

Strategic Priorities

2026



A Context for WCC's Strategic Directions

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, food relief, volunteering, settlement, employment and youth services, community information and community development initiatives, as well as a portfolio of social enterprises. We work to help local people address barriers they may face and support communities to become active, empowered and connected.

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.

Equity of access underpins WCC's approach, objectives and long-term outcomes and as such, these are embedded in each of our strategic directions. Further, as climate change increasingly impacts on our local community, WCC has included climate resilience as a new strategic priority moving forward.

WCC recognises our role in response to complex social issues at a place-based level and in the context of global sustainability and prosperity. WCC works closely with local partners, specialist services and peak bodies to deliver our strategic goals effectively for the City of Whittlesea community.

A note on the SDGs

WCC's strategic goals are also mapped to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to support alignment with global evidence and best practice.

Adopted in 2015 by all UN Member States, the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** are a global framework for achieving peace and prosperity for people and the planet.

Strategic Directions

1.



Women achieve equitable life outcomes and are safe from violence

2.



Young People have a sense of belonging and voice in their community

3.



There is equitable access to employment opportunities within a sustainable local economy

4.



Everyone has the opportunity to live a healthy life connected to community and be food secure

5.



Whittlesea is resilient community that is empowered to protect, prepare and adapt to a changing local environment in partnership with our First Nations and diverse communities



1. Women achieve equitable life outcomes and are safe from violence

Family violence directly affects one in five Victorian women over the course of their lifetime. It is the leading contributor to preventable death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15 to 44 years.¹

In the City of Whittlesea, the prevalence of reported family violence, intimate partner violence and sexual violence is higher than the Metro North Region and the State of Victoria.² In the City of Whittlesea over 2024-2025, incidents increased by 14.6% with a reported 3,313 offences taking place.³

Per 10,000 of the population for this period, family violence incidents included:

- 1,500 family violence incidents compared to the Victorian state average of 1,271
- An overwhelming prevalence of female victim-survivors, with 77.2% of incidents perpetrated against women and 22.8% against men
- 59 sexual violence incidents. There remains a strong tendency for sexual violence to remain unreported, with only 54% of Australian female victim-survivors seeking support about their experience and 82% never reporting the incident to police.⁴

WCC has worked on the prevention of family violence within communities for over 10 years, developing the knowledge and expertise to lead this work locally. This has been recognised more broadly through the MARAM Sector Capability project, where WCC supports multicultural organisations across the state to align with Victoria's Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Model (MARAM).

Activities to support this strategic direction include:

- Multicultural Women's Driving Program
- Bilingual Family Violence Connectors
- CALD Family Violence Women's Groups
- Whittlesea Family Violence Network

WCC works at an individual, community and systems level to create long-term change. WCC is committed to promoting social and economic inclusion and eradicating all forms of violence and discrimination against girls and women everywhere.

SDG Alignment



1. <https://www.thewomens.org.au/health-information/violence-against-women/family-violence>
 2. <https://victorianwomenshealthatlas.net.au/factsheets>
 3. <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/family-violence-data/family-violence-dashboard>
 4. <https://www.vic.gov.au/about-family-violence-victoria>



2. Young People have a sense of belonging and voice in their community

In 2025, there were an estimated 39,450 young people (12-25 years) living in the City of Whittlesea, comprising 18.5% of the total population.⁵ This is projected to grow, and by 2037 young people will make up an estimated 20% of the total population.⁶

Families living with children are the most prevalent household type in City of Whittlesea (52.5%), and children and young people combined make up 33.94% of the total population.⁷ This indicates that growth is expected and place-based infrastructure will need to reflect the future needs of young people in the area to create inclusive and supportive youth development environments.

In the North Eastern Melbourne region, youth unemployment is growing. In 2026, 11.1% of young people were unemployed, up from 8.7% in 2021.^{8,9} Disengagement rates are higher in precincts such as Lalor (10.9%), Thomastown (10.5%) and Epping (10.3%).¹⁰

Nearly 40% of people aged 16–24 years had a 12-month mental disorder in 2020-2021¹¹, and 36.9% of NDIS participants in Whittlesea are young people.¹² Through targeted supports and early intervention to address access and inclusion needs, young people with additional needs are better able to participate wholly in community life.

WCC works with children and young people from prevention to early intervention through a range of programs including homework support, L2P, volunteering, settlement support and case management for at-risk and disengaged young people.

WCC's partnership with La Trobe University will further extend student placement opportunities for young people through legal and other clinics. WCC welcomes the City of Whittlesea's recent approval of a site for a proposed youth hub, and will continue to advocate for a safe space for young people to connect, learn and thrive. WCC will also explore ways to increase access to locally available support for young people at risk of disengagement living in or connected to Whittlesea.

WCC is committed to ending all forms of violence and abuse against children and young people.

SDG Alignment



5. <https://profile.id.com.au/whittlesea/age-introduction?COIID=3080&Denominator=3080>

6. www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/v/1/documents/services/support-for-people/children-and-families/youthplan2030plus-summary.pdf

7. <https://profile.id.com.au/whittlesea/households?COIID=3050&Denominator=3050&WebID=420>

8. <https://profile.id.com.au/whittlesea/disengagement-by-age?WebID=10&BMID=20>

9. <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/employment-region-dashboards-and-profiles/monthly-labour-market-dashboards>

10. <https://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/About-us/Council/Plans-strategies-and-policies/Community-Plan-2025-2029>

11. <https://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/About-us/Council/Plans-strategies-and-policies/Community-Plan-2025-2029>

12. <https://dataresearch.ndis.gov.au/explore-data>



3. There is equitable access to employment opportunities within a sustainable local economy

Unemployment in the City of Whittlesea is currently 5.9%, sitting ahead of the Victorian state average of 4.9% and representing the highest rate in the North Eastern region. The intersectionality of disadvantage in these communities often creates additional barriers to social and economic inclusion. This is evidenced by the overrepresentation of priority cohorts in this data, such as young people (11%), women (6%), people living with a disability (16%) and from CALD communities (7%).¹³

The impact of inequitable access to employment and other participation opportunities is evident. Whittlesea is the top 4th Council by total number of people living in poverty (35,733) behind Casey, Hume and Wyndham.¹⁴ Thomastown, Lalor and Epping are ranked in the 6th, 9th and 23rd SEIFA percentiles respectively, comprising some of the most disadvantaged suburbs in Victoria.¹⁵

WCC has significant experience in delivering specialist employment services to local people experiencing barriers to employment. These include the Jobs Victoria Mentoring Service, Jobs Victoria Advocates, the Priority Workforce Project and the current Economic Pathways for Refugees Initiative.

In addition, WCC addresses inequitable access to employment and participation through its four social enterprises:

- **driverED** – a multilingual driving school
- **Food Collective Cafe & Catering** – providing on the job skills training and employment pathways
- **nugal biik plants & seeds** – wholesale native plant nursery
- **Women in Work** – on-demand, mobile childcare.

WCC's social enterprise and employability programs address a range of SDGs, ensuring a higher level of access to education and job opportunities, progressively reducing poverty and income inequities for the Whittlesea community.

SDG Alignment



13. <https://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/About-us/Council/Plans-strategies-and-policies/Economic-Participation-Plan-2023-2026>

14. <https://vcoss.org.au/cost-of-living/2023/08/povertymaps/>

15. <https://statmaps.abs.gov.au/portal/home/webscene/viewer.html?layers=ccb97e3ff9814e1d958cedb4f99dc812>

4. Everyone has the opportunity to live a healthy life connected to community and be food secure



Whittlesea is a proudly culturally diverse community. Two thirds of Whittlesea residents have at least one parent born overseas, meaning that a significant majority have either migrated themselves or were born to at least one migrant parent. More than half (56.4%) of residents stated that both their parents were born overseas.¹⁶ Of those born overseas, 17% migrated to Australia only within the previous five years (2016–2021).¹⁷

However, more needs to be done to ensure people feel safe, included and connected to our community. The Whittlesea Anti-Racism Community Project identified that 59% of survey respondents (or a member of their household) had experienced racism in the previous 12 months. Women and younger people were more likely to experience racism.¹⁸

In order to build relationships between communities from different backgrounds, there needs to be opportunities for people to meet and exchange information, resources, knowledge and connections.¹⁹ Social capital both increases access to information and provides social support.²⁰ Volunteering and active citizenship can be used as measures of social wellbeing and inclusion in the broader community.²¹ In the City of Whittlesea, 7.6% of the population reported doing some form of voluntary work in 2021, as compared to Greater Melbourne (12%), with volunteering numbers declining as a result of the COVID19 pandemic.²² CALD communities in particular report significant benefits from volunteering, citing opportunities to help others, use their skills and give back to others who have supported them.²³

WCC is working towards the development of a place-based food security model aimed at relocalising food supply chains and establishing equitable and accessible food distribution directly to the communities that need it most. Activities and programs include:

- Food Collective's emergency food relief program
- Trialing of a community wholesaling enterprise
- Development of a traditional food growing garden at Wollert Community Farm
- Community food education programs, delivered by its Food Collective Café and Catering social enterprise, and Settlement programs.

WCC has been delivering settlement support for and with new arrival migrants and refugees for over twenty years. By helping people overcome barriers, building individual and community capacity and creating opportunities to meaningfully participate, WCC works towards a stronger and more connected community. As a leading volunteer involving organisation in Whittlesea, WCC continues to identify opportunities for volunteers to be involved in service planning, and delivery. In addition, WCC builds the capacity of other organisations in Whittlesea to adapt and be more inclusive ensuring that more people have the opportunity to volunteer locally.

WCC is currently contributing to a range of SDGs focused on health, community connection and inclusion and food security. Our work fosters community connection and access to key health and wellbeing messaging, while supporting access to nutritious food and enhancing food security via sustainable farming practices.

SDG Alignment



16. <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA27070>

17. <https://profile.id.com.au/whittlesea/overseas-arrivals>

18. Peucker, M. et.al. Speaking out against racism: an Anti-Racism Roadmap for Whittlesea (2022) Victoria University

19. Ager, A., & Strang, A. (2008). Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 21(2), 166-191

20. Chen, W., Li, L., & Renzaho, A. (2017). Building a new life in Australia: an analysis of the first wave of the longitudinal study of humanitarian migrants in Australia to assess the association between social integration and self-rated health. *BMJ Open*, 7(3)

21. Kerr, L. & Tedmanson, D. (2003). Active citizenship, social capital and diversity: When volunteering falls "outside the square". *Australian Journal on Volunteering*, 8(1), pp. 23-32, cited in Leong, R. (2008). Volunteering: pathway to inclusion. *Australian Journal on Volunteering*, 13(2), 67-73

22. <https://profile.id.com.au/whittlesea/volunteering>

23. www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/VV-2025-SOVR-CALD-Snapshot-Final-v1.pdf



5. Communities are climate resilient and better able to prepare, respond and recover from disasters and climate impacts

WCC is committed to creating a climate resilient community by preparing, responding and adapting to changes in weather patterns, natural hazards and extreme events. The growing challenges associated with climate change and escalating disasters mean it is now more important than ever to work in partnership with First Nations and diverse communities to mitigate risks and build resilience.

Whittlesea is a geographically diverse, peri-urban region which includes both urban and rural local areas. Bush fires and heat are the most prevalent natural hazards in the region.²⁴ In recent decades, the City of Whittlesea has become hotter and drier, a trend that is expected to continue despite efforts to reduce emissions. By 2050, Whittlesea could experience double the number of extreme heat days (above 30°C) compared to the 1990s.²⁵ Heatwaves kill more Australians than any other natural hazard²⁶ and heat acts as a risk multiplier for groups already living with vulnerabilities.

Groups most likely to experience heightened vulnerability to disaster and climate impacts are represented strongly in the local Whittlesea area. Children and young people, the elderly, people living with a disability, people on low incomes and multicultural communities are all disproportionately impacted by extreme weather events, highlighting a need for tailored support approaches to build resilience.

For groups such as children, the elderly and people living with disability, these vulnerabilities stem from factors such as a higher reliance on others for support, lack of physical mobility, inability to regulate body temperature effectively and a higher prevalence of chronic health conditions.²⁷ For multicultural groups, people who are new to an area may be unfamiliar with local environmental hazards, community shelter options and procedures before, during and after emergencies. English proficiency and a lack of social networks can also impact the ability of community members to understand and respond to natural hazards.²⁸ Additionally, disasters and extreme weather events have been linked with increases in family violence, emergency department presentations for suicidal ideation and poverty spikes post event.^{29, 30, 31}

The impact of these inequities on health and wellbeing is compounded in Whittlesea where substantial investment is needed to meet the needs of a rapidly growing and changing population.³² This is exacerbated by poor-quality housing, limited access to affordable cooling systems, disruptions to electricity supply in heatwaves and limited urban greenspace and canopy cover.^{33, 34}

As a place-based organisation embedded in the community, WCC is relied upon to provide support before, during and after emergencies. WCC has a critical role to play in helping build individual, household and community level resilience to prepare, respond and recover from disasters, which are increasing in frequency and severity with climate change. Disaster recovery is not just about responding and rebuilding. It is also about building resilience for future disasters in ways that are locally and culturally responsive, based on trusted relationships.

WCC is already undertaking some of this work through:

- Whittlesea Food Hub
- Mernda Neighbourhood House and Repair Café
- Whittlesea Climate Action Network (WCAN)
- Wollert Community Farm bushland restoration
- nugal biik Junior Rangers Program
- Its wholesale native plant nursery, nugal biik plants and seeds

In supporting the community to take action to mitigate and adapt to climate change, WCC must also build its own capacity and undertake efforts to minimise its own emissions.

WCC works to reduce the exposure of vulnerable communities to climate and disaster impacts and enhance resilience by building local capacity awareness of key mitigation, adaptation and impact reduction strategies.

SDG Alignment



24. www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/v/1/documents/services/emergencies/endorsed-v5-city-of-whittlesea-memplan.pdf

25. <https://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/About-us/Council/Plans-strategies-and-policies/Climate-Change-Plan-2022-2032#section-2>

26. <https://environment.victoria.org.au/our-campaigns/safe-climate/victoria-heatwaves-climate-change/>

27. <https://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/About-us/Council/Plans-strategies-and-policies/Climate-Change-Plan-2022-2032#section-2>

28. <https://eccv.org.au/projects/emergency-management/>

29. Mahmood, R. & Maitra, P. (2026) When Protection Fails: Disasters and Violence Against Women, Monash Economics Working Papers, 2026-05

30. Dey C, Wu J, Uesi J, Sara G, Dudley M, Knight K, Scott JG, Jay O, Bowden M, Perkes IE. Youth suicidality risk relative to ambient temperature and heatwaves across

climate zones: A time series analysis of emergency department presentations in New South Wales, Australia. *Aust N Z J Psychiatry*. 2025 Jan;59(1):18-28. doi: 10.1177/00048674241290449. Epub 2024 Oct 23. PMID: 39441101; PMCID: PMC11667958.

31. <https://vcoss.org.au/climate-change-environment/2026/03/ripple-effects/>

32. https://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/v/1/documents/about-us/about-the-city-of-whittlesea/plans-and-strategies/cow-ltci-plan-2024-2033_web.pdf

33. Bratanova A, et al (2026) Hot and powerless: Identifying vulnerable population clusters under hypothetical concurrent heatwave and loss-of-electricity conditions in Australia, *Sustainable Futures*, Vol 12

34. <https://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/v/1/documents/services/emergencies/2022-2023-whittlesea-extreme-heat-sub-plan.pdf>

- Place based: our work is connected to community in places and spaces where they live, work, study or play.
- Volunteer and community participation: our work is driven by, for and with community
- Multi-faceted: our work responds to multiple and diverse community needs
- In recognition that Whittlesea's multicultural and diverse community brings opportunities and strength

- First Nations People
- People living with a disability
- People experiencing homelessness
- People seeking asylum
- People from a refugee background
- People living with poor mental health
- People who identify as LGBTIQ+
- People living in rural areas
- Victim- Survivors of family violence
- Women and young people who identify with any of the above

- Reconciliation Aboriginal Plan Anti-racism Strategy
- Child Safety Plan
- Rainbow Tick Accreditation

- New or different ways to engage priority groups across the organisation
- Partnerships that strengthen engagement and responses for priority groups
- Appropriate internal processes including intake and assessment, data collection and evaluation

At Whittlesea Community Connections we aim to identify and break down barriers to accessing information and specialised support services and work towards building individual and community resilience. As a community-led organisation, Whittlesea Community Connections works alongside individuals, families and groups to create opportunities to build and strengthen connections, supporting a community that is better able to support itself.

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OUTCOMES				
INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	IMMEDIATE OUTCOME	INTERMEDIATE OUTCOME
			What immediate changes will occur?	What intermediate changes will occur?
What resources are being used? - Community and stakeholder partnerships - Volunteers - Board of Management - Diverse and skilled work force - Funding - Infrastructure including IT & multiple site locations - Policy & legislative context - Internal & external communication systems and networks	What is being done? - Settlement, Community Help, Legal assistance, CALD FV Women's Groups, Women's Driving Program - Settlement, Empower, Engage, L2P, TWCH & School Hubs, WF&FC Schools Program - Employment Mentoring, Volunteering, Learn Local, Women's Development & Leadership, WF&FC - Contact Centre, Community Help, Settlement, Community Transport, Mernda Community House (MCH) - Food Hub, information & training (eg LU), nugal bilk Junior Rangers Program	What is being created? - Resources, women's groups, PP projects - Casework, volunteering opportunities, activities - Employment, work experience & training opportunities - Group activities, social connections, bus trips - Learning modules & opportunities	What immediate changes will occur? - Increased: Connection to services & between women & understanding of FV & equal & respectful relationships - Connection to school, peers & community - Access to information, training & support to gain employment - Access to essential services & social connections - Awareness of the impact of climate change & positive behaviour change	What intermediate changes will occur? - Increased: Challenges to gender stereotypes, women's independence and empowerment - Participation in education, training & community - Employment outcomes for disadvantaged jobseekers - Community health & wellbeing - Confidence to participate in climate action initiatives
			What immediate changes will occur? - Increased: Understanding of drivers of FV & strengthened collaborative responses - Understanding & support to address the needs of VP locally - Training & employment opportunities - Community connection & participation - Community leadership in climate action initiatives	What intermediate changes will occur? - Increased: Community & organisational capacity to respond to FV & information sharing - Youth participation & leadership - Business sustainability - Community wellbeing & resilience - Low waste & circular economy
Individual level	Organisational/Community level	System level	What immediate changes will occur? - Increased: Services for women & children impacted by FV - Partnerships & resources for a youth space - Partnerships with local businesses, agribusinesses & employers - Resources for models developed in partnership with community - Connection between growers & consumers/ people & environment & increased biodiversity	What intermediate changes will occur? - Sector & law reform - Youth space established in Whittlesea - Local job opportunities & investment to the agribusiness sector and local business - Local infrastructure for community use - Resilient & fair local food system & reduced carbon footprint
			What immediate changes will occur? - Settlement Sector Capacity Project - Advocacy re dedicated youth spaces in Whittlesea - Employer & industry engagement to develop new opportunities & influence local economy - Expansion of place based model to new sites & suburbs - Food Hub, Wollert Community Farm carbon neutral & bushland restoration, nugal bilk Plants and Seeds nursery	What intermediate changes will occur? - Alliance & recommendations for sector & law reform - Model for a youth space in Whittlesea - Local jobs, social procurement guidelines - Community infrastructure - Food Hub & carbon neutral nursery models



Whittlesea
Community
Connections

Making a positive difference everyday

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Last updated: July 2026