, including increased funding and revolutionary thinking that we can reverse this trend.”

Professor Patrick McGorry AO<sup>92</sup>



**Young people** are the loneliest age group in Australia. One in three emerging adults, and one in six adolescents experience intense or persistent loneliness.<sup>43,44,70</sup> The prevalence of loneliness in young people aged 15–24 years has been rising steadily since 2008, with sharper increases since 2015.<sup>70</sup>

This has longer-term health implications. Loneliness is a strong predictor of a range of mental health challenges (including social anxiety, depression, psychological distress and emotional regulation difficulties, and suicidality); and negative physical health outcomes (signs of vascular dysfunction or damage may be evident in young people who are lonely as early as in their 20s).<sup>70</sup>

In explaining the factors contributing to the steady decline of mental health in young people over the past two decades, the 2024 Lancet Psychiatry Commission on Youth Mental Health found that ‘[i]nsufficient action on **climate change**, an unregulated and unsafe **digital world** and **social media environment**, and **social exclusion** as reflected by **insecure employment**, reduced access to **affordable housing**, and **intergenerational inequality** have combined to create a bleak present and future for young people in many countries’.<sup>71</sup>

## Taking coordinated action to improve wellbeing

**Promoting wellbeing delivers multiple benefits – it enables us to live our best lives, can prevent or delay the onset of mental illness, and supports people with mental illness to live equally well.**

An elevated focus on wellbeing promotion and the prevention of mental illness is critical to meaningfully improving health and social outcomes for everyone. The Wellbeing Strategy provides a coordinated approach that focuses beyond the mental health system, to improve the drivers of mental health and wellbeing at the societal, communal, relational and personal levels. This work is led by the Wellbeing Promotion Office in partnership with government, sectors and communities.

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Division (in the Department of Health) will lead improvements to the mental healthcare system by ensuring wellbeing supports are routinely provided to people living with mental illness.

By working in tandem, all people and communities will have what they need to thrive. It is possible to reduce the prevalence of mental illness, suicidality, and alcohol and drug harms, and support those living with mental illness to flourish.

Figure 8: Wellbeing promotion beyond and within the mental health service system



# 4

## How we developed the strategy

### What the Royal Commission recommended

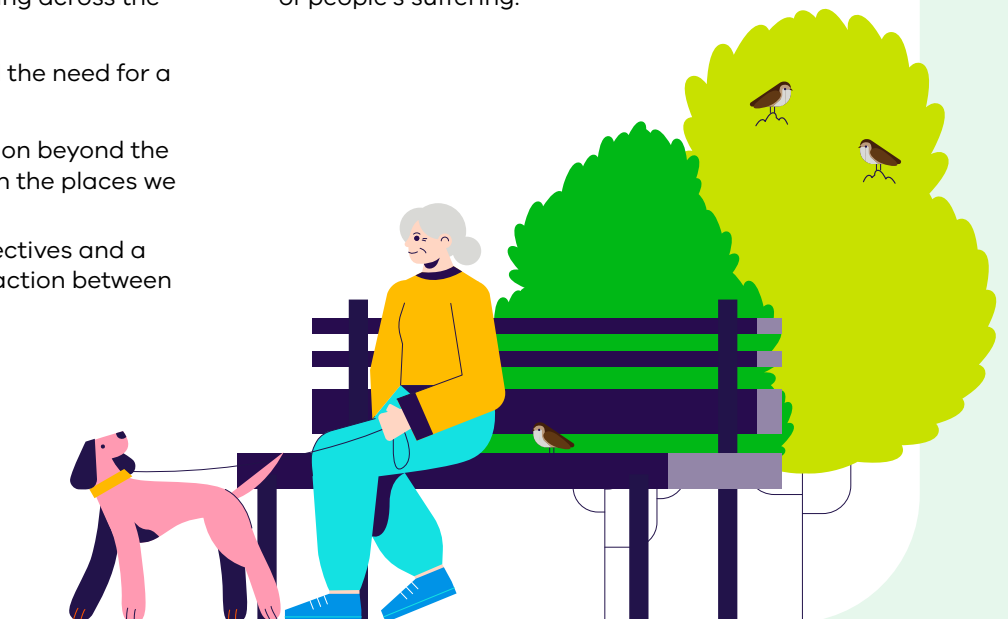
**In 2021, the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System found that Victoria's efforts to promote mental health and wellbeing had so far been 'piecemeal and uncoordinated'.<sup>12</sup> Featuring as the second recommendation of its final report, the Royal Commission emphasised the importance of wellbeing promotion as being integral to the redesign of the mental healthcare system.**

It recommended that the Victorian Government establish the Wellbeing Promotion Office, led by Victoria's first State Wellbeing Promotion Adviser. Its core functions are to 'develop and coordinate a *statewide approach* to the promotion of good mental health and wellbeing and the prevention of mental illness, which delivers the economic and social benefits of good mental health and wellbeing across the population'.<sup>12</sup>

The Royal Commission outlined the need for a Wellbeing Strategy to:

- strengthen wellbeing promotion beyond the mental healthcare system – in the places we live, learn, work and play
- provide a common set of objectives and a foundation for collaborative action between different sectors.<sup>12</sup>

It noted that dedicated funding and long-term commitment from the Victorian Government is needed to address the underlying factors that contribute to mental distress.<sup>12</sup> These include inequitable social, economic and environmental conditions, such as discrimination, isolation and disadvantage.<sup>12</sup> So that in the long-term, we can significantly reduce the prevalence and severity of people's suffering.



### Developing the strategy from the ground up

We placed people at the heart of developing the Wellbeing Strategy by taking a holistic and intersectional approach to understanding individual experiences, and how social identities, positions and dynamics interact to influence people's lives. This means we heard and acted on

people's contributions in a way that recognises the underlying causes of inequity, exclusion and distress. Their opinions, experiences and aspirations underpin this plan and are reinforced by evidence and research.

To develop this strategy, we conducted:

20

#### expert interviews

20 expert interviews to understand the evidence on wellbeing promotion

250

#### sector experts and service providers

Workshops with 250 sector experts and service providers to understand their views on the actions we should prioritise

750

#### community members

Surveys, interviews, and targeted workshops with 750 community members, including 30 Aboriginal community members and leaders to explore what mental wellbeing meant to them

3

#### symposium events

200+

#### participants

3 symposium events of more than 200 participants to test and validate the ideas in the Wellbeing Strategy





#### 4. How we developed the strategy (continued)

Then we went further. We listened and learned from people who contributed to other recent consultations and incorporated insights from community and researchers. For example, the Voices of Victoria listening tours, Latrobe Health Advocate, Mapping Social Cohesion reports, and National Mental Health Commission

Making Connections 2022, which highlighted people's strong desire for a prevention focus to reduce mental distress and suicides.<sup>72,73,74</sup> It was unequivocal – people everywhere said that good mental wellbeing is a priority.

##### People also told us they:

Think quality of life matters

Want to be respected for who they are

Want safety and security

Value having access to good public education and health care

Value a stable and adequate income and time to pursue interests

Want a home that is safe and affordable, to have nourishing meals and time with friends and loved ones

To live in a country that protects its environment

To have a meaningful say in shaping our future as part of a strong democracy



The Wellbeing Strategy is grounded in the **wellbeing needs** of people living in Victoria, with **aspirations** and **collective priorities** to guide the way forward. While the change we are seeking is ambitious, achieving wellbeing for all is critical to enable Victorian communities to thrive and to be resilient. The Royal Commission acknowledged that long-term change is needed to embed wellbeing in the fabric of our society and decision making. We cannot do this alone. We know that it will require sustained and coordinated effort across government, sectors and communities.

# 5

## What Victorians need for their wellbeing



By taking a human-rights centred approach, we were able to listen to and understand people's needs in a holistic way through the consultation process for this strategy. Through many rich conversations, we learned people from different communities share similar wellbeing needs and aspirations. The relative importance of specific needs depends on our different upbringings and past experiences, our personalities and cultural backgrounds, the stage we are at in our lives and the degree to which society affirms or excludes us. This includes the continuing impacts of colonisation, and trauma arising from past and current injustices caused to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

What people told us they need to live well also aligns with research findings relevant to good mental health and wellbeing.

This can be summarised in five key statements:

1. We need our basic needs met before we can focus on other aspects of our wellbeing.
2. We need to feel connected to each other, our communities, culture and the spaces around us.
3. We need to feel our lives have worth and meaning.
4. We need to be safe and respected for who we are.
5. We need the capabilities to navigate the ups and downs of life.

Figure 9: Our wellbeing needs







### Wellbeing story:

## Strengthening Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing through cultural connection and resilience

The past affects the present. While many Aboriginal families are thriving, historical and contemporary social injustices, violence and discrimination continue to have an impact on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal peoples. Colonisation is an ongoing experience. It manifests in ever-evolving ways and has lasting impacts including historical trauma, disconnection from cultural identity and the erosion of traditional practices.

Cultural connection is a powerful catalyst for promoting social and emotional wellbeing within Aboriginal communities. The deep-rooted connection to ancestral lands, cultural traditions and community networks provides a sense of belonging, identity and purpose. Cultural connection is a protective factor against the negative impacts of historical traumas, discrimination and systemic inequalities, empowering individuals to navigate challenges and maintain a positive outlook on life.

When Aboriginal individuals and families are connected to their cultural heritage, they experience a heightened sense of self-worth, pride and resilience. Reaffirming cultural identity through language, art, storytelling and traditional practices fosters a positive sense of self and strengthens interpersonal relationships within the community.

Communities have recognised the key role extended kinship structures in families play in wellbeing and are supporting and

strengthening Aboriginal families with new programs and activities. Family camps provide a space for families to come together and reconnect with their cultural heritage. These camps focus on fostering intergenerational relationships, passing down cultural knowledge and strengthening family bonds with activities such as storytelling, traditional games and art workshops. This creates opportunities for family members to share experiences, learn from Elders and strengthen their sense of belonging.

Language reclamation programs address the loss of language and cultural knowledge, helping families learn and speak their traditional language and fostering a deeper connection to cultural identity.

Family healing circles provide a safe space for families to share their stories and support one another in healing from historical traumas. These circles integrate cultural practices, such as yarning circles and traditional ceremonies, to facilitate healing and resilience-building.

Many Victorian communities have witnessed a positive transformation in Aboriginal family wellbeing by prioritising cultural connection and resilience-building. Families reported improved communication, a stronger sense of cultural identity, increased pride in their heritage and enhanced social and emotional health.

*Case study provided by Balit Durn Durn Centre*

# 1. We need our basic needs met before we can focus on other aspects of our wellbeing

## Wellbeing is meaningful to us when we're no longer struggling for the necessities in life.

To survive and function, we need food, shelter, transport and the ability to communicate and connect. We also need stability, safety and freedom from violence for ourselves and our loved ones.

We are all affected when some in our society don't have these needs met. Research has found social inequality has wide-ranging and corrosive impacts including poor health, reduced longevity and social unrest.<sup>62,63,75</sup> From conception to older adulthood,

when our basic needs are met, we are more likely to have the means and opportunities to live a life that we value. We can feel hopeful and good about ourselves. We can think about our wellbeing in a more holistic way.

The ability to meet our basic needs is more than an individual responsibility – it's a collective endeavour in which our systems and services need to ensure no one is left behind.

## What people told us

'Wellbeing is interpreted around practicalities: employment, money, housing, safety. For diverse communities from unfortunate circumstances, this is what comes first.'

'If your basic needs aren't met, it's impossible to think about what you want to do. What your own sense of wellbeing looks like in a state of crisis.'

'We have gyms, music venues, social venues, parks, and health services, but these ignore that the main wellbeing stressors in my community come from things we can't control. Things like global warming, housing unaffordability and lack of protection for tenants.'

'Many Australians live in poverty, so we need to go back to basics. We need to ensure food, shelter, safety, healthy relationships, and income. This empowers people to raise their aspirations, improves hope, and leads to greater economic and social participation.'

'I sometimes see people, especially single women over 60, who are just managing households and bills. Their homes are in dire need of repairs. At the same time, they are financially strapped, but unable to access decent counselling services for depression. Some may end up homeless, which is appalling.'

'My mental health started to improve when hope was reintroduced to my life. There's a sense of hopelessness when you're homeless because it's so tough. So, hope is a huge way to recovery.'



### What the evidence says

- A recent systematic review of 136 studies found that increases in individual and household income improved mental health and wellbeing, while decreases had the opposite effect. These efforts were strongest when individuals were lifted out of poverty.<sup>76</sup>
- While research has shown that good quality housing improves mental health and bad housing has a detrimental effect, avoiding the disruption and trauma of homelessness is far better for the person, with immediate and long-term benefits for their physical health, their mental health and wellbeing.<sup>77</sup>
- Nutrition plays an important role in our mental wellbeing. Diets high in vegetables, fruit, wholegrains and healthy oils and those lower in ultra-processed, nutrient-poor foods and drinks are associated with reduced risk of depression and anxiety.<sup>78,79</sup> Supporting healthy eating choices, including in pregnancy, childhood and adolescence, can reduce the risk of mental illness across the lifespan.<sup>78</sup>



#### Wellbeing story

### Changing Children's Chances project, Murdoch Children's Research Institute

The early years of a child's life are critical for shaping their health, development and wellbeing. Children raised in families experiencing social or economic stress are at greater risk of developing psychological and educational difficulties and behavioural challenges later in life.

Recognising that addressing inequities in children's early years can reduce a range of problems in the future, researchers at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute wanted to understand how providing cash to low-income Australian families could benefit the rest of their child's life.

They combined existing data from a longitudinal research study with a technique called target trial emulation to simulate providing families with \$1,000 per fortnight (\$26,000 in total) for the first year of their child's life.

Among other findings, the initial results showed that providing this hypothetical cash supplement reduced the risk of poor social-emotional outcomes at age four to five (equal to a 12% improvement in equity) and reduced the risk of poor physical functioning outcomes at age four to five (equal to a 10% improvement in equity). Other initial findings suggest that families who received the additional funds experienced less stress, which improved their mental and emotional states.

The results demonstrate the benefits of policies that assist families experiencing financial stress, and show that income support can have a meaningful role in eliminating inequities in children's health, development and wellbeing.

## 2. We need to feel connected to each other, our communities, cultures and the spaces around us

### We all share a desire to connect.

Connection creates a sense of belonging. It begins from infancy and is a fundamental human need. Connection can take many forms depending on our individual or collective needs. Connection can improve our health, reduce stress and increase our self-esteem. Feeling like we belong helps us cope with adversity. It gives us a sense of identity. Social connection is a key protective factor that can promote better wellbeing outcomes during periods of high uncertainty and distress.

Our sense of belonging comes through the quality of our relationships, our connection with

our communities and culture, and the places that soothe and energise us. Our environment can create challenges and opportunities for connection. We can feel loneliness, experience isolation or belonging depending on our circumstances and the people around us. Natural disasters can isolate us or unite us. Technology can challenge us or bring us together. Debate can polarise or galvanise our communities.

We must create places, spaces and opportunities for people to connect and belong.

### What people told us

'Conversation is the start of a connection. Some engage from a distance then slowly connect. People don't want to be defined as lonely and socially isolated.'

'Community is about inclusion. When I see growth in my various roles, this is where I see it. Accepting people. Individual needs. Accommodating them.'

'Mental wellbeing means having the capacity, accessibility and feeling of safety to navigate the systems of life, including family and social connections, employment, and health services, as the diverse humans that we are. The opposite of mental wellbeing is isolation and loneliness.'

'Social connection is key. When you're not feeling your best, it's quite easy to isolate yourself. Doing things you know are good for you and being surrounded by people who love and care about you help you to come out of that.'

'People are often reliving something in the past or worrying about something in the future. Let's bring people back to their immediate situation. Imagine doing that while out on Country and how powerful that would be.'

'There is almost a second layer to social connection; perhaps 'belonging'. There's a reciprocal nature to belonging that takes social connection to next level. It's more than 'I'm connected'. It's "I feel appreciated and I'm not a burden".'





### What the evidence says

- People who are more **socially connected** have higher levels of perceived happiness, sense of belonging and life satisfaction. At all stages of life, social connection protects us against stress, anxiety and depression.<sup>80,5,81</sup> Connection to family and community is protective for wellbeing and against suicide among diverse communities, including multicultural and LGBTIQ+ communities.<sup>82,83,84</sup>
- **Creative art** activities such as singing, dancing, crafts and photography help improve subjective wellbeing (health satisfaction, relationships, community, life achievements), perceived happiness, mental resilience, social connection and sense of purpose, and reduce stress.<sup>85</sup>
- Strong social and emotional wellbeing among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples depends on reciprocal relationships with **Country, family and kinship, community, culture and spirituality**.<sup>28,65</sup> Low cultural continuity is linked with higher suicide rates among young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.<sup>86</sup>
- **Connecting with nature** is linked to less anger, sadness and anxiety, as well as better physical wellbeing.<sup>87,88</sup> Visiting national parks and protected areas can indirectly increase economic productivity by improving people's mental health.<sup>89</sup>
- Neighbourhoods that are more **walkable** and provide leisure opportunities are linked to reduced depression and alcohol abuse.<sup>90</sup>
- Young people who are **members of a local sporting club** are more likely to demonstrate greater trust in other people possess a stronger sense of belonging to their community, form more close friendships. achieve greater levels of life satisfaction, happiness and health, and possess a greater desire to give back to their community through volunteering.<sup>123</sup>



### Wellbeing story:

## Men's groups reduce isolation and support health and wellbeing

**Like other social groups, men's groups are a great way to build local friendships and connections. Men's Sheds are well known. They are places where men of all ages can go for a cuppa and a chat, to work on a project of their own or for the community.**

According to Peter, Older Men New Ideas focuses on 'giving older men the opportunity to communicate, connect and establish confidential and trusting relationships so they can open up. That can be profoundly beneficial for some men who are going through trauma. And we discuss topics – some challenging, which stimulates new ideas.'

Sons of the West focuses on empowering men to make their health and wellbeing a priority. It combines fun exercise activities, expert guidance and social connection. According to

a participant: 'maybe if I have issues and I'm staying within that man box<sup>91</sup> or being a tough individual, it gave me the avenue to open up and say, "well, if this guy has gone through all of this, maybe I should share my story as well".'

Whatever their interests or membership, these groups serve their members by providing a supportive place to meet up and creating an environment that encourages connection, talking and listening. And this connection is key to a better sense of wellbeing.

'So, what we're doing together is building momentum, into a general acceptance of connecting, joining, talking, listening. It's very powerful stuff.'

**Peter, facilitator of Older Men New Ideas**

**At Tough Guy Book Club, Shay says:**

'we're just a bunch of guys who meet once a month, at a pub, to talk about a book. But what we're really doing is meeting up and talking about life.'

'I have made some fantastic mates here. The best thing about the Men's Shed is the camaraderie. But generally speaking, it's the opportunity to be free enough to talk.'

**Keith, Nepean Men's Shed**

**Ben Hughes, co-founder of Men's Table, says:**

'wellbeing is about sitting down and having a meal together. The first thing is listening, being able to listen to each other in a safe space, not jumping in and trying to fix each other, just being able to accept what the other man is saying ... and talking about what's going on. It's about being part of a safe, non-judgemental community, especially for men who don't have this in their lives.'



### 3. We need to feel our lives have worth and meaning

#### **It's important to feel we can take part and contribute socially and economically, and be part of something bigger than us.**

Living in a way that aligns with our values gives us a sense of purpose, fulfilment and peace. It can help us to cultivate deeper relationships, build trust with others and feel a greater sense of connection with our communities.

We may find meaning in a range of ways - by pursuing our goals and ambitions, contributing to

our community, expressing ourselves creatively, caring for others, taking part in spiritual or religious practices, or connecting with nature.

We need access to a range of opportunities and the skills to define and pursue the things that give meaning to our lives.

#### **What people told us**

'I like the idea of having the freedom to define wellbeing for myself. What it means for me and what it means for you comes out of our own experience.'



'I think mental wellbeing is when people have purpose and you can see, sense, and feel the joy as they are speaking. It's about connection, care, and contribution.'

'I was introduced to the Council for Homeless Persons, and they invited me to interview for a role. Getting that job lifted me out of a hopeless situation into being involved and giving back to the community.'



'I aim to stay mentally agile, continue to work and make priority time with family and friends. These things get you up each morning, give you something to look forward to and provide hope for the future.'

### What the evidence says

- Engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through **culturally appropriate approaches** can contribute to a higher sense of individual and community empowerment, self-efficacy, belonging and control over personal and community social and emotional wellbeing.<sup>93</sup>
- **Spirituality and spiritual practices** can support people to explore their meaning in life and to cope with mental distress. Spirituality may help prevent suicide.<sup>94,95</sup>
- For young people, **volunteering** is associated with better mental health and increased life satisfaction. Young people may turn to civic action and volunteering to manage their anxiety related to government inaction towards issues such as climate change and cost of living.<sup>96</sup>
- **Meaningful work** is associated with greater personal work and life satisfaction, feelings of accomplishment, growth and enrichment, wellbeing and less stress.<sup>97</sup>



Photo credit: Our Place

#### Wellbeing story:

'[W]hen you walk through the doors and everyone was welcoming it was great. Right from the beginning. Within a couple of weeks you'd walk through the door and you'd be greeted from the staff all the way through. It became like a second home.'

**Patsy, parent and support staff member**

### Schools as community hubs

Walking into Doveton College is like entering a lively multicultural community hub. Opened in 2012, this Prep to Year 9 school was designed to weave school and community together to help children and families to thrive.

Doveton is one of nine Our Place school sites in Victoria offering wrap-around activities and services onsite, including playgroups, childcare and kindergarten, adult education and a range of health, family and children's services. This means school staff can work closely with care workers to identify and support children and families with additional needs, and children can

'I never, ever thought I'd be teaching kids sports, or being a sports assistant. Even doing cooking classes and stuff – it's changed my outlook and helped me in life in a big way.'

**Dean, parent and volunteer<sup>98</sup>**

easily get the care they need without having to miss school or for their parents needing to miss work.

Each Our Place school has a team of community facilitators who encourage and support parents to engage with various activities and to pursue learning, employment and leadership opportunities. As Sumona, a parent at Doveton, said: 'before I was very scared to talk to someone, but when I talked to [the community facilitator] she said no, I understand ... When I go and see her, she helps me, and always I step up. And nowadays I have too much confidence!'

Above all, Our Place schools such as Doveton are proving that schools can be a powerful place to bring people together to connect, learn and get involved, which in turn builds ability, identity and confidence. The key to the strong sense of pride, community and belonging lies in the proactive, supportive and collective spirit that is shared by the principal, educators, parents, children and other onsite staff.





Wellbeing story:

Photo credit: Frankston City Council

### Social Inclusion Action Groups, Department of Health

Social exclusion is a major contributor to mental ill health, loneliness and isolation. Recognising the important role of community in promoting wellbeing, the Victorian Government established the first 10 Social Inclusion Action Groups (SIAGs) in response to Recommendation 15 of the Royal Commission's final report.

SIAGs are focused on strengthening the wellbeing and resilience of local communities. They do this by enhancing community connection and participation, which can boost people's wellbeing and sense of identity, agency and belonging.

Each SIAG is made up of community members and leaders who work together to fund initiatives that foster local participation, inclusion and connection through a Local Social Inclusion Investment Fund. By tackling social exclusion through a values-based, locally driven model, the groups demonstrate the key role of communities in wellbeing promotion.

Priorities and initiatives vary across SIAGs, responding to local need. Initiatives across sites include place making, inclusive community events and fostering partnerships to test new ideas to support connected and inclusive communities.

'There is a sense of connectedness, community and inclusion that comes with being part of the SIAG and you feel you are contributing to making a difference.'

#### SIAG community member

The Frankston SIAG is supporting a local primary school to build stronger ties with fathers in their school community. The SIAG provided seed funding and facilitated local partnerships to bring The Fathering Project to Frankston, a locally-led approach to engaging fathers through group events, activities and resources. The SIAG anticipates that in time, the initiative will help more dads to become involved and connected to their children's learning and to the broader school community.



## 4. We need to be safe and respected for who we are

### Feeling valued and accepted by our community contributes to our feelings of self-worth.

We can express ourselves without fear when we are respected for who we are. It gives us cultural and emotional safety, social connection and a sense of agency or control over our own lives. It allows us to accept ourselves, overcome self-criticism, reduce anxiety and focus on our strengths.

This helps build resilience so we can overcome challenges at different stages in our lives. When we are valued, we are more likely to feel connected to others, to seek out and maintain positive relationships and contribute to our community.

Raising our voices and connecting with others is harder when we are fearful or experience violence, overlapping forms of discrimination or stigma.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it is important to acknowledge the impact and trauma of colonisation through truth-telling. Perceived unfairness in society combined with low trust in our government and institutions can lead to cracks in our sense of cohesion.

Whether we feel respected and included is about the way we are perceived and treated by others. So, the intersectional nature of society's structures, norms and values play a critical role in shaping our sense of belonging and dignity.

#### What people told us

'Mental wellbeing is about a safe and supportive space that is free from discrimination, where I am respected and can access my health and wellbeing needs.'

'Self-efficacy comes from feeling safe enough ... having internal safety and resilience.'

'I enjoy being an older person, but our society sees old age as a negative. I want a society in which all ages are respected and celebrated.'

'Limits to the system began at colonisation. It was not set up to support Aboriginal people. That's why we need to go as far as we possibly can on a path to Treaty.'

'Mental wellbeing is about holding hands with your partner and not worrying about what people will think. It is about being embraced by the community. It is workplaces and families accepting you have needs and being flexible enough to support these needs.'



### What the evidence says

- A stronger sense of **belonging**, a factor of social connectedness, is associated with increased life satisfaction among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities<sup>99</sup> and decreased suicidal ideation or attempts among young people from LGBTIQ+ communities in Australia.<sup>100</sup>
- Organisations with a high psychosocial safety climate emphasise psychological health over productivity and consequently make improvements in the **work environment** (e.g., reducing demands, increasing resources, providing job security, adequate salaries, antibullying, and violence policies).<sup>98</sup> Having positive **interpersonal relationships at work** is the strongest driver of job satisfaction, particularly with managers and co-workers.<sup>102</sup>
- **Challenging rigid gendered stereotypes** and behaviours that condone gender-based violence, while creating cultures that **promote women's independence**, can prevent gendered violence and promote the wellbeing of men, women and LGBTIQ+ communities.<sup>91,103</sup>
- Immediate and extended family support, trust and fairness in the family, high family cohesion, a **positive family climate** and parental involvement are key factors that contribute to positive mental health outcomes in children, including those who have faced childhood adversity.<sup>104,105</sup>

#### Wellbeing story:

### Ballarat community saturation model, Respect Victoria

In May 2024, the Victorian Government announced a community 'saturation model' in Ballarat to prevent gendered violence. Part of Victoria's wider family violence reform effort, the initiative is based on global evidence that demonstrates the impact of place-based, community-led approaches to preventing gender-based violence.

The saturation approach is based on the idea that all of a person's different connections in their community should reinforce the same attitudes, beliefs and behaviours related to preventing gendered violence. When prevention actions shaped by the community 'saturate' an area, and are connected and reinforce each other, evidence shows they have significantly more impact.

Respect Victoria is working together with the community, local organisations and services to design the model, which could include initiatives with schools, sporting groups, workplaces and other settings. The model will build on existing promising practice, support innovation and strengthen coordination to maximise impact and accelerate progress in preventing gender-based violence in Ballarat.



Photo credit : Respect Victoria

Co-design of the model will take place through the first half of 2025 via a working group of the Ballarat community and local leaders. The model will be designed to connect with family and sexual violence response and recovery services in Ballarat. A well-supported system of prevention, early intervention, response and recovery services is essential to effectively drive down rates of gendered violence and help keep people safe.

This is the first initiative of its kind in Australia. Results from the Ballarat saturation model may improve Victoria and Australia's understanding of what works to prevent gendered violence on a wider scale.

### Wellbeing story:

## Public libraries foster connection, safety and belonging.

Public libraries do much more than lend books to people. According to a recent survey, people recognise libraries as places where they feel safe or belong (56%), they feel connected to their community (49%), their mental wellbeing is helped (44%) and they can get access to services (43%).<sup>107</sup>

For example, Warrnambool Library and Learning Centre is a place where people who have experienced addiction are supported to tell their own life stories through creative non-fiction. The Sharing Stories program is led by a writing teacher who supports participants to improve their literacy and build confidence

to share their experiences. The project has had a profound impact on participants by strengthening their connections to community, and by decreasing stigma around addiction.

At Merri-bek Libraries, people with disabilities came together to co-design an arts program, with remarkable results. Arts Connection facilitator Jess says: 'I feel like my role ... a lot of the time is to provide the space and hopefully a bit of structure to allow everyone to connect and have fun making art'. Trial program participants felt less isolated (60%), more connected (70%), experienced an increased sense of belonging (80%) and felt more confident to try new things (80%).<sup>107</sup>

People go to the library looking mainly for information, but they find each other there.

**Robert Putnam, Harvard professor and social scientist<sup>106</sup>**



## 5. We need the capabilities to navigate the ups and downs of life

### We need to understand and navigate our wellbeing through different life stages and experiences.

Everyone's life has highs and lows. Changes, challenges, joys and rewards.

We need the knowledge, skills and supports to look after our mental and physical health and help others to look after theirs. This includes understanding the impact of our emotions and experiences on our wellbeing and having the language and skills to communicate our needs. We also need to know when and where to ask for help.

Importantly, we need to be able to make decisions for ourselves and to have influence in our lives.

This gives us a sense of control, confidence and hope about the future, especially if we have had experiences of control or agency being denied.

From birth, we must develop the critical foundations of these wellbeing skills, so they are part of our approach to life as we grow up and help us to age well. When we have the knowledge, language and skills we need, we are more confident in managing our relationships and our wellbeing. We are also more likely to act with respect, care and generosity to support the wellbeing of others.

### What people told us

'Acknowledge and emphasise that all people have highs and lows of mental wellbeing. We don't need to be seriously unwell to be noticed, cared for, or involved in programs.'

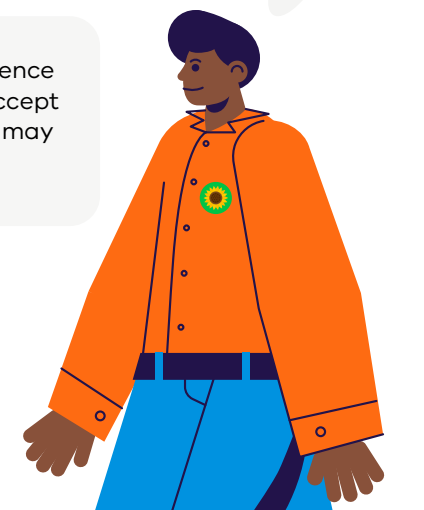
'For LGBTIQ+ communities, many social environments impact on our wellbeing. We need policies, cultures and resources that recognise and affirm us and our lived experience.'

'When my husband died, there was no assistance available. There is no agency that helps an older person re-organise their lives. A couple of contacts or checklists would have been useful.'

'I work in a school, and there are barriers around language. The way we interpret the world is different. Our social constructs are designed for neurotypical people. We need to normalise difference.'

'Hearing peoples' lived experience helps farmers to relate and accept that it's ok to admit that they may need to seek help.'

'It's normal to feel grief. It's normal to feel upset. If you didn't have those feelings, it wouldn't be normal. But it is also important to know your own levels of endurance and what you can cope with.'



### What the evidence says

- Having high levels of **life skills**, such as emotional stability, determination, optimism and sense of control, can increase subjective wellbeing.<sup>108</sup>
- **Intentional activities that aim to boost wellbeing** can enhance subjective wellbeing and psychological wellbeing and help reduce depressive symptoms.<sup>109,110,111</sup>
- Up to 17% of depression incidences can be prevented with 60 minutes of **physical activity** each week. Eating a **healthy diet**, **quitting smoking** and engaging with the **natural environment** can also improve health outcomes for people experiencing mental distress.<sup>112,113,114,115</sup> Conversely, high levels of mental wellbeing can enhance these protective factors for physical wellbeing, including less cigarette smoking and more social interactions.<sup>116,117</sup>



Wellbeing story:

### Parenting program supports family and community connection

Empowering Parents Empowering Communities is a parenting program with a difference. It connects parents with each other to improve children's lives.<sup>118</sup>

As a new parent, Hieu was on the verge of depression when she joined this program. 'I knew I needed help. I was the mother I didn't want to be and my son was becoming violent,' Hieu says. 'He was yelling and hitting to express his feelings. I needed something to help me deal with my parenting.'

Designed for parents with children aged from two to eleven years old, the program offers eight 2.5-hour sessions on topics such as attachment, social learning, structural, relational and cognitive behaviour therapy. The focus is to enable parents to talk to and learn from other parents when seeking information. Parent facilitators are trained, employed, supported and supervised by a specially trained practitioner within a local community organisation.

Hieu found the program enormously helpful. It improved her parenting and also her relationships with her son and husband. She says the family is more emotionally connected. 'Parenting now has become easier for both my husband and me. We find joy and happiness in every moment we spend with our son. Every second we are together is precious. We value the time we spend together, and most importantly, we have learnt to trust each other.'

Hieu's experience was so positive that she decided to become a parent facilitator. This has also helped her connect with her local community. 'I was exposed to a group of like-minded people, which helped me feel included. It was very important for me, especially as I am from another country. I was exposed to a lot of different cultural values and ideas too.'



# 6

## Our vision, aspirations and priorities

**All people and communities in Victoria have what they need to thrive, for now and for future generations.**



We heard clearly from people across Victoria about what they need to achieve good mental health and wellbeing. This is supported by research and evidence in prevention and wellbeing promotion.

Over the next 10 years, we **aspire** and commit to change so that:

- people's life conditions support individual and collective wellbeing
- our physical, natural and cultural spaces support wellbeing
- community wisdom is valued and supported
- our communities are inclusive, connected and respectful
- our ability to nurture our personal and collective wellbeing is strong.

To achieve this change, we will focus efforts on eight **priority** areas:

1. Prioritise wellbeing in decision making across economic and social systems
2. Promote wellbeing centred leadership in institutions
3. Integrate wellbeing in the design and development of physical, social and natural infrastructure
4. Increase access and participation in natural and cultural spaces
5. Learn from community wisdom, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' experience and expertise
6. Embed respect and inclusion in communities and organisations
7. Support connected communities
8. Strengthen people's agency over their wellbeing.

## 6. Our vision, aspirations and priorities (continued)

**Our aspirations** were developed by combining what the community and our cross-sector partners told us, with evidence about what works to promote mental wellbeing. These were tested with people we consulted and with our Expert Advisory Committee. They are also consistent with the Royal Commission's recommendations and lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, which amplified barriers to wellbeing, social inequities, and mental distress.

**Our priorities** were developed to meet our aspirations, and were also tested through consultation. They aim to promote respect, equity and dignity and to reflect our right to the highest attainable standard of mental wellbeing. Many of these build on reforms that are currently planned or underway, while others forge new directions. Priorities will be led across government, and aim to prevent mental distress and promote wellbeing across multiple settings and sectors – most of which are outside the health system.

Figure 10: Our Aspirations and Priorities



# 7

# Our approach to implementation

## Pathway to change

The Wellbeing Strategy spans 10 years. Sustained and coordinated action is needed to make a real difference. Led by Victoria's Wellbeing Promotion Adviser, wellbeing action plans will guide change and integrate wellbeing into the work of government, and in the places where people live, work, learn and play.

We must work together to create a future where everyone has what they need to feel and function well, to participate and benefit on a more equitable basis.

The first two-year action plan will build the foundations for wellbeing promotion to be delivered across government, various sectors and in the community. This will include:

- building strong partnerships and capabilities
- establishing a coordinated approach
- identifying and amplifying best practice
- laying the foundations to realise our aspirations over the term of the strategy.

Figure 11: Key partners in implementing the Wellbeing Strategy

### WHO NEEDS TO PLAY A ROLE?

We must work together to create a future where everyone has what they need to feel and function well, to participate and benefit on a more equitable basis.

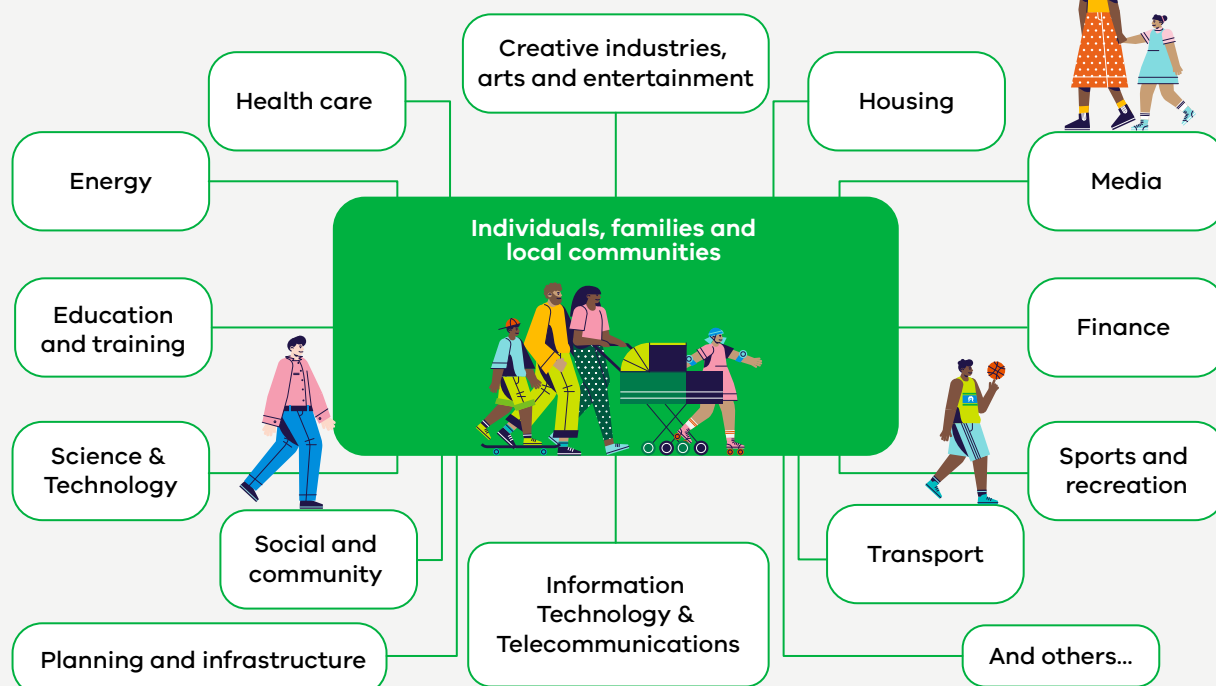
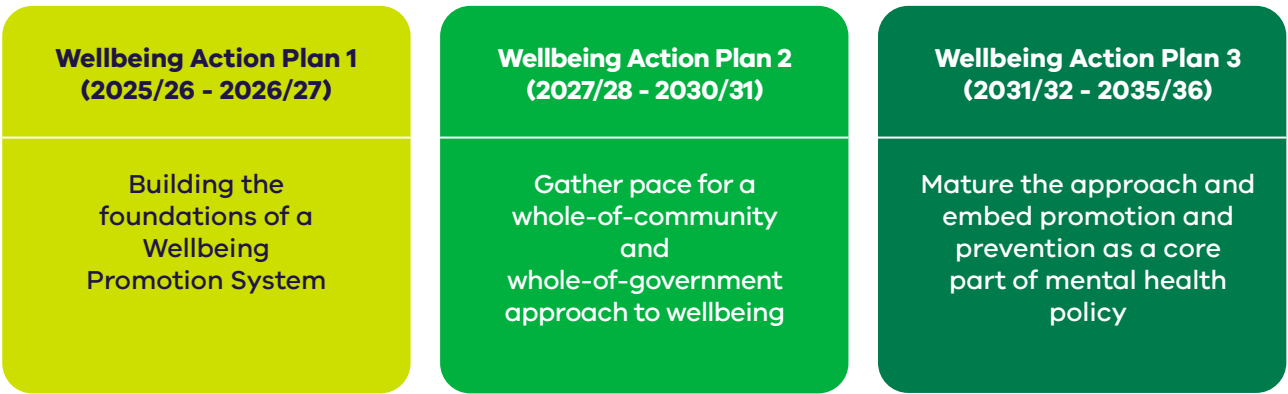


Figure 12: Key stages of change



Refer to Appendix 1: Pathway to Wellbeing: A Change Framework (Summary) for ‘markers of change’ that will enable us to see whether this new approach is improving the wellbeing of the Victorian community.

Treaty and Aboriginal self-determination

The Wellbeing Strategy recognises that reforms are underway to embed Voice, Treaty and Truth-telling to advance Aboriginal self-determination in Victoria. It acknowledges the importance of these developments in achieving equity and justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Improving wellbeing for all in Victoria cannot be achieved without this.

The strategy is placed within this wider context of reform. First, actions relating to or affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in this strategy will be self-determined (including engagement with the First Peoples Assembly where appropriate) and align with Treaty obligations. Second, the strategy will be an ongoing mechanism for promoting respect, recognition of past injustices, and learning from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ expertise and knowledge of social and emotional wellbeing. Finally, the strategy will be reviewed, when appropriate, so that future actions align with Treaty negotiations and future Treaties in Victoria, as well as findings and recommendations made by the Yoorrook Justice Commission.



### How the Wellbeing Strategy relates to other reforms

#### Victoria's Early Intervention Investment Framework

The Early Intervention Investment Framework (EIIF) is designed to guide investment in early intervention initiatives through the State Budget by linking government funding to quantifiable impacts on communities and the service system. It was introduced in the Victorian State Budget in 2021–22 and aims to improve life outcomes for individuals while reducing pressure on acute services, including health and mental health services. Wellbeing promotion and prevention initiatives can be funded through EIIF, and initiatives that are funded will be reported on annually, to help better understand their effectiveness.

#### Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan

The Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (the Plan) is legislated by Victoria's Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008. The Plan sets the direction for improving public health and wellbeing over four-year cycles. The current plan (2023–2027) outlines ten priority areas for action with a focus on:

- collaborative action across all levels of government, health sector partners, organisations and communities
- supporting safe and health-sustaining environments
- promoting the health and wellbeing of all Victorians, with targeting action towards those who need it most to advance health equity.

The Wellbeing Strategy outlines the approach to collective action to deliver on mental wellbeing as a priority area of the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (2023–2027). It also provides local councils with specific policy direction to improve mental wellbeing as part of their municipal public health and wellbeing plans.

#### Alignment with related mental health and wellbeing strategies

The Wellbeing Strategy also aligns with other strategies recommended by the Royal Commission to build a foundation for integrated and coordinated approaches to mental health and wellbeing in Victoria. These include:

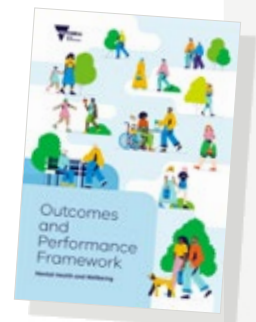
- the *Victorian Suicide Prevention and Response Strategy 2024–2034*, which aims to address the factors that impact suicide within and beyond the mental health and wellbeing service system



- the *Diverse Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework 2025–2035*, which embeds diversity, equity and inclusion across the mental health and wellbeing reforms to improve mental health and wellbeing outcomes for diverse communities



- the *Mental Health and Wellbeing Outcomes and Performance Framework*, the Victorian Government's main mechanism for monitoring the impact of the mental health and wellbeing reform agenda on system outcomes and for holding the service system to account for its service performance (more detail in section 6).





### Improving wellbeing support within the mental healthcare system

While the Wellbeing Promotion Office is focused on wellbeing promotion outside of the mental healthcare system, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Division (in the Department of Health) will ensure that wellbeing supports are a core part of the treatment, care and support provided to people living with a mental illness. This is critical to ensure that people living with mental illness are supported to flourish.

Wellbeing support may include services that assist people with mental illness to:

- manage daily living skills
- obtain and maintain housing
- identify client needs for other services (such as the NDIS, alcohol and other drug treatment services, clinical care), and connect with and maintain engagement with these services
- socialise, build and maintain relationships
- engage, and maintain engagement, with appropriate education (including vocational skills) and employment opportunities.



### Reform is already underway in many areas

We know that work is already underway across government and in communities to achieve the eight priorities outlined in this strategy. Wellbeing action plans will build on existing success by coordinating and scaling our collective efforts to achieve long-term, sustainable improvements to people's wellbeing.

Existing Victorian Government reforms that are already supporting the priorities outlined in the Wellbeing Strategy outlined in Appendix 2.

As part of delivering the Royal Commission recommendations, we are:

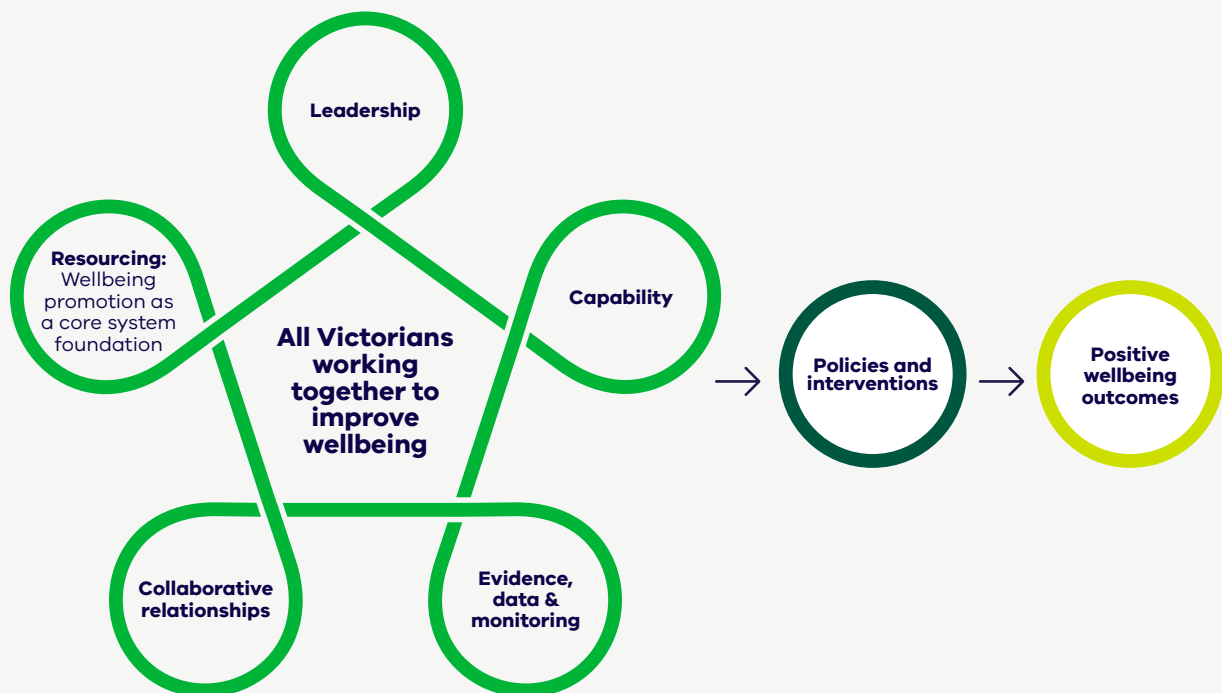
- implementing a **Mentally Healthy Workplaces Framework** and tools that support Victorian businesses and workplaces to adopt mentally healthy workplace strategies and promote inclusive workplaces that are free from stigma and discrimination
- implementing actions that prioritise **student wellbeing** under the revised Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO 2.0), which guides Victorian schools to place student learning and wellbeing at the forefront of improving student outcomes (including implementing the Royal Commission recommendation on social and emotional wellbeing in schools).

# 8

## How we will build better wellbeing together – the foundations

The Wellbeing Strategy lays the foundations for a robust, adaptive and accountable system to promote wellbeing and prevent mental distress while also promoting health equity and Aboriginal self-determination (Figure 13). It is a systematic approach involving the whole of government, all sectors, all services and all communities.

Figure 13: Foundations of a wellbeing promotion system



Based on Littlejohns & Wilson (2019)<sup>119</sup>

### Wellbeing leadership in every sphere

Victorians told us they want leaders to prioritise the wellbeing needs of communities, and they want leaders to bring diverse voices into decision-making.

Leadership in wellbeing is not limited to any one sector or setting. Leaders at all levels of government, organisations and community have a role in advancing wellbeing. They can make wellbeing a priority by making decisions that advance wellbeing, encouraging diverse values and views and including people with lived and living experience, allocating resources towards efforts that promote wellbeing, sharing power, collaborating with other wellbeing partners and empowering their teams. This approach needs to become part of their accountability as leaders. The wellbeing of their teams, their organisations and the communities they serve should be a measure of their success.

**Victorians told us they want leaders to prioritise the wellbeing needs of communities, and they want leaders to bring diverse voices into decision-making.**



The State Wellbeing Promotion Adviser and their Office will provide leadership, coordination and collaboration to champion a sustained focus on wellbeing and drive positive outcomes. They will support wellbeing leaders to forge new directions to ensure we make progress and overcome challenges.

### Resourcing for wellbeing promotion

Victoria can only realise a better state of wellbeing if wellbeing promotion and prevention are embedded in the mental healthcare system, prioritised in sectors beyond health, and supported by committed resources. Dedicated resources for effective wellbeing promotion are required in addition to – not instead of – funds for treatment, care and support more broadly. Without them, we will not achieve a reduction in demand for services and healthcare costs over time.

In the 2021–22 State Budget, the Victorian Government dedicated funding to establish the Wellbeing Promotion Office in the Department of Health to lead and coordinate a statewide approach to promoting good mental health and wellbeing and preventing mental distress. Mental health and wellbeing promotion has been supported through health promotion funding provided to VicHealth, community health and women's health agencies, and to Local Public Health Units.

Resource allocation will be most effective when used to deliver evidence-informed initiatives focused on influencing the drivers of good mental health for specific communities and at a statewide level. This will help achieve more equitable health outcomes and is the key to improving wellbeing. It's also about allocating resources to strengthen wellbeing outcomes in broader, non-health settings, such as workplaces, early learning centres, schools, sports/recreation and in communities. By investing in targeted, coordinated, evidence-based initiatives in a range of settings and at scale, we can effectively reduce the prevalence of mental distress and improve people's wellbeing.

Thinking forward to a Treaty with Aboriginal Victorians, we seek to meet the expectations. This includes working with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to enhance support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples before crises and to positively transform lives of the Aboriginal Health Partnership Agreement in relation to prevention and early intervention. This includes prioritising funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to enhance support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples before crises and to positively transform lives.

### Wellbeing as a collaborative endeavour

Bringing the Wellbeing Strategy to life demands collective action. It requires deep and genuine collaboration that reaches across sectors, and incorporates diverse, intersectional and lived and living experiences. We must bring together different disciplines and approaches to support wellbeing goals. By listening, learning and sharing, we can further our collective knowledge and maximise the impact of our initiatives. Meaningful partnerships and collaboration across sectors will be central to delivering *Wellbeing in Victoria*. It will allow us to change the societal factors that enable good mental health for all.

### Enhance and embed wellbeing promotion capabilities

We all play a part in advancing wellbeing. Every Victorian can influence their own and other people's wellbeing as a community leader, colleague, peer, parent or friend. It is essential that professionals and practitioners across many sectors play a role, in addition to those inside the health system. But community action is not enough on its own.

Workforce development (recognised as an important function of the Wellbeing Promotion Office) will be needed to expand the skills and practices that promote wellbeing – both within and beyond the health system.<sup>12</sup> This includes drawing on the wisdom, knowledge and cultures that already support wellbeing in many parts of our community. Harnessing the knowledge of wellbeing promotion that exists in Victoria, we'll embed promotion capabilities across settings and practices to build the workforce we need in the long term.

### Evidence, data and monitoring for impact

We need to deliver actions that lead to positive and more equitable outcomes for people and communities. To achieve this, we need a better understanding of the drivers of wellbeing at a community level and clear and consistent ways to measure and report on wellbeing outcomes. Incorporating an intersectional approach to data systems will highlight the experiences of people who face multiple forms of discrimination and inequality that intersect, overlap and create compounding forms of disadvantage. This will assist in better understanding and highlighting gaps, patterns, and barriers to wellbeing.

We need to monitor and evaluate activities delivered through this strategy and to share new insights from practice. This translation of knowledge is important, so we can base our actions on what is needed and what works, and continuously improve what we do and how we do it, for Victorians as a whole and for specific communities. Our accountability is to communities, and it will incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights to data sovereignty.

Meaningful change will occur when we address strengthen these five foundations, which is a focus of the priorities in the Wellbeing Strategy.



# 9

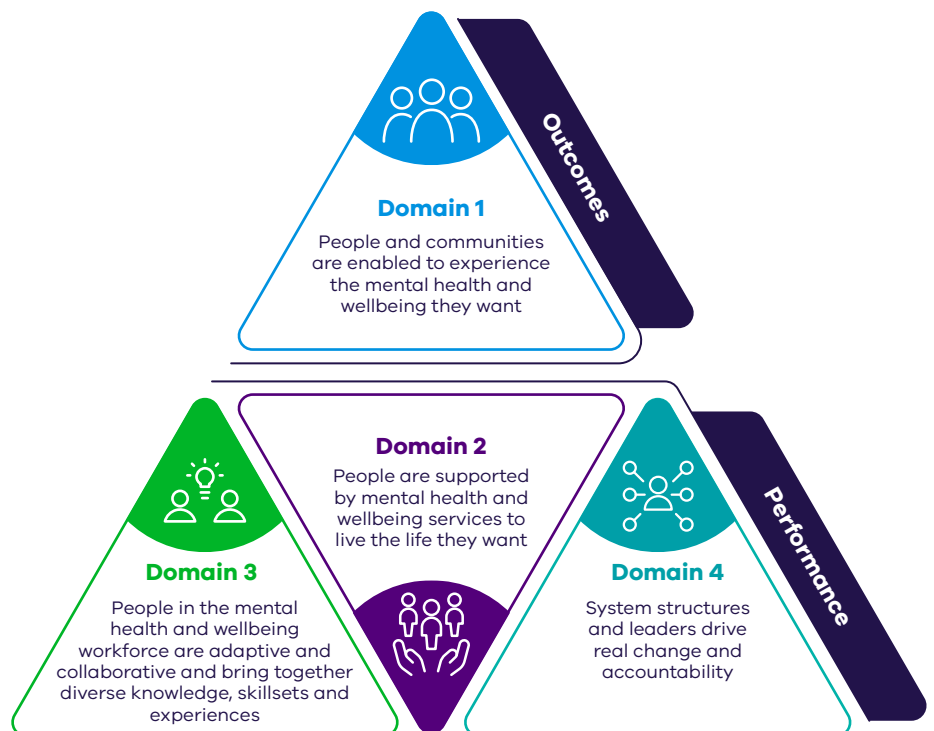
## How we'll know if we're making a difference

**We will monitor our progress under the new Mental Health and Wellbeing Outcomes and Performance Framework (Figure 14), which is the Victorian Government's primary mechanism for monitoring the impact of the mental health and wellbeing reform agenda.**

The outcome and performance framework architecture sets out a singular vision underpinned by four domains, which together describe what success looks like in Victoria's reformed mental health and wellbeing system. The four domains contain a series of outcomes, each with respective indicators and measures, which together define how success will be measured.

Domains 1 and 4 contain outcomes and indicators relevant to the priorities of the Wellbeing strategy as outlined on the next page.

**Figure 14: The four domains of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Performance and Outcomes Framework**





**Domain 1:****Victorian Population****People and communities are enabled to experience the mental health and wellbeing they want****Outcome 1. People's mental health and wellbeing enable them to live a life they want**

Indicators	Priorities:
↑ Increase quality of life and life satisfaction	1 2 3 4
↑ Increase sense of belonging and purpose	5 6 7 8
↑ Increase self-confidence and self-belief	
↓ Decrease rates of suicide	
↓ Decrease rates of psychological distress	

**Outcome 2. Communities support and enable mental health and wellbeing**

Indicators	Priorities:
↑ Increase social inclusion and community connection	1 2 3 4
↑ Increase local liveability and access to nature	5 6 7 8
↑ Increase supportive, respectful relationships	
↑ Increase community conversations about emotional wellbeing	

**Outcome 3. People's mental health and wellbeing is supported by every aspect of their life**

Indicators	Priorities:
↑ Decrease family violence, gender-based violence, and gender inequality	1 2 3 4
↑ Decrease community and societal violence	5 6 7 8
↑ Decrease adverse childhood experiences	
↑ Decrease bullying and cyber bullying	
↓ Decrease experiences of discrimination and exclusion	
↑ Increase support for people and communities exposed to trauma, natural disasters, and other adverse events	

**Outcome 3. People's mental health and wellbeing is supported by every aspect of their life (continued)**

Indicators	Priorities:
 Decrease financial insecurity	<b>1</b> <b>2</b> 3 4
 Decrease harmful and addictive relationships with alcohol, other drugs, and gambling Increase stable, secure, and appropriate housing	<b>5</b> <b>6</b> <b>7</b> <b>8</b>
 Increase meaningful engagement in education, employment, and other pastimes	
 Increase physical health	
 Increase optimal family functioning and support	
 Decrease discrimination and stigma around mental health challenges and psychological distress	

**Domain 4:****System stewardship****System structures and leaders drive real change and accountability****Outcome 5. Wellbeing is supported in the places people learn, live and work**

Indicators	Priorities:
 Increase positive mental health and wellbeing for children and young people in education settings	<b>1</b> <b>2</b> 3 4
 Increase positive mental health and wellbeing in workplaces	5 <b>6</b> <b>7</b> <b>8</b>
 Increase positive mental health and wellbeing in aged care and other long-term care settings	
 Increase awareness of and support for mental health and wellbeing in the justice system, including youth justice	
 Increase support for mental health and wellbeing in the child protection and out-of-home care systems	
 Increase positive mental health and wellbeing for people in public and social housing	

The Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Outcomes Framework is another key mechanism to monitor and report progress on our collective efforts to achieve good health and wellbeing, including positive mental health.

Further detail regarding how we will monitor the impact of the Wellbeing Strategy will be provided during delivery of the first action plan.

# 10

## A final message from the State Wellbeing Promotion Adviser

**Your contribution to change matters.** In today's globalised, digitalised and fast-paced world, we can feel like we have less control and influence over our lives. During these times, it's especially important to remember the things we value, like wellbeing.

**Our wellbeing is intertwined with others.** We are social beings and all need other people to thrive, to feel safe, connected and belong which as we've heard, are essential to wellbeing.

**We all have the opportunity to lead change that will result in greater collective wellbeing.** We can lead from where we are, in our homes, neighbourhoods, workplaces and communities. We can enable others to do the same, and support those who are less heard to have greater voice. I encourage you to join us in doing what you can to advance the wellbeing priorities that matter most to you and your community.

**Victoria's first Wellbeing Strategy represents a call to action for all of us.** This is about long term change, subtle but significant shifts that will ensure all people and communities in Victoria have what they need to thrive, now and for future generations. We look forward to working with you to achieve this.

– Monica Kelly, Inaugural State Wellbeing Promotion Adviser, 2025



# Thank you

## We acknowledge the following people for their contribution:

- Aboriginal leaders including Dr John Davis, Nicole McCartney, and the Balit Durn Durn Centre team
- Belinda Duarte AM and guest speakers at the Wellbeing Symposium 2023 – Jill Gallagher AO, Bonnie Dukakis, Drew Paton, Mary O'Hagan, Ciara Sterling and Mike Salvaris
- Kerry Arabena and guest speakers at the Wellbeing Symposium 2024- Jon Kanoa, Sheree Lowe, Professor Sharon Goldfeld, Dr Stephen Carbone, Professor Patrick McGorry AO
- Taryn Marks, Kylie Long Facilitation and Portable Australia.

- Wellbeing Promotion Office Expert Advisory Committee members:

Alliance for the Prevention of Mental Disorders	Professor Nicola Reavley, President
Balit Durn Durn Centre for Excellence in Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing	Sheree Lowe, Executive Director
Child and Family Services Ballarat	Wendy Sturgess, CEO
Commissioner for Senior Victorians	Gerard Mansour, former Commissioner
Commissioner for LGBTIQ+ Communities	Joe Ball; Todd Fernando, former Commissioner
Council on the Ageing Victoria	Ben Rogers, CEO
Department of Health	Mary O'Hagan, former Executive Director
Kalinda Primary School	Shaun McClare, Principal
Municipal Association of Victoria	Jan Black, Policy Advisor
Prevention United	Suzanne Dick, CEO; Stephen Carbone, former CEO
Self Help Addiction Resource Centre	Claire Davies, CEO
South Eastern Metro Primary Health Network	Quinn Pawson, CEO
VicHealth	Kris Cooney, Executive Director; Liss Gabb, Manager
Victorian Disability Advisory Council	Chris Varney, Chairperson; Jen Hargrave, Council member
Victorian Council of Social Services	Juanita Pope, CEO; Emma King OAM, former CEO
Victorian Multicultural Commission	Viv Nguyen AM, Chairperson; Hakan Akyol PSM, former Executive Senior Advisor
Women's Health Victoria	Sally Hasler, CEO; Diane Hill, former CEO
WorkSafe Victoria	John Moran, former Director
Youth Affairs Council Victoria	Mary Naga, CEO; Katherine Ellis, former CEO



**We thank everyone who contributed. We have, to our best efforts, listed the community groups and organisations that people are associated with. We have worked hard to ensure everyone is recognised and apologise for any inadvertent omissions.**

Access Arts Victoria	Australian Services Union	City of Casey
Access Health and Community	Australian Social Value Bank	City of Greater Bendigo
Agriculture Victoria	Australian Vietnamese Women's Association	City of Greater Geelong
Alannah & Madeline Foundation	Back to Back Theatre	City of Kingston
Alexandra Rotary Club	Ballarat Community Health	City of Melbourne
Alfred Mental & Addiction Health	Banyule City Council	City of Melton
Alliance for the Prevention of Mental Disorders	Banyule Community Health	City of Whittlesea
Alpine Health	Barwon Health	cohealth
AMAZE	Batyr	Community and Public Sector Union
Anglicare Victoria	Bayside City Council	Community Music Victoria
Anxiety Recovery Centre	Bendigo City Council	Compassionate Friends Victoria
Arts Access Victoria	Bendigo Community Health Services	Consumer Action Law Centre
Asylum Seeker Resource Centre	Bendigo Financial Services	Council for Homeless Persons
Ausdance	Bendigo Health	Council of International Students
Austin Child & Youth Mental Health Service	Berry Street – Y Change	Council of Single Mothers
Australia Post	Beyond Blue	Council of Whittlesea
Australian African Foundation for Retention and Opportunity	Body Confident Collective	Council on the Ageing
Australian African Sports Association	Brain and Mind Centre, University of Sydney	Country Womens Association
Australian Bi-Polar Disorder Foundation	Budja Budja Aboriginal Cooperative	CREATE Foundation
Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation	Cancer Council Victoria	Creative Victoria
Australian Education Union	Cardinia Shire Council	Deaf Victoria
Australian Music Therapy Association	Carers Victoria	Deakin University
Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights	Central Goldfields Shire Council	Dear Dyslexic Foundation
Australian National Veterans Arts Museum	Centre for Multicultural Youth	Department of Education
Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation	Centre for Youth Mental Health, The University of Melbourne	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
Australian Schools Plus	CERES	Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
	Charis Mentoring	Department of Government Services
	Chatty Café Australia	Department of Health
	Child and Family Services Ballarat	Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions
		Department of Justice and



Community Safety	healthAbility	Multicultural Centre for Women's Health
Department of Premier and Cabinet	Homes Victoria	Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network
Department of Transport and Planning	Housing for the Aged Action Group	Municipal Association of Victoria
Different Journeys	Housing Industry Association	Murdoch Children's Research Institute
DPV Health	Humanists Victoria	Murrindindi Shire Council
Earthwatch Australia	Hume City Council	Natural Health Balance
East Gippsland Health Service	ICan Network	neami national
East Wimmera Health Service	In Touch – Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence	Neighbourhood Houses Victoria
Eastern Community Legal Centre	Infoxchange	Nillumbik Shire Council
Eastern Health	Inner Melbourne Community Legal	North Central Local Learning and Employment Network
Eating Disorders Victoria	Inner West Area Mental Health Service	North West Metro Primary Health Network
Elder Rights Advocacy	International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People	Northern Health
Emergency Services Foundation	Jesuit Social Services	Older Men New Ideas
Everymind	Kalinda Primary School	On the Line
Exercise and Sports Science Australia	Kindred Club House	Orygen
Family Life	Kirrip Aboriginal Corporation	Our Place
Farnham Street Neighbourhood Learning Centre	Knox City Council	Out of the Locker Room
Federation of Community Legal Centres	La Trobe University	Peninsula Health Mental Health Services
Financial Counselling Victoria	Le Mana Pasifika	Fair Go for Pensioners Coalition
Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education	Linfox	People and Parks Foundation
Foundation House	Living Positive Victoria	Point of Difference Studio
Frankston City Council	Love Me Love You	Polyglot Theatre
Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority	Mallee District Aboriginal Service	Port Phillip Eco Centre
Golden City Support Services	Maribyrnong City Council	Prevention United
Good Shepherd	Melbourne City Mission	Pride Cup
Gordon TAFE	Melbourne Health	Project Respect
Goulburn Valley Public Health Unit	Melbourne PC User Group	Proud2Play
Goulburn Women's Health North-East	Melbourne Water	Psychological Safety Works
Gowrie Victoria	Mental Health Legal Centre	Public Galleries Association of Victoria
Grampians Community Health	Merri Health	Public Libraries Victoria
Grampians Health Stawell	Merri-bek City Council	Queers in Science
Grampians Pyrenees Prevention Network	Mildura Base Public Hospital	Rainbow Connections
Healesville Living and Learning Centre	Mildura District Health Service	Red Nose
	Monash Health	Redefine Life
	Monash University	Remember the Wild
	Mosaic Insights	RMIT
	Movember	

Royal Children's Hospital	Thorne Harbour Health	West Wimmera Health Service
Rural Bank	Three for All Foundation	Western Bulldogs Community Foundation
Rural City of Wangaratta	Timboon and District Health Care	Western District Health Service
Rural Financial Counselling Service Gippsland	Tough Guy Book Club	Whitehorse Manningham Libraries
Rural Rainbows	Tourette Syndrome Association of Australia	Wimmera Southern Mallee Development
Safe and Equal	Transcend	Wodonga Council
Safer Care Victoria	Transgender Bendigo	Women and Mentoring
SANE	Trust for Nature	Women's Health Goulbourn North East
Satellite Foundation	Tyabb Village Childrens Centre	Women's Health Victoria
Self Help Addiction Resource Centre	U3A Network Victoria	Women's Mental Health Alliance
Servants Community Housing	Upper Murray Family Care	Women's Spirit Project
Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation	Women's Health and Wellbeing Barwon South West
Smart Recovery	Victoria University	Women's Health East
Smiling Mind	Victoria Walks	Women's Health Goulburn North East
Social Health Australia	Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability	Women's Health in the South East
South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute	Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association	WorkSafe Victoria
South West Alliance of Rural Health	Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders	Youth Affairs Council Victoria
South West Healthcare	Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres	Yallourn North Community Wellbeing Group
South West Sport	Victorian Farmers Federation	Yarra City Council
South-East Monash Legal Service	Victorian Health Promotion Foundation	Yarriambiack Shire Council
Speech Pathology Australia	Victorian Local Governance Association	Yellow Kitties
Spiritual Health Association	Victorian Local Governance Association Child-Friendly Cities and Communities Network	Your Community Health
Sports Focus	Victorian Men's Shed Association	Youth Activating Youth
St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne	Victorian Planning Authority	Youth Disability Advocacy Service
Sunbury and Cobaw Community Health	Victorian Pride Centre	Youth Live4Life
Swinburne University of Technology	Victorian Public Tenants Association	Youth Projects
SYN Media	Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation	Youthlaw
Taskforce Community Agency	Virtual School Victoria	Youthrive
Tenants Victoria	Wangaratta City Council	
The Male Hug	Wellbeing in Schools Australia	
The Mankind Project	Wellways	
The Men's Table		
The University of Melbourne		
The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc.		
Thirrili		

## Appendix 1:

# Pathway to Wellbeing – A Change Framework (Summary)



# The Pathway to Wellbeing: A Change Framework

*Wellbeing in Victoria* is Victoria's first 10-year strategy to promote wellbeing and reduce mental distress across the community. It marks the start of a journey to embed wellbeing in decision-making in public policies, and across organisations, institutions and communities. It will be followed by subsequent wellbeing strategies in the years ahead.

*The Pathway to Wellbeing* is a companion piece to *Wellbeing Strategy*. It tells the story of change – showing how transformation can be achieved, the benefits of this approach, and who can play a role. It also contains some 'markers of change' so we can determine if our actions are working to improve the wellbeing of people in Victoria.



## Why do we need Wellbeing in Victoria?

### To maximise the benefits of wellbeing

- Better learning, increased creativity, improved labour force participation, higher employee engagement and job performance, and greater organisational productivity.
- Better quality relationships, more pro-social behaviours, and greater civic engagement.
- Greater adoption of positive health behaviours, better physical health, and longer life expectancy.
- A reduced likelihood of experiencing a diagnosed mental health condition, and better recovery from these conditions.

### To reduce the impacts of mental distress

- Mental distress is linked to poorer school performance and early school leaving, unemployment, homelessness, divorce, incarceration, substance misuse and reduced physical health.
- Mental distress increases the risk of suicide.
- Mental distress is the second leading cause of disability, and the fourth leading cause of combined disability and premature death in Australia.
- Mental distress costs Victoria \$14.2 billion annually.

### To manage rising demand for services

- There has been a steady rise in the prevalence of mental distress among Australians, particularly dramatic among young people.
- Services are struggling to keep up with demand despite increasing per capita investment.
- We now have the knowledge and programs to promote mental wellbeing and prevent the onset of many common mental health conditions.
- These initiatives are cost-effective and can reduce individual and government costs and save lives.

1 in 5

Victorians experience a mental health condition each year

45 per cent of Victorians will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime



## How can we promote wellbeing?

Our wellbeing is not static. Rather, it is constantly evolving in response to a host of positive influences (protective factors) and negative influences (risk factors).

Promoting wellbeing therefore centres on enhancing positive factors and reducing risk factors in people's lives. Achieving this requires action across four key ecological levels.

No single initiative can promote and protect everyone's mental wellbeing. No single organisation, sector or level of government can do it all. Instead, we need a multi-modal, coordinated approach that operates across the lifespan.

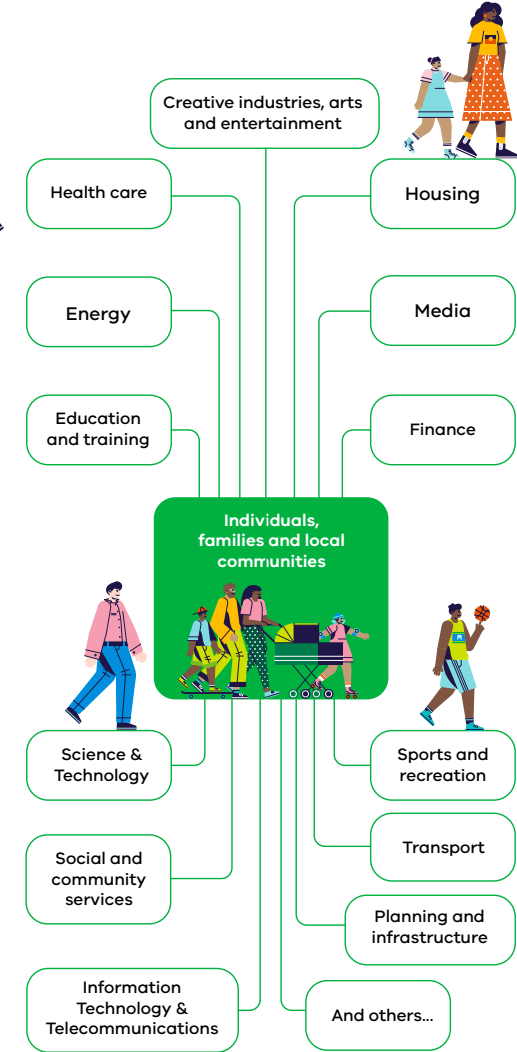
We also need to ensure our initiatives promote equity and are tailored to the needs, preferences, and cultural practices of Victoria's diverse communities.

### Actions to achieve change



## Who needs to play a role?

We must work together to create a future where everyone has what they need to feel and function well, to participate and benefit on a more equitable basis.



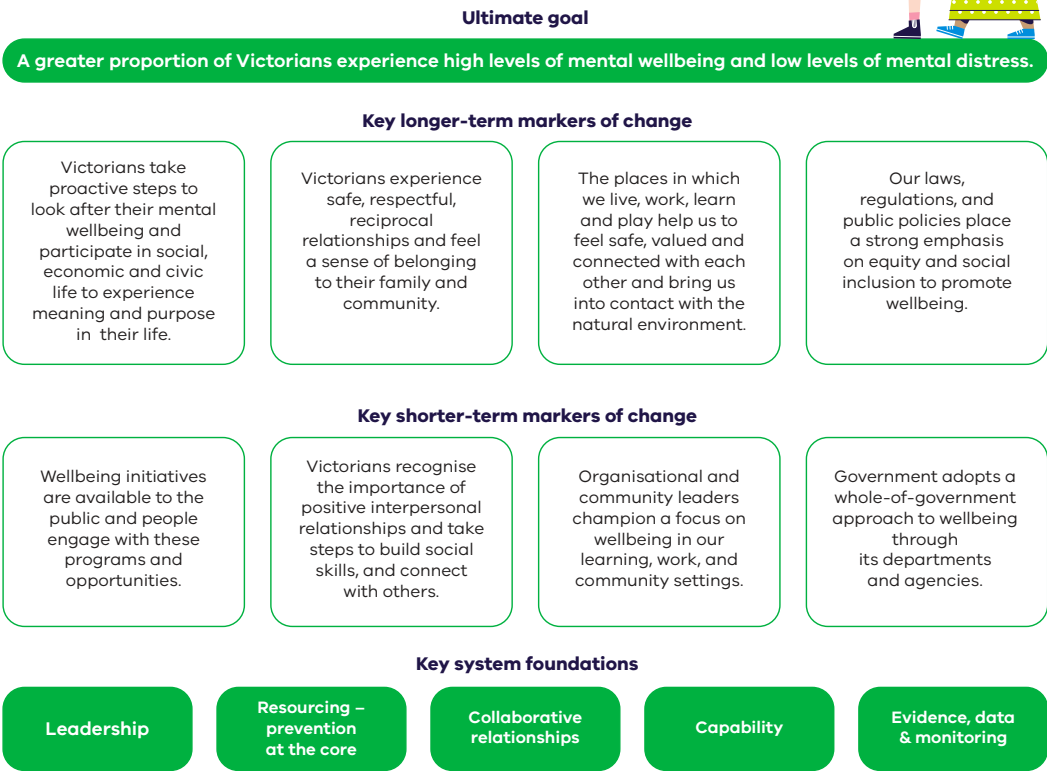


The key stages of change

Sustained action is needed to make a real difference. A series of Wellbeing Actions Plans will drive the priorities and goals outlined in *Wellbeing Strategy*.

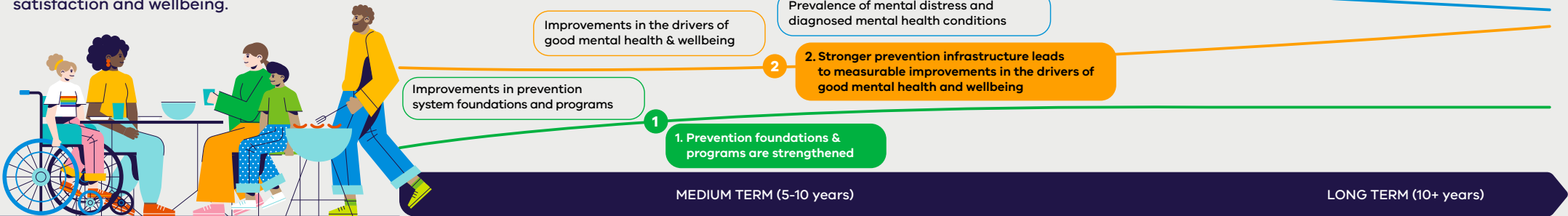
Wellbeing Action Plan 1 (2025/26 - 2026/27)	Wellbeing Action Plan 2 (2027/28 - 2030/31)	Wellbeing Action Plan 3 (2031/21 - 2035/36)
Set strong foundations	Deliver on whole-of-community and whole-of-government approaches to wellbeing	Mature the approach and embed wellbeing promotion in Victoria
Engage the public and organisational and community leaders in the wellbeing agenda and identify and support leaders who can help to drive change.	Build on existing initiatives to strengthen their reach, uptake and impact.	Review what's been achieved drawing on monitoring data and community and stakeholder feedback.
Establish the foundations of a mental health and wellbeing promotion system with a focus on leadership, whole-of-government action, collaborative relationships, resourcing, capability, and data, evidence and monitoring.	Support more organisations and communities to get involved and further strengthen collaboration and coordination of activity through communities of practice and local wellbeing hubs.	Consider lessons learnt in implementing the first Wellbeing Strategy in developing the next strategy for Victoria.
Explore approaches to wellbeing in decision making and improving coordination, reach and impact of existing resourcing, as well as planning for future investments.	Continue to build on whole-of-government relationships and capabilities to implement innovative public policy.	Sustain the programs and policies that are contributing to positive outcomes across the population to ensure their continued success.
Building the capacity and capability of the mental health and wellbeing promotion workforce.	Leverage research and evaluation expertise to co-design new approaches to promote mental wellbeing and prevent mental distress, with an emphasis on communities who need additional or bespoke support.	Target action to address continuing areas for improvement and incorporate advances in wellbeing and prevention science into the next iteration of Victoria's Wellbeing Strategy.

Measuring population level progress towards Wellbeing



The expected process of change

The first step in the change pathway is to strengthen wellbeing promotion system foundations and programs. This will enhance the drivers of wellbeing, which will ultimately reduce the prevalence of mental distress in the community and improve the rates of life satisfaction and wellbeing.





## Appendix 2:

# Existing wellbeing-related initiatives in Victoria

The following Victorian Government led and supported strategies and initiatives have a significant impact on the wellbeing of people in Victoria.

**We need our basic needs met before we can focus on other aspects of our wellbeing**

- **Treaty, Truth and Aboriginal Self-determination**, Department of Premier and Cabinet
- **Big Housing Build 2021**, Homes Victoria
- **Roadmap for Reform: Strong Families, Safe Children 2021-2024**, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
- **Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures 2021-2025**, Department of Health
- **School Readiness Funding 2019 – ongoing**, Department of Education
- **Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework 2009 – ongoing**, Department of Education

**We need to feel connected to each other, our communities, cultures, and spaces around us**

- **Creative State 2025**, Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions
- **Active Victoria 2022-26**, Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions
- **Biodiversity 2037**, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
- **Victoria's Active Transport Strategy (in development)**, Department of Transport and Planning
- **Plan for Victoria: A plan by Victorians, for Victorians 2025**, Department of Transport and Planning
- **Open Space for Everyone 2021**, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
- **Social Inclusion Action Groups**, Department of Health
- **Balit Murrup – Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework 2017-2027**, Department of Health
- **Victorian Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Partnership Agreement Action Plan 2023-2025**, Department of Health
- **Wungurilwil Gapgapduir Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement 2018 – ongoing**, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
- **Victorian Government Digital Inclusion Statement 2022-2023**, Whole-of-government
- **Victoria's Cyber Strategy 2021**, Department of Government Services
- **VicHealth Strategy: reshaping systems together for a healthier, fairer Victoria 2023-2033**, VicHealth
- **Experience Victoria 2033**, Department of Jobs, Skills, Industries and Regions

## We need to feel that our lives have worth and meaning

- **Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO 2.0) (2022 – ongoing)**, Department of Education
- **Victorian Volunteer Strategy 2022-2027**, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
- **Marrung 2016-2026**, Department of Education
- **Metro and Regional Partnerships**, Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions



## We need to feel safe and respected for who we are

- **Gender Equality Act 2020**, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
- **Our Equal State: Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2027**, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
- **Free from violence: Victoria's Strategy to prevent family violence 2018 – ongoing**, Department of Premier and Cabinet
- **Ending Family Violence: Victoria's plan for change 2017-2027**, Department of Premier and Cabinet
- **Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way – Strong Culture, Strong People, Strong Communities 2018 – ongoing**, Family Safety Victoria
- **Respect Victoria Strategic Plan 2023-2028**, Respect Victoria
- **Victoria's Child Safe Standards 2022**, All government departments, Commission for Children and Young People
- **Respectful Relationships 2016 – ongoing**, Department of Education
- **Diverse Communities Framework 2025-2035**, Department of Health
- **Inclusive Victoria: State Disability Plan 2022-2026**, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
- **Victorian Autism Plan 2023 to 2025**, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
- **Pride in our future: Victoria's LGBTQ+ strategy 2022-32**, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
- **Ageing well in Victoria: Action plan for strengthening wellbeing for senior Victorians 2022-2026**, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
- **2024 Pride in Ageing program (2024 – 2027)**, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
- **Victoria's Anti-Racism Strategy 2024-2029**, Department of Premier and Cabinet
- **Crime Prevention Strategy 2021**, Department of Justice and Community Safety
- **Keeping You Safe: Victoria Police Strategy 23-28**
- **WorkSafe Victoria's Strategy 2025**, WorkSafe Victoria

## We need the capabilities to navigate the ups and downs of life

- **Suicide Prevention and Response Strategy 2023-2033**, Department of Health
- **Our promise, Your future: Victoria's youth strategy 2022-2027**, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
- **Schools Mental Health Fund and Menu 2022 – ongoing**, Department of Education
- **Mental Health in Primary Schools program 2023 – ongoing**, Department of Education
- **Mental Health Practitioners Initiative**, Department of Education
- **Recognising and supporting Victoria's carers: Victorian carer strategy 2018-2022**, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

## Appendix 3:

# Definitions

Term	Definitions
<b>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people</b>	The original inhabitants and Traditional Owners of lands in Victoria. We recognise the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living throughout Victoria. The terms 'Koorie' or 'Koori' are often used to describe Aboriginal people of southeast Australia.
<b>Aboriginal self-determination</b>	<p>The ability for Aboriginal people to freely determine their political status and pursue their economic, social and cultural development. Self-determination is a right that relates to groups of people, not only individuals.</p> <p>Inherent to self-determination is the right of Aboriginal people to define for themselves what self-determination means. Aboriginal self-determination encompasses a spectrum of rights that are necessary for Aboriginal people living in Victoria to achieve economic, social and cultural equity, based on their own cultural values and way of life.</p>
<b>Diagnosed mental health condition</b>	A wide spectrum of diagnosable health conditions that significantly affect how a person feels, thinks, behaves, and interacts with other people. Diagnoses of mental health conditions can vary in both severity and duration.
<b>Disability</b>	<p>In line with the <i>Disability Discrimination Act 1992</i> (Cth), disability includes physical, intellectual, psychiatric, sensory, neurological and learning disabilities and chronic health conditions. In our work, we use the human rights model of disability, which recognises that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• disability is a natural part of human diversity that must be respected and supported in all its forms</li> <li>• people from disability communities have the same rights as everyone else in society</li> <li>• impairment must not be used as an excuse to deny or restrict people's rights.</li> </ul> <p>That means we recognise that people from disability communities are experts in all matters that affect them, and that as a government we have accountability to take proactive steps to uphold, promote and protect the rights of people from disability communities.</p>
<b>Discrimination</b>	Unfair or unequal treatment of a person or people based on one or more components of their identity. Discrimination, like identity, is complex. People can face multiple forms of discrimination. It occurs on different levels, and disadvantage, inequality, inequity, and oppression are the direct result of discrimination.
<b>Equity</b>	Equity is the absence of unfair, avoidable or remediable differences between groups of people, whether those groups are defined socially, economically, geographically or by other attributes (for example, gender, ethnicity or disability). Equity recognises that everyone has different needs and interactions of power, which should be identified and addressed to allow everyone to experience their full potential for wellbeing. <sup>21</sup>

Term	Definitions
<b>Family violence</b>	Violence and abuse directed by one or more family members against another or others. Intimate partner violence is the most common, and commonly recognised, form of family violence. However, as defined by the <i>Family Violence Protection Act 2008</i> (Vic), abuse and violence can occur in other relational forms including relationships amongst people sharing family accommodations, people across generations including older people (elder abuse) and children, kinship relationships and any other relationships recognised by communities as constituting family relationships. <sup>120</sup>
<b>Indicators</b>	Specify what needs to change to achieve a desired outcome. Indicators are signs or clues of what's happening and our progress towards an outcome.
<b>LGBTIQA+ communities</b>	This inclusive umbrella abbreviation encompasses a range of sexualities, genders and sex characteristics. We use it to refer to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse, intersex, queer/questioning and asexual. The '+' is for people whose gender identity or sexual orientation is not represented by the letters. We use variations of the term throughout our work depending on the context or language originally used by communities. We also note that some Aboriginal communities use the terms 'sistergirls' and 'brotherboys'.
<b>Mental health</b>	A person's level of emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing that it is reflected in their thoughts, feelings and behaviours, and how well they handle stress, relate to others and function in society.
<b>Mental health and wellbeing promotion</b>	Activity that focuses on promoting and protecting the mental health and wellbeing of the community and building knowledge and skills to support help-giving and help-seeking. It covers a wide range of individual and environmental interventions designed to benefit and protect people's mental health by addressing and preventing the root causes of mental distress, not just focusing on treatment and cure.
<b>Mental health and wellbeing system</b>	<p>This term is used to describe the future system described by the Royal Commission in its final report.</p> <p>The reformed mental health and wellbeing system will strike a balance between hospital-based services and care in the community, with support, care and treatment organised in a way that provides each person with dependable access to mental health services and links to other supports they may seek.</p> <p>The addition of 'wellbeing' to the term represents a fundamental shift in the role and structure of the system. Mental health and wellbeing does not refer simply to the absence of mental distress, but to creating the conditions in which people are supported to achieve their potential. Therefore, the new system will also focus on the strengths and needs that contribute to people's wellbeing in the places that they live, learn, work and play.</p> <p>Historically 'mental health system' was used to refer to services (with various funders and providers) that have a primary function of providing support, care and treatment to people living with mental distress and/or their families, carers and supporters.</p>
<b>Multicultural communities</b>	This includes people who or whose families have migrated to or entered Australia through a variety of pathways, including through humanitarian, family, child and skilled migration. This term includes people on working visas, people seeking asylum in Australia, people on temporary protection visas, undocumented migrants, refugees, people on provisional spouse visas, international students, people who have been trafficked and people born in Australia whose families migrated to Australia. It includes people from a wide range of cultures, ethnicities and faiths who speak different languages, and both well-established and newer communities.

Term	Definitions
<b>Outcomes</b>	Articulates what success looks like and reflect our ambition for Victoria. They are clear, unambiguous, and high-level statements about the things that matter for people and communities.
<b>People with lived and living experiences</b>	People who identify as having lived and living experiences of mental illness, psychological distress, suicidal thoughts or behaviours, having survived a suicide attempt, substance use or addiction, families, carers, supporters, and individuals who are bereaved by suicide.
<b>Prevention (primary)</b>	Strategies that aim to stop the onset of a health condition from occurring by addressing the underlying causes of that condition. Primary prevention is distinct from secondary prevention, also referred to as early intervention, which aims to minimise the progress of a condition at an early stage. It is also distinct from tertiary prevention, which aims to stop further progression of the condition and address the impacts that have already occurred.
<b>Psychological distress</b>	A state of significant emotional strain characterised by unpleasant and disruptive emotional and physical symptoms. These symptoms may include tiredness, anxiety, nervousness, hopelessness and sadness.
<b>Social cohesion</b>	A cohesive society that works towards the wellbeing of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility. <sup>121</sup>
<b>Stigma</b>	When someone sees you in a negative way because of a particular characteristic or attribute. Stigma can lead to discrimination. Stigma is a fundamentally social process, because different characteristics or traits are not inherently negative but become seen and treated as negative by individuals or groups within society.
<b>Suicide prevention</b>	In <i>Wellbeing in Victoria</i> , suicide prevention is understood to focus on enhancing protective factors and reducing contributing (risk) factors for suicide. It requires coordinated and combined action from all levels of government, healthcare systems, frontline health and community workers, workplaces, schools and other educational settings, community groups, the media, and individuals, families, and communities.
<b>Substance use or addiction</b>	<p>Incorporates a diversity of experiences related to alcohol and drug use. In <i>Wellbeing in Victoria</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Substance use refers to the use of alcohol or other drugs, both legal and illegal. In some cases, substance use may become harmful to a person's health and wellbeing and cause other harms including impacts on family and supporters.</li> <li>• Addiction is a medical term used to describe a condition where someone continues to engage in a behaviour – in this case substance use – despite experiencing negative consequences. The medical term for a substance addiction is a 'substance use disorder', although not all people with a substance use disorder experience symptoms like physical dependence or withdrawal.<sup>122</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Wellbeing</b>	A positive, holistic state of being where people feel well and can function well in their personal lives, in their relationships with others, and as members of their communities and society more broadly. Wellbeing can be experienced whether a person is experiencing mental distress.



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