

Strategic Priorities

2018-2021



This document, Strategic Priorities 2018-2021, sets out our values and way of working, our commitment to the community we serve and the priorities we have developed to respond to their needs and aspirations. By working to advance these priorities we hope to contribute to strengthening our community through the hard work, dedication and focus of our staff and volunteers, and with the support, engagement and participation of our community.

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About us

Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) is a proud place based community organisation established in 1973 by local residents concerned with the lack of services available in the City of Whittlesea. While we have grown and diversified since then, we have maintained our focus on meeting the needs of those most disadvantaged in our community and building on our community’s strengths and aspirations.

WCC provides a wide range of free services including legal assistance, emergency relief, volunteering support, community transport, generalist casework, settlement and youth services, group work, community information and community development initiatives. We work to help local people to address any barriers they may face and support them to become active, empowered and connected.

We recognise the impacts of:

- Poverty, unemployment and social exclusion,
- Racism and other forms of discrimination,
- Inadequacies in housing, health care and education,
- The structural causes of crime and social disadvantage and
- Abuse and exploitation.



Our community

Whittlesea Community Connections has been working for and with the local community for 45 years. Whittlesea has changed immeasurably over that time – it's more urbanised, more culturally and linguistically diverse and is home to more than four times as many people.

Some suburbs are among the fastest growing in Victoria and some suburbs are amongst the most disadvantaged in Victoria. While there are serious challenges like poor transport connections, increasing housing related stress, growing rates of family violence, and high levels of gambling losses there are also significant strengths that include amazing volunteer contributions, environmental assets and cultural diversity.

The City of Whittlesea is the third largest and fourth fastest growing municipality in Victoria. Its estimated 2018 population of 223,566 is projected to reach more than 350,000 in the next twenty years. It is also Melbourne's seventh largest municipality, covering a land area of about 490 square kilometres which includes established urban and rural areas as well as new growth suburbs, with services for the most part clustered in the LGA's southern suburbs.

The City of Whittlesea community is one of the most highly diverse communities in Victoria. Nearly 36% of the population is born overseas and nearly 32% are born in non-English speaking countries. More than 44% of the population speak a language other than English at home which is more than double the Australian average. Families with children are the largest proportion of the population (48%) with children between the ages of 0-14 years constituting 21% of the population. Worrying numbers of young people are disengaging from education and employment, further entrenching the economic issues impacting the municipality as a whole. The overall unemployment rate for the City stands at 7.2%, higher than the greater Melbourne average. A lack of affordable public transport means residents are vulnerable to social isolation and have long travel times to work as well as to access essential services.

While the number of volunteers in the City of Whittlesea increased by 6,116 people between 2011 and 2016 overall the percentage of the population volunteering is lower than the Greater Melbourne average.

The municipality is home to a high proportion of residents that are vulnerable to entrenched disadvantage, residents that often face multiple and complex challenges that negatively impact their health, learning and social outcomes. Nearly 42% of the population have a mortgage. The recent (2017) Annual Household Survey has identified that nearly 11.5% of the population is experiencing mortgage stress. In addition to the economic issues faced by residents, the municipality has the highest rate of family violence in Melbourne's North East Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) region.

Our values

We work to make the City of Whittlesea a place where people and agencies work together to make a positive difference in our community, ensuring that everyone has equal access to the community's resources and services.

Whittlesea Community Connections offers services and programs that address disadvantage in the community and promote community participation and involvement. We hold strong values including:

Self determination	We support individuals and communities in making choices and decisions that best meet their own needs
Non judgmental	We provide services that are impartial and supportive of all forms of diversity
Free services	We provide high quality services that are free at the point of delivery to residents of Whittlesea to ensure cost is not a barrier
Confidentiality	We approach our community relationships and provide services in a manner that protects clients and community member's privacy and confidentiality
Diversity	We value the diversity of the community and commit to strengthening inclusiveness in all aspects of our work
Independence	We value and guard our independence including the right to comment and advocate on local, state and federal government policy and manage our own affairs according to the laws of the land

Our way of working

<p>We are community centred and led</p>	<p>We are accountable to our community for delivering appropriate and effective services and for advocating strongly for community needs. Whittlesea residents are instrumental in our planning, decision-making, program delivery, partnerships and reviews.</p>
<p>We collaborate for better outcomes</p>	<p>We identify, build and nurture partnerships that help to realise our shared vision for the people of Whittlesea. We acknowledge and value the individuals, families, communities and organisations we work with and are committed to working to create a culture of inclusion built on trust and respect. We work transparently and ethically - meaning what we say and saying what we mean.</p>
<p>We live our values</p>	<p>We have a strong commitment to fulfilling promises and ensuring open, respectful relationships. We strive to ensure that our values are integrated into our work and our services and programs reflect community needs. We are committed, responsive and brave and prepared to take risks to respond to the needs and challenges of our community.</p>
<p>We adapt to changing community needs</p>	<p>Working with community members every day we reflect on our practice and build on our knowledge by undertaking research and gathering local evidence. This evidence informs our priorities, our programs and the focus of our advocacy.</p>
<p>We value volunteering and community participation</p>	<p>We believe that people have a right to be involved in the decisions that impact on their lives. We believe community participation in all aspects of our organisation makes it stronger and more relevant. We are proactive in advocating the benefits of volunteerism and community engagement to other organisations and the community.</p>

A 10 year outlook

Victoria

It is estimated that the population of the State of Victoria will double to 10.4 million by 2051. While the majority of change will be in metropolitan Melbourne, strong growth is also expected in major regional centres. Other trends include the life expectancy gap between men and women closing, a rise in the number of people aged over 65 and a significant increase in the number of school-aged children. The population growth has fuelled a property boom and strong growth in construction and finance, which now contribute more than half the state's economic growth.

An analysis of the current and future Victorian economy is underpinned by population growth as well as employment by sector. Melbourne's North-West is forecast to have one of the highest rates of employment growth in Australia over the next 30 years.

Housing affordability is important to households but so is close proximity to jobs. Diminishing housing affordability raises issues around the extent to which infrastructure should facilitate growth on the urban fringe where housing is cheaper or densification of existing areas which are close to jobs.

The City of Whittlesea

The population of the City of Whittlesea is forecast to rise to 382,896 by 2041. Until recently, there had been significant outflows from the City of Whittlesea to new housing developments in the City of Hume, particularly Craigieburn and Roxburgh Park to the west, as well as flows to rural and rural residential areas to the north in Mitchell and Murrundindi Shires. These flows have reversed in the last few years, as residential opportunities have been exhausted in Hume and new development fronts have been established in the City of Whittlesea catering for a range of markets. With the progressive residential development of the City over many decades, the large size of the municipality and the broad range of land uses across the City, areas have developed different roles within the housing market. Areas such as Epping North, Mernda - Doreen and South Morang have had significant residential development and are attractive to couples and families seeking new housing opportunities. Blossom Park is attractive to mature families looking to upgrade to their second and third home while Mill Park has experienced losses in most age groups as its development cycle ended.

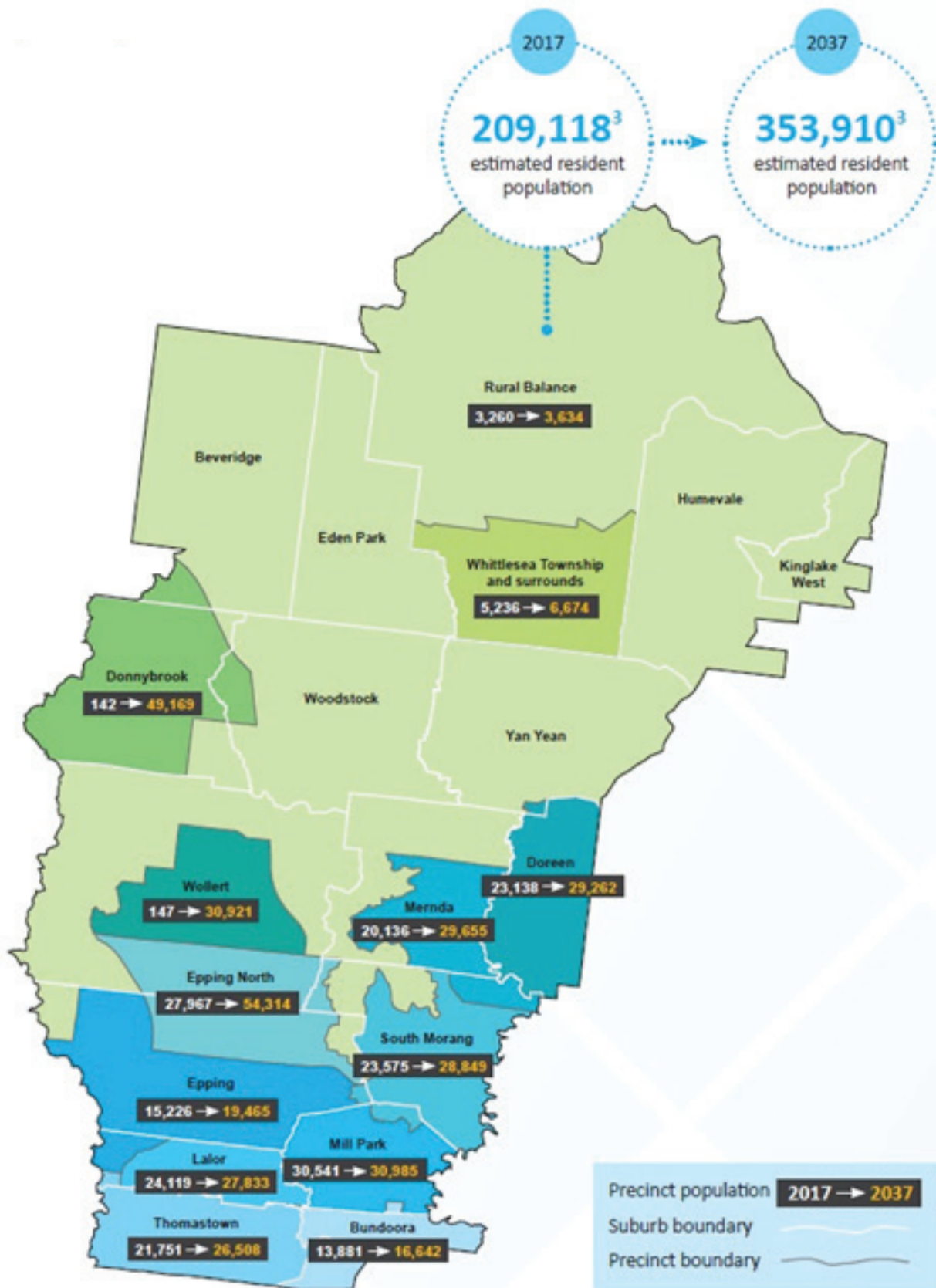
Bundoora, Epping, Lalor and Thomastown tend to attract more young adults (18-24 years), due to the range of services in the area, proximity to public transport, as well as rental accommodation. This variety of function and role of the small areas in the City of Whittlesea means that population outcomes differ significantly across the municipality. The southern areas are likely to experience significant gentrification over the next ten years which will increase the pressure on renters.

As the population grows by an estimated 144,792 people over the next twenty years, residents will continue to need relevant information and support to access appropriate services and activities to improve their health and wellbeing, strengthen their social connections and expand their capacity to pursue volunteering, learning, education and employment opportunities.

The rapidly growing population is spreading further north. This means people will continue to be isolated by distance and lack of transport options and face barriers accessing services that are in the southern part of the City or in adjoining municipalities. This requires us to consider a range of strategies and locations to ensure equitable access to information and services for all residents.

All communication channels are needed to ensure as many residents as possible are aware of the services and support provided by Whittlesea Community Connections and others. The print and online media, social media and events are needed for broad scale public recognition, and phone, skype type support and face to face engagement are required for those experiencing significant hardship or barriers.

Projected Population 2017-2037



Our Learning 2014-2018

<p>Over the last five years we have been working on:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Supporting a growing and changing population to access appropriate and integrated services and resources ● Enabling positive social and generational change to improve people's lives and life chances ● Strengthening our organisational capacity to better serve our community.
<p>We made significant progress including:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Developing a strong focus on prevention across a range of issues including gambling harm and family violence ● Trialling new approaches to service delivery to improve access, particularly for those in outer areas (for example – Mernda Community Help, Espresso Legal) ● Trialling new partnerships to integrate services for better client outcomes ● Collaborating to improve community outcomes through Whittlesea Interagency Taskforce on Gambling, Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence project, Whittlesea Emergency Relief Network and the Whittlesea Multicultural Issues Network ● Strengthening our financial accountability and reporting, our audit process, policies and procedures and organisational development generally
<p>We need to intensify our efforts in some areas including:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increasing opportunities for people to have their voice heard and be involved in decision making that affects their lives ● Incorporating a stronger prevention and early intervention focus in our approach ● Evaluating the effectiveness of what we do and where there are positive impacts, share findings and demonstrate the benefit and value of what we do ● Engaging with people in newer suburbs to understand needs and aspirations, strengthen community connections and to deliver appropriate services
<p>We learnt that:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Our external policy and funding environment is changing quickly making it hard to plan with any certainty. For our new plan we will keep an eye on the future with a ten year outlook but we have chosen a 3 year timeframe for action. This is the period in which we think we can anticipate what might happen in our community and understand how current and emerging issues might manifest themselves. ● It is hard to effect and measure change, outcomes and impact across broad priority areas. For this plan we will focus on specific issues and be flexible and agile about how we respond and advance these priorities. While the work on one issue may continue over several planning cycles we think that having some key directions and continually assessing our plans in light of new information or insight will help us see whether we are making a difference and tailor our approach to be most effective.

Priorities 2018-2021

The Board formed a Working Group to lead the development of the new strategic plan early in 2018 and prepared a discussion paper which largely informed the ten year outlook.

Staff and volunteers worked in a number of ways to reflect on past challenges and successes, and to identify and explore emerging issues in our community over nine months from August 2017. A planning day in April 2018 brought all this thinking together and enabled us to prioritise seven key areas based on the evidence and our collective analysis and insight into what we thought was most important for us to do. We will advance these priorities through our current work, through building more capability and partnerships and through strengthening our advocacy and engagement.

Housing/Homelessness

– This is one of the biggest gaps we are seeing in provision and one of the biggest barriers to people improving their life circumstances. We will explore opportunities for advocacy, research, partnerships, practical support and build on our Housing Brokerage scheme.

Multiculturalism

– This is at the heart of who we are and the work we do and we want to develop a framework for progressing issues related to advocacy, policy and practice and projects. There is always a need to address racism and discrimination and contribute to recognising the strengths that diversity brings.

Equity of Access

– This involves looking at how we deliver services and programs, where we do it and who we do it with to reduce any barriers to residents accessing information, help or services. We value the diversity of the community and commit to strengthening inclusiveness in all aspects of our work. This is consistent with one of our aims for the last planning cycle and we have made some progress in terms of service reviews, working to understand how we can better respond to the needs and aspirations of aboriginal people, trialling engagement and delivery from Mernda and Espresso Legal.

Gender Equality

– This is a natural extension of our work in family violence response, early intervention and prevention and it addresses the key driver of family violence and other forms of violence against women and girls. This work can happen in community settings, with target populations and through improving our own practice. Gender equality can be built into the design of projects and programs to address intersectionality.

Young People

– This acknowledges the need for young people to be a priority group across all our programs, activities and advocacy as well as having youth specific programs and building our expertise and capacity to work effectively with young people.

Employment generation through enterprise

– This builds on our experience with Women in Work, our childcare enterprise, and recognises that employment, like housing is a fundamental platform for wellbeing. It also recognises that there may be opportunities in the changes to government funding and social procurement.

Mental Health

– This acknowledges that mental health is a significant health issue in outer urban communities such as Whittlesea, due to the limited access to mental health services, stigma, prohibitive costs and lack of transport that make it difficult for people to receive help. Developing partnerships with mental health service providers will be necessary to facilitate access for those who need it, particularly in conjunction with other services we provide.

These priorities are based on an implicit assumption that we will work with others to understand, plan and progress these priorities. As a place based organisation we are focused on our communities' needs and aspirations and we acknowledge we learn a lot from our community and contribute a lot to others working on these priorities in the City of Whittlesea and elsewhere. We have a strong and proud history of working effectively and ethically with others to strengthen our collective voice and enable broader and deeper engagement and action.

Our Approach

We will work to...	We will start by...
Improve access to Housing and reduce Homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understanding the issue, the service system and how it intersects with other services and policy and funding drivers ● Identifying the local context (gaps, providers) through research and consultation ● Continuing to build on Housing Brokerage project and fund ● Determining a clear role for WCC to improve housing outcomes for residents
Actively engage in strengthening Multiculturalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Developing a WCC framework and position through community conversations and consultation ● Identifying key issues, for example family reunion and detention, and the associated advocacy targets or platforms ● Looking at what we can do, for example how we can reduce racism and discrimination in our community and build understanding
Improve equity of access to information, support and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continuing to develop the Community Help model and trial new approaches to information and service delivery and new locations or delivery mechanisms ● Improving LGBTI inclusive service provision across our services
Increase Gender Equality in community settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continuing our prevention work with Building Respectful Community (BRC) ● Trialling new work in Early Years and Community Group settings, that includes intersectionality in its approach and design
Improve opportunities and outcomes for Young People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building our capacity to engage and support young people ● Identifying barriers to young people accessing services, programs, activities, opportunities and use these for advocacy and partnerships ● Understanding how to work more directly and effectively with young people across all WCC work ● Investigating opportunities for youth centre/space
Increase local employment through enterprise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Investigating market based opportunities to create meaningful and supported employment opportunities through social enterprise type models or mixed model services in which income subsidises free services for those who need them most ● Considering a Whittlesea wide approach to increasing social procurement
Improve access to Mental Health services and support and reduce stigma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Developing WCC capacity to identify and support people with mental health issues ● Supporting the EMPHN Suicide Prevention pilot and other initiatives relating to mental health

Our challenge is to create opportunities to connect with those who both give and need support, the agencies and the funders who want to make a difference and the policy-makers and planners who have the power to shape our environment and community for the better.



Whittlesea
Community
Connections

Making a positive difference everyday

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