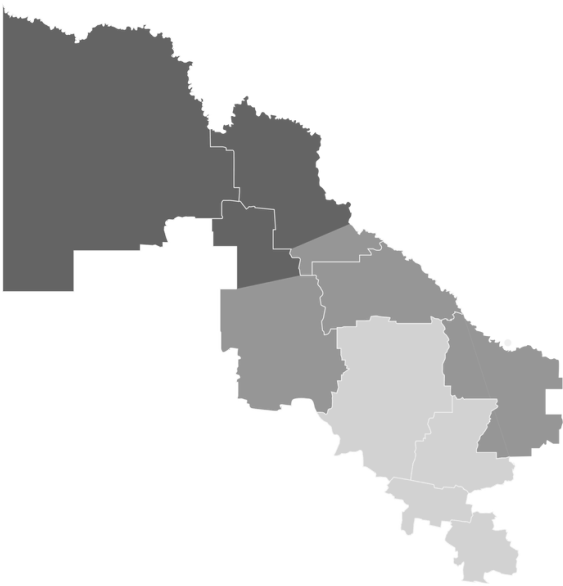




Loddon Mallee  
Public Health Unit

# HEALTHY FOOD SYSTEMS

Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit  
Priority 2023 - 2029



Produced by Bendigo Health,  
Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit  
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We acknowledge the First Peoples of Australia who are the Traditional Custodians of the land and water where we live, work and play. We celebrate that this is the oldest living and continuous culture in the world. We are proud to be sharing the land that we work on and recognise that sovereignty was never ceded.



We welcome all cultures, nationalities and religions. Being inclusive and providing equitable healthcare is our commitment

The Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Health Organization define sustainable healthy diets as those that support individual health, have minimal environmental impact, are accessible, affordable, safe, equitable and culturally appropriate. Achieving this requires a systems approach, as a healthy and sustainable diet is influenced by interconnected policies, industries, and social factors that must work together to create lasting change.

A healthy food system requires collaboration among governments, producers, industry, retailers and consumers to ensure access to affordable, nutritious food. The Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit (LMPHU) prioritises transforming the local food system to enhance food security, sustainability, and public health.

The LMPHU recognises the link between diet, health, and climate change. Current dietary patterns contribute to chronic disease and significant carbon emissions. Rising food insecurity in the region, worsened by extreme weather and increasing costs of living, underscores the urgency of action.

The LMPHU aims to improve food access, encourage healthy food environments, and build resilience against climate change impacts. From 2025-2029, the Healthy Food Systems initiative will focus on increasing availability of fresh, locally produced food, reducing diet-related disease, and supporting sustainable food systems.

LMPHU will work with local organisations to enhance policy understanding and promote food systems leadership.

By addressing both health and environmental concerns, LMPHU seeks to create a more resilient and equitable food system that supports healthy eating, reduces food insecurity and mitigates climate change impacts in the Loddon Mallee region.

## Why it is a priority

Healthy eating is one of the four focus areas within the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan.

Dietary risk is the third highest modifiable risk factor contributing to total burden of disease in Australia.

All nine Loddon Mallee local government areas have higher proportion of people with obesity compared to the Victoria average, with high hospital admissions for cardiac and circulatory disease in the region.

Healthy eating was identified as one of the highest concerns for stakeholders, particularly in the Mallee and Murray sub-regions. Stakeholders at the workshops were strongly focused on food security, including access and affordability.

Healthy Loddon Campaspe (HLC) is a Victorian Government initiative focusing on healthy eating and active living. They cover Campaspe, Greater Bendigo, Loddon, Mount Alexander and Macedon Ranges shires. We work closely with HLC and see opportunity to leverage and upscale the lessons from this initiative.

LMPHU Population Health Plan 2023 - 25



**Healthy Food System will continue to be a priority in the LMPHU Population Health Plan 2025-29.**

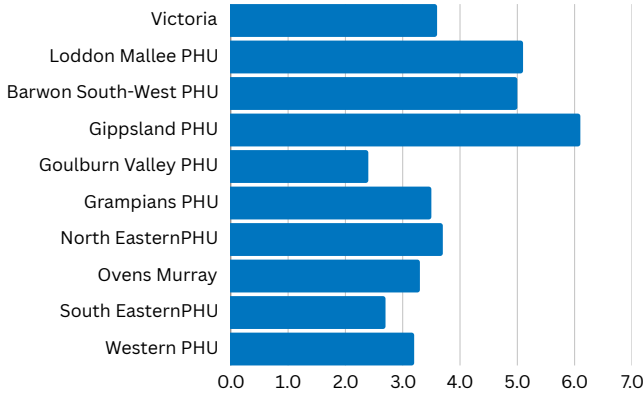


The LMPHU Loddon team reaping fresh produce from the LMPHU Bendigo office garden.

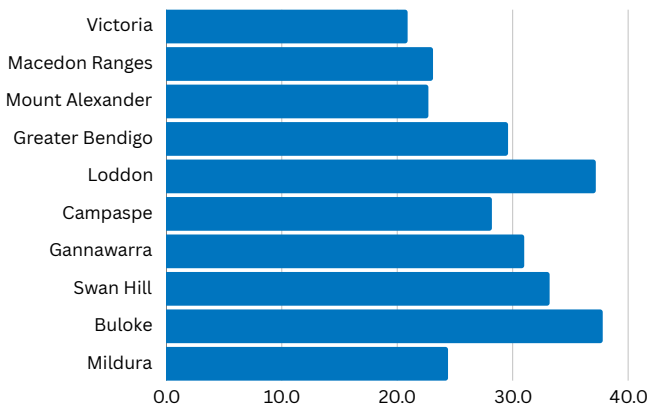
## What the data told us

Of the risk factors, overweight and obesity are the leading cause of the disease burden (8.3% of the total burden) and dietary risk is the third highest (4.8% of the total burden). [1]

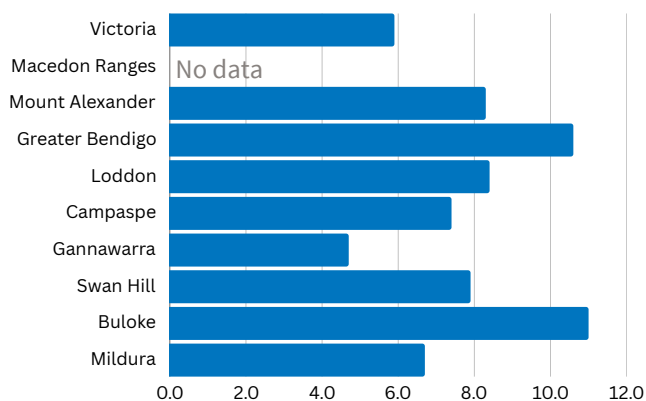
Adults who consume sufficient fruit and vegetables (%), 2019 [2]



Proportion of adults who are obese, self reported (%), 2020 [2]



Adults who ran out of money to buy food in the last 12 months (%), 2020 [3]



[1] Australian Burden of Disease Study 2024, AIHW

[2] Victorian public health and wellbeing outcomes dashboard, Public Health Division, Department of Health, 2019

[3] Victorian Population Health Survey, 2022

## Loddon Mallee Data



10.6% people experienced severe food insecurity (Vic. 8.1%) [3]

5.1% adults consume sufficient fruit and vegetables (Vic. 3.6%) [2]

Loddon Mallee regional and local government community profiles



## What stakeholders told us

April 2023

Healthy eating is a required priority within the Community Health - health promotion guidelines. Therefore, it was not surprising the top rationale for selecting this is that it is an organisational priority.

All three sub-regions expressed concerns regarding access to healthy food and food insecurity. All areas acknowledged people have to make choices where they spend their money with increasing cost of living and healthy food was one of many choices to be made. The Mallee and Murray workshops in particular highlighted limited fruit and vegetable intake and concern around access and availability of healthy food options. Some reasoning being the limited availability of fresh food markets and limited hours of operation of local supermarkets but also the easy availability of fast food particularly home delivery such as Uber Eats.

Lack of knowledge and education on healthy food choices was a concern for some of the older multicultural women in the Mallee communities and for the future of their younger extended family members. In the Murray sub-region, they advocated a focus on influencing the younger generation to make healthy food choices.

Food insecurity concerns were evident in the LGAs that experienced flooding. In the Loddon sub-region workshop there was an acknowledgement of the rising figures of overweight and obese people in their communities.

An online stakeholder survey (n=63) showed that healthy eating was second highest selected priority for the LMPHU Population Health Plan 2023-25. The primary reason for survey participants to prioritise healthy eating was its alignment with organisational goals.

## Healthy Food System Networks

Stakeholder networks across the Loddon Mallee

### Loddon sub-region:

- HLC: Greater Bendigo, Macedon Ranges, Mount Alexander, Loddon shires
- Healthy Communities Network (Greater Bendigo)
- Mount Alexander Community Food Network
- Macedon Ranges Food Network
- Healthy Eating and Active living (Loddon shire)

### Mallee sub-region:

- Sunraysia Local Food Movement

### Murray sub-region:

- HLC: Campaspe shire
- Campaspe Multicultural Connections Meeting
- Campaspe Food Network
- Early Years Collaborative Table
- Murray Prevention Network

## 1 Promote evidence informed programs that support people to make healthy food choice and increase food literacy

LMPHU provided funding for:

- Vic Kids Eat Well school program delivered term 1 and term 2
- Healthy recipe books provided to a kindergarten as an addition to Smiles 4 Miles program
- Maternal Child Health baby food making class held
- healthy eating education sessions

Successfully advocated for Bendigo Health to become a signatory to Food Fight

Resource allocation (PCP reserve): \$135,000

- 6 LGAs with healthy food system networks
- 33 Healthy food system activities
- 27 Community gardens supported

## 2. Improve food equity and enhance social support systems

*Objective: Support a food system where people can access food relief in times of crisis, in collaboration with local stakeholders*

- Completed and analysed the Mallee Food relief provider survey
- Developed a Loddon Mallee Food Relief resource and service mapping
- Developing a Social Supermarket Toolkit for the Loddon Mallee

*Objective: Enhance access to a culturally appropriate, local, and sustainable food system for priority groups by fostering partnerships and supporting community-led initiatives.*

- Supported a Tongala Pacific Island Food Forum and dinner to explore healthy eating needs of The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) workers ([click here for case study](#))
- Supported an Aboriginal Corporation in regenerating an indigenous garden to raise awareness of native Indigenous foods ([click here for case study](#))
- Funded young people to co-design cooking and life skills workshops
- Working with disability support organisations to identify healthy eating needs.
- Supported multicultural food festival

## 3. Support the availability of healthy fresh food where people live, work and play

*Promote culturally appropriate community gardens to increase participation and community connectedness.*

- Twenty seven community vegetable gardens enhancements supported, including indigenous gardens
- Funded food composting workshops

*Support the availability of healthy fresh food in settings for young people*

- Supported secondary school to expand school breakfast program and developed model to be expanded in 2025
- Funded food sharing and cooking programs in schools and playgroup

#### 4. Support regional and local initiatives that improve access to locally produced fresh, plant-based food

*Objective: Develop Murray and Mallee Healthy Food System place-based strategies.*

The **Loddon sub-region** supported the implementation of the Healthy Loddon Campaspe's Flourish Framework, with additional focus on food relief.

The **Murray sub-region** have supported consultation on the HLC Flourish food systems framework to determine applicability to the Murray LGAs.

A set of food systems capacity building workshops and community food and farming surveys for the Murray were also delivered in partnership with Sustain Australia to increase stakeholders' local food systems knowledge; understand food systems issues; understand community and producer needs; and build knowledge on how to enact food systems change. The workshops highlighted a variety of perceived strengths and weaknesses of their local food systems.

Working with the Mallee sub-region in reviewing food environment policy in conjunction with the findings of the Murray food systems strengths and weaknesses, the interventions we are seeking to progress across the Murray LGAs include; Implementing the Local Food-EPI+ protocol with local governments to create detailed recommendations for improving local food environments

- Implement systems thinking workshops to determine key areas for each LGA and design implementation plans for public health stakeholders to action
- Develop food systems data profiles for each LGA
- Support community food relief agencies within Murray with development of a strategy to work towards best-practice models of service delivery
- Continue to support capacity building learning opportunities and generate citizen dialogue around food systems, sustainability and health.

These key areas are formalised in the Murray sub-region action plan and will have oversight to support achievement of these from the Murray Prevention Network and Murray Primary Care and Population Health Sub-Advisory Committee.

Additionally, these strategies also link to the LMPHU Healthy Food Systems Logic Model 2024-2026 – developed by the HFS leads and based on the VicHealth Food Systems Consensus statement and CSIRO Roadmap.

The **Mallee sub-region** have funded and performed public health assessments to better understand local level opportunities for food system action. These assessments have drawn from stakeholder consultations, policy analysis, and research synthesis to investigate the local food economy, supermarket intervention, food environment policy, and the charitable food relief sector. Promising interventions we are seeking to progress at a local level include:

- Implementing the Local Food-EPI+ protocol with local government to create detailed recommendations for improving local food environments.
- Collaborating with health promotion teams to ensure adequate resourcing to fully implement the current suite of state wide food environment policies and programs.
- Developing and disseminating a standardised toolkit that can be used to create efficiencies in the flow and management of food relief between food rescue organisations / donors, food hubs, and food relief agencies, building on existing knowledge within the sector.
- Developing a best-practice guideline and supporting tools for food literacy development in children, adolescents, and young adults.

#### **Future alignment with:**

- A consensus statement: Towards a Healthy, Regenerative and Equitable Food System in Victoria
- VicHealth, Building Better Food Systems for Healthier Communities
- VicHealth, Reshaping systems together for a healthier, fairer Victoria, 2023 -33
- CSIRO Roadmap to reshape Australia's food systems





Click on picture below for more place-based detail



Loddon sub-region



Mallee sub-region



Murray sub-region

## Stakeholder consultations

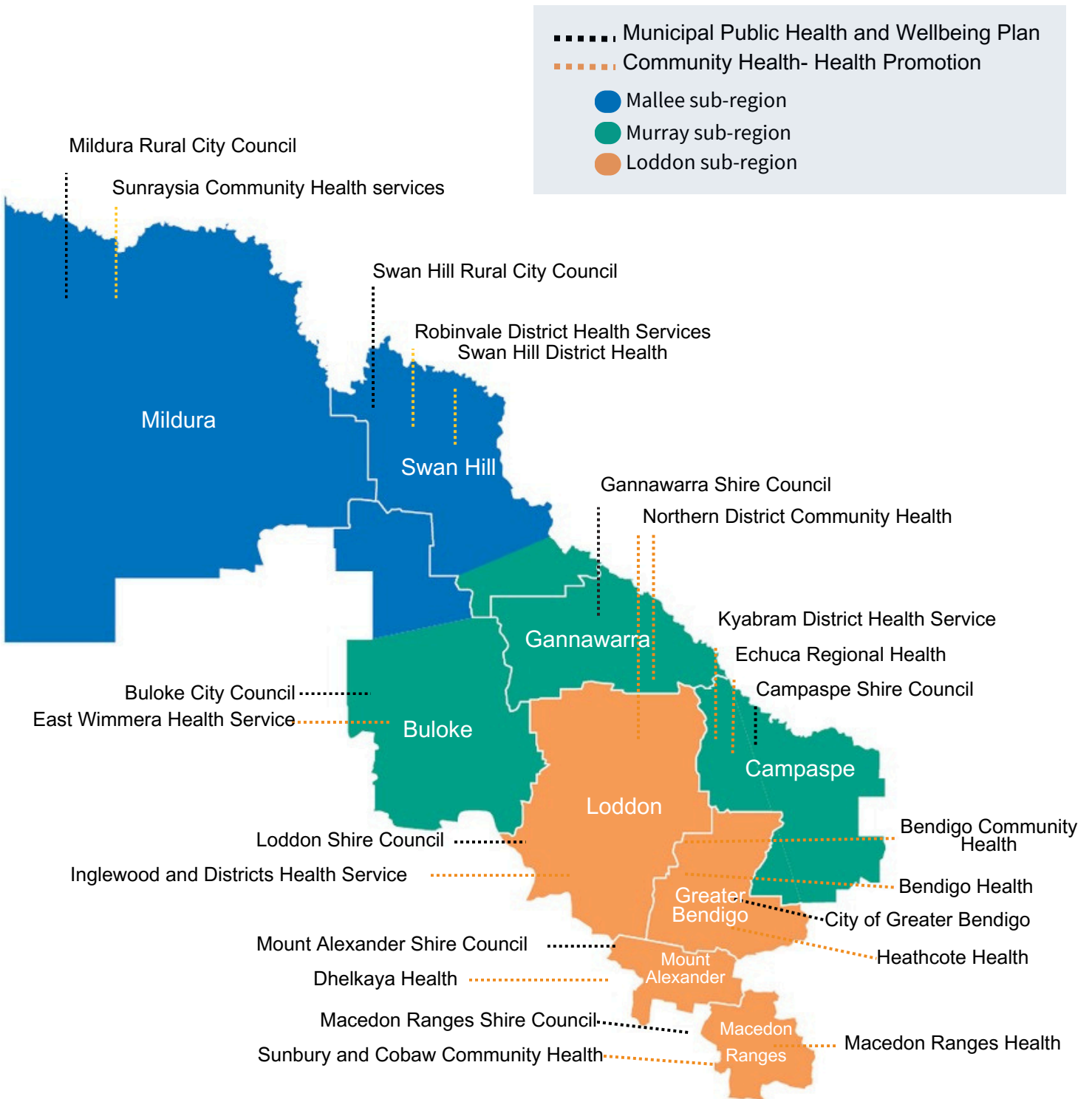
As part of the planning process for the LMPHU Population Health Plan 2025–29, stakeholders are invited to the Healthy Food System Forum on 18 March 2025. This forum provides an opportunity for stakeholders to share their expertise and contribute to the development of the plan.

The key themes from the forum will be compiled and presented to the Primary Care and Population Health Advisory Sub-Committees and other stakeholders within each LMPHU sub-region by the respective Loddon, Mallee, and Murray teams, helping to shape sub-regional workplans.

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# Healthy eating: a priority across the region (2023-25)



## Regional organisations: Healthy eating priority

- Women's Health Loddon Mallee
- Healthy Loddon Campaspe: Campaspe, Greater Bendigo, Macedon Ranges and Mount Alexander shires





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