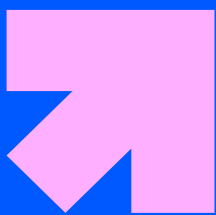


**FUTURE
HEALTHY**

**GIVING
YOUNG PEOPLE
A VOICE AND A
HEALTHIER FUTURE**



Summary report:

FUTURE HEALTHY COMMUNITY LISTENING



Message from VicHealth CEO, Dr. Sandro Demaio and Executive Manager Future Healthy Group, Sarah Loh.

As we continue to respond to the challenges of a rapidly changing world, collective health and wellbeing has never been more important. And over the past years, we know that young people have been hardest hit.

VicHealth has a vision for Victoria where no young person is denied a future that is healthy. We want to see a future with vibrant communities where young people and children across the state are connected, active, enjoy nutritious food and feel great. But we know we can't do this alone. That's why we partnered with Health Issues Centre and gathered insights from young people, parents and carers themselves. To hear their experiences, ideas and vision of what health and wellbeing looks like for them. To understand what's important to them. To give those who rarely get a say, a voice for a healthier future.

Young people are a positive force to be reckoned with – and we want to listen.

As communities start to create their 'new normal', we see an opportunity to build back healthier and fairer. With the voices of young people from across our state guiding the way, we are confident we'll create a future that is healthy for all.

We encourage you to use this report as a starting point. Share it with your colleagues and explore its recommendations.

Above all, we invite you to listen to young people in your community and across your region. Together, we'll continue to shape the Victoria we all want!



Dr Sandro Demaio
Chief Executive Officer



Sarah Loh
Executive Manager,
Future Healthy Group



\$45 million in investments. 3 years of action.

And countless opportunities for young people in Victoria to be heard. VicHealth's Future Healthy is investing in locally led initiatives that are informed by the voices of Victoria's young people.

More importantly, Future Healthy is a collaboration. A conversation with a community of young people telling us exactly what they need to make happier, healthier living a reality for as many of us as possible.

So, we started listening.

Together with Health Issues Centre (HIC), we ran a series of community listening sessions. We heard about what needed to change directly from the perspective of young people, parents, carers and those who rarely get a say.

We set out to understand what's important to them in health and wellbeing. And what eating well, being active and making meaningful connections looks like to them. It's through their stories and insights that we're able to bring about healthy change.

We ran community listening sessions between August and November 2021 with:

- Young people (18–25 years)
- Parents and carers (of children under 18 years)

HOW DID WE DO IT?



Community conversations

August 2021 – targeting rural and regional areas, and people who are hardly reached. We ran separate sessions for young people as well as parents and carers.



Short online survey

September to November 2021 – via the Future Healthy website, asking a mix of open ended and multiple-choice questions.



Online portal to submit stories

September to November 2021 – a mix of short videos, audio files, pictures and writing submitted via the Future Healthy website.


During the pandemic, we held online sessions instead of face-to-face which meant we couldn't reach everyone. Our future sessions will focus on reaching out to these groups to make sure all voices are heard.

WHO DID WE HEAR FROM?



Total
422
participants

 **156**
Young people

 **266**
Parents and carers

152
Community
conversations

74
Young
people

78
Parents
and carers

221
Online
survey

58
Young
people

163
Parents
and carers

49
Story
submission

24
Young
people

25
Parents
and carers

A few things to note:

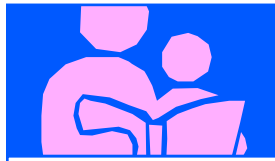
- Most participants identified as women across all engagements.
- Carers and parents responded strongly to the survey when compared to young people.
- There was strong participation from across Victoria with regional and rural areas well represented.
- A diversity of young people participated, including those who are gender diverse, have a disability, or come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Parents and carers of children and young people of all ages participated.

It's important to note that the stories of young people under 18 years old came indirectly from family members or carers. In the future, we're aiming to collect informed consent from people under 18 so we can hear it directly from those individuals.

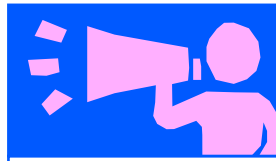
WHAT DID WE HEAR?



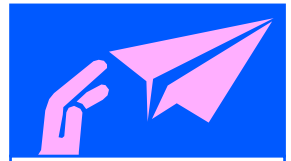
Here's what our community feels is important for building a healthy future for our children and young people:



Timely access to appropriate information and education.



Feeling empowered, represented and safe.



Access to opportunities and resources.



Access to healthy natural environments.



Being able to afford the resources and activities that support them.



Having suitable and affordable transport available.



Access to health and community services that meet their needs.



Better access to technology and positive ways to use it.



Learning from the pandemic and promoting the importance of wellbeing.

Let's explore these areas in more detail below.

WHAT DID WE HEAR?

Timely access to appropriate information and education.



Young person:

“Funding local agriculture, and agricultural students/programs, to provide healthy food in the long term!”

Young person:

“Promoting different sports and activities (surfing, skateboarding, dance, pole, aerobics...), as well as more information promoting healthy sleep habits, lifestyle hacks, and guidance tools to work towards a healthy lifestyle.”

Parent:

“Normalising mental health and that it is ok to seek help from an early age.”

With so much content around these days it’s a challenge to find valid or trustworthy information in a format that’s inclusive too.

There was a need to provide education that helps children, young people and families to better manage their health and wellbeing. Education that gives children and young people the skills to make informed life choices. For example, cooking healthy meals and recognising when to get mental health support.

Actions wanted

- Access to credible information that’s evidence-based, easy to understand, appealing and available in different formats (written, spoken, visual).
- Deliver inclusive messages that acknowledge the diversity of young people including all body types, genders, cultures and abilities.
- Recognition that young people still need support over 18 years. Many other young people miss out on learning opportunities through schools and families, but technology and social media can help bridge the gap. We need to look at innovative ways to support their wellbeing, including webinars, websites, apps, YouTube etc.
- More learning opportunities to teach children, young people and families life skills, including:
 - Culturally diverse cooking lessons via schools and community hubs that reduce food waste and are affordable, easy and fun.
 - Kitchen garden programs in the community that teach you how to grow, care and forage for plants.
 - Family health and wellbeing education for those who haven’t had the opportunity to develop these skills.
 - Teaching life skills like applying for a Medicare card or support services.
 - Guidance on developing healthy habits like meditation for better mental wellbeing and sleep, how to keep active and quick recipes for eating well.
 - Guidance on getting support for mental health, physical health and life skills.

WHAT DID WE HEAR?

Feeling empowered, represented and safe



 **Young person:**

“Youth-led programs created by the youth for the youth.”

 **Young person:**

“Being able to go out and dance and feel safe and respected by everyone.”

 **Parent:**

“The safety of children and young people is supported through advocacy.”

Children and young people told us they want to be a part of the bigger conversations – to have a real say about their future.

We learnt it’s important for them to be decision makers who can influence outcomes, giving them a more hopeful and optimistic outlook on the future. However, there are times when children and young people can’t make those decisions. So, they want someone who understands them to represent and advocate on their behalf. Because being empowered and represented makes them feel safe – culturally, emotionally and physically.

Actions wanted

- Empower children and young people with advocacy skills to represent themselves and make sure their voice gets heard. We need to consider advocacy skills at both an individual level (addressing own concerns) and a systemic one (pushing to change attitudes, policies, systems and law).
- Make sure children and young people have a say about what matters to them. For example, how money is spent on the initiatives that impact them, like the Future Healthy grants. Or give young people the chance to create and lead initiatives for their peers.
- Make sure that committees and other decision-making bodies represent a diverse range of ages and backgrounds.

WHAT DID WE HEAR?

Access to opportunities and resources



Young person:

“Creating community hubs and providing activities and events for likeminded people to connect safely.”

Young person:

“More recreation sport areas, areas in which there are modified sport areas for people to go and enjoy, e.g. basketball sized synthetic areas for hockey, soccer, etc.”

Young person:

“Starting a food hub to grow and sell local produce at a low price. Educate on how to grow and use food keeping in mind cultures.”

Getting access to relevant resources was a big concern for many. Because of the barriers facing children and young people today (affordability, location, experiences of violence, inaccessible or unwelcoming places, lack of facilities) we heard that after leaving high school, opportunities are few and far between. This was especially true in regional and rural areas. Fortunately, the young people, carers and parents we spoke to believe there are ways to improve this.

Actions wanted

- The creation of local hubs, where children and young people can safely access social activities and events.
- Opportunities targeting those over 18 years, including sport and recreation, learning and development, life and job seeking skills.
- Being creative and innovative with the resources available, including:
 - using repair sheds to learn how to fix things
 - closing off streets in crowded spaces to allow safe outdoor play and/or community interaction
 - peer led study groups
 - fun local challenges like treasure hunts, pop culture walks and healthy food competitions
 - walking activities to explore local areas that cater for different abilities.
- Seeing the value of events and festivals which bring people together to celebrate different cultures and abilities.
- Better support those with different levels of English proficiency through innovations such as health navigators for health and community services.
- Create and support safe spaces, like women only times at gyms or public pools.
- Recognising that people with preschool aged children want year-round activities, not just during school terms.
- Help communities to feel safe by looking after local assets and removing or replacing damaged or vandalised infrastructure.

WHAT DID WE HEAR?

Access to healthy natural environments



Young person:

"Lots of green spaces that encourage physical activity, no unhealthy advertising like gambling."

Young person:

"Huge investments into green spaces and creating community gardens and spaces where good healthy lifestyles can happen."

Young person:

"Health and climate action considered in all policy making. Reduced capacity of corporate interests to influence health policy."

Feeling calm and connected to nature can have a big impact on wellbeing, especially for young people. Green spaces allow people to connect, exercise, grow food and forage. And being outside offers a place to feel safe, especially during the pandemic. Our community also voiced a deep concern about the state of our environment, the impact of climate change and our role in protecting the planet for a healthier future.

Actions wanted

- Make sure health and climate change action are included in policy and planning E.g., 20-minute neighbourhoods that promote living local.
- Design green spaces and playgrounds with universal design principles so that they're accessible to all.
- Encourage existing and new urban developments to reduce their environmental impact and add more green space, offering incentives to homeowners and renovators.
- Make sure playgrounds and other green spaces:
 - cater for toddlers through to adults and those with mobility issues
 - offer diverse activities for all ages E.g., slides and skate parks
 - support and enhance the use of nature in play with trees and rocks to climb, water to wade through and sticks to build with or write.
- Fund and support local greening opportunities and shared community gardens.
- Create programs and activities in nature for young people that bring the community together and encourage care for the environment.
- Improve infrastructure and sustainable transport options like walking paths and bike trails.
- Offer free or low-cost activities in parks to promote social connection, education and wellness. E.g., gardening or exercise groups.
- More pocket nature parks and greening street parties that bring people together.

WHAT DID WE HEAR?

Being able to afford the resources and activities that support them



Carer:

"Funding for our youth in regional centres to access culture and engage with mob in regards to women's and men's business."



Parent:

"More free, community based activities that bring people together."



Young person:

'Healthy food is too expensive for me and my friends and when we are out, we often have to go with choices that are not the best due to cost.'

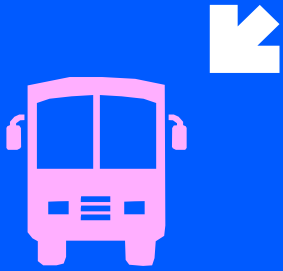
Ignoring our health and wellbeing can affect us in many ways. But often, cost is the biggest barrier for young people. We heard that without access to much money there's often a lack of affordable options to help young people stay healthy.

Actions wanted

- Improve access to affordable health care, including mental health services.
- Advocacy to lift minimum wage and Centrelink payments – poverty is a huge barrier to maintaining good health and wellbeing.
- Support for culturally appropriate care, including free to low-cost wellbeing activities set by the community. E.g. Aboriginal community recognising and teaching mob business.
- Integrate free and/or low-cost options into the community, such as publicly accessible community gardens or social activities like gardening groups, yoga or interactive treasure hunts.
- Provide free and low-cost events that bring communities together.
- Develop and widely promote apps which support good health and wellbeing, such as maps showing local, affordable or free healthy food options, or places to be active.
- Offer subsidies or vouchers for activities so that children and young people can participate and try different things E.g., cover fees or uniforms.

WHAT DID WE HEAR?

Having suitable and affordable transport available



Parent:

“Cheaper public transport to reduce reliance on cars
– more safe bike routes through suburbs.”

Community worker:

“Being in rural communities can have limiting opportunities that impact wellbeing.”

Community worker:

“Accessing healthy food can be difficult due to lack of options near people.”

Young person:

“Bring in more activities, whether its traveling sport or music or dance opportunities to regional areas.”

Your proximity to transport plays an important role in your health and wellbeing. We heard that in some regional and outer Melbourne growth areas, accessing public transport was difficult and made residents feel more isolated and challenged. And it's even harder for children and young people who don't have the option to drive.

Actions wanted

- Advocate for better public transport in city and regional areas, so that it's more frequent, runs later and has better connections.
- Advocacy and funding to improve walking and cycling paths, so that they're safer and encourage more people to use them.
- Bring sport and creative activities and opportunities to rural and remote communities, so people aren't forced to travel. Or support their participation by providing transport or subsidising travel costs.
- Affordable fruit and vegetable vans that travel to communities in need and with least access.

WHAT DID WE HEAR?

Access to health and community services that meet their needs



Community worker:

"There is limited opportunity for group physical activities, even though the bushfires have meant they are a priority for our area but it's hard to get services to come out and run them."

Young person:

"Create network of organisations, to have everything in one place, not a silo approach."

Young person:

"A mobile travelling bus that gives us access to services and provides time out. Holistic health needs to be valued much more to include justice, financial support and other stuff."

People reported several challenges with health and community services, like wait times and fees and employees who didn't understand their needs.

Actions wanted

- Provide welcoming and inclusive community outreach services that offer support for health and wellbeing, mental health, financial, legal, recreational and more.
- Develop one stop hubs in central locations that offer a range of health and support services for children, young people and families.
- Help train health and community workers to respectfully and effectively engage with children and young people from all walks of life.
- Bring together health and community services that people receive. E.g. maternal child health and early childhood intervention services.
- Employ more youth peer workers or those with lived experience to support representation and help people feel included.
- Recognise and improve mental health support (such as mental health first aid) in a range of settings, including schools, youth drop in spaces, pharmacies and delivery drivers in remote areas.
- Make sure sport and other youth focused clubs are inclusive of diversity, including all genders, abilities, body types and cultural backgrounds.
- Provide free or very low-cost health services. E.g. Young people who want a dietitian but can't afford it and are unable to ask their family for financial help.

WHAT DID WE HEAR?

Better access to technology and positive ways to use it



Parent:

"The level of connection is really changing very fast for young people, with snapchat, TikTok the preferred way to engage, it is fast, a short video and no need to physically communicate by phone or text."



Young person:

"Apps are good that allow you to set goals on your own or with friends which you can use as motivation."

Kids and technology – it's part of their every day. Having internet access helps them connect with friends and get support for their health and wellbeing. But some young people are left out online. We heard that poor connectivity, lack of access to hardware or low digital literacy are major barriers for children and young people. And it's only been amplified by COVID-19. So, how can we help them connect?

Actions wanted

- Help young people who can't afford a computer, tablet or internet connections with subsidies or vouchers (especially those who aren't connected to educational institutions with similar schemes available).
- Teach young people and their parents and carers to stay safe online through education programs.
- Promote websites that connect people who are in crisis with available services nearby.
- Harness the power of social media influencers to promote healthy, evidence based and positive messages.
- Explore, develop and promote apps that support health and wellbeing such as:
 - creative and fun challenges that promote fitness or eating well, E.g., cooking challenges
 - developing positive habits and connecting people with shared goals.

WHAT DID WE HEAR?

Learning from the pandemic and promoting the importance of wellbeing



Young person:

“Spend time with your pets, go and take them for a walk and try to be active no matter what the weather.”

Young person:




“Young people after the bushfires and then the lockdowns just want to have fun, they just want to have fun and want experiences and to be able to connect more.”

COVID-19 has reshaped the world. And it still plays a significant role in our lives today. As we adapt to ‘COVID-normal’, the mental, emotional and financial tolls have made a real impact on the wellbeing of individuals and communities.

We heard concerns about how COVID-19 was impacting the healthy futures of our children and young people. Some even shared their strategies to stay healthy during this time, from setting goals to finding ways to connect with others.

We also talked about the bigger picture with parents, carers and young people themselves. The pressure that COVID-19 has put on children, young people and families. And different approaches to self-care. People want to know that professional support is there when they need it, whether it’s through schools and educational bodies, health and community services, or workplaces.

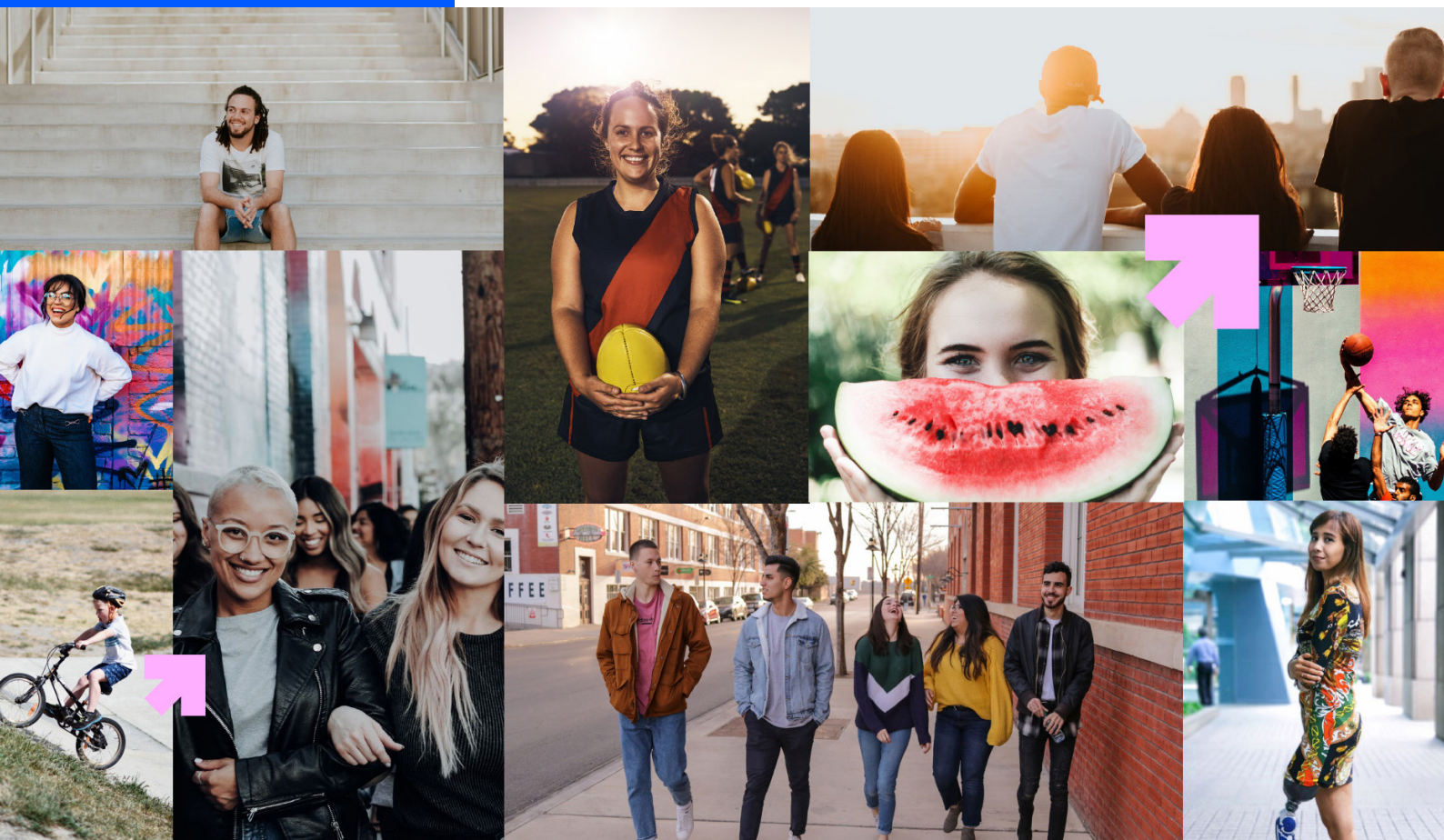
Actions wanted

-  Access to mental health support.
-  Access to financial support.
-  Tips and techniques to stay motivated and care for your health and wellbeing, including:
 - staying connected with family and friends through video calls and meeting in parks or outdoor spaces
 - making your own healthy food but also being kind to yourself when you can’t manage this
 - trying to find balance that works for you
 - meditation, reading and walking
 - connecting to nature
 - having a purpose and setting goals for each day.

WHAT'S NEXT?

We'll keep listening. We've been sharing these ideas and bringing them front and centre of our Future Healthy investments. Why? To ensure our programs are informed by, and shaped by young people across Victoria. Because they know what young people need.

To continue to better understand young people's needs, we've teamed up with [7 youth organisations](#). Together, we're putting young people at the centre of health, ensuring their voices are heard in developing solutions.



Have questions about Future Healthy?

[Head over to our website.](#)