



Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit Annual Summary Report 2025/26



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.



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Castlemaine, Mount Alexander LGA
Cover image: Robinvale, Swan Hill LGA

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1. Executive Summary

The Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit (LMPHU) continues to take a place-based and equity-focused approach to improving and protecting the health of communities across the region. Guided by the LMPHU Population Health Plan 2025-2029 and the LMPHU Strategic Plan 2026-2030, the LMPHU works in partnership with local communities, health services, local government, Aboriginal organisations and other stakeholders to strengthen both population health and health protection outcomes.

During 2025-2026, the LMPHU focused on three key system-strengthening enablers: communication, collaboration and Capacity building. The LMPHU engaged with 223 organisations, supported 67 cross-sector networks and committees, and facilitated knowledge sharing across health, local government, community, education, emergency management and social service sectors. Stakeholder feedback remained strong, with 93% reporting communications were timely, relevant and easy to understand, and 98% agreeing that the LMPHU and partners effectively share knowledge and skills to strengthen sector capability.

A significant focus during the year was protecting communities from emerging and ongoing public health risks. The Health Protection team managed more than 1,200 notifications of infectious disease, investigated 172 outbreaks across the region, responded to measles cases and seasonal disease activity, delivered preparedness programs for residential aged care facilities, expanded access to free MMR vaccination through a regional partnership model, and strengthened emergency preparedness through pandemic planning and emergency response activities. These efforts helped build regional readiness and reduce the impact of communicable diseases and other public health threats.

Our population health priorities remained climate change, healthy food systems and wellbeing. The LMPHU delivered climate literacy workshops, expanded partnerships supporting climate adaptation and resilience, and developed a Climate Change and Health training module for health services. Efforts to strengthen healthy food systems included supporting local government planning, food security networks, community food initiatives and regional research on food affordability. Wellbeing initiatives focused on lived and living experience leadership, Capacity building for the health promotion workforce, service navigation resources and community-led wellbeing activities.

Across all focus areas, the LMPHU strengthened partnerships, increased workforce capability, supported evidence-informed decision-making and amplified community voices. The launch of the [LMPHU Strategic Plan 2026-2030](#) and implementation of the [Population Health Plan 2025-2029](#) established a strong foundation for future action, demonstrating the LMPHU's commitment to improving health equity, protecting communities from public health risks, reducing preventable illness and building connected, resilient communities across the Loddon Mallee region.



Expedition Pass Reservoir, Mount Alexander LGA

2. Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit

Who We Are

The LMPHU supports the health, safety, and wellbeing of communities across the region. Using local knowledge, trusted relationships and stakeholder engagement, the unit delivers tailored responses to public health challenges and supports initiatives that reflect the unique needs of people living in the Loddon Mallee region.

How We Do It

The LMPHU [Strategic Plan 2026–2030](#) and the LMPHU [Population Health Plan 2025-2029](#) set a clear direction for strengthening prevention, preparedness, and response across the region through place-based, equity-driven public health action, using three key system enablers:

Collaboration



With stakeholders to harness knowledge and diverse perspectives, identifying place-based solutions that improve public health.

Communication



With communities and partners to share relevant, actionable public health information and advice.

Capacity building



By strengthening workforce capability and capacity to support effective public health practice across the region.

Focus Areas

Health Protection: Protect communities from preventable conditions, emergency incidents and environmental risks.

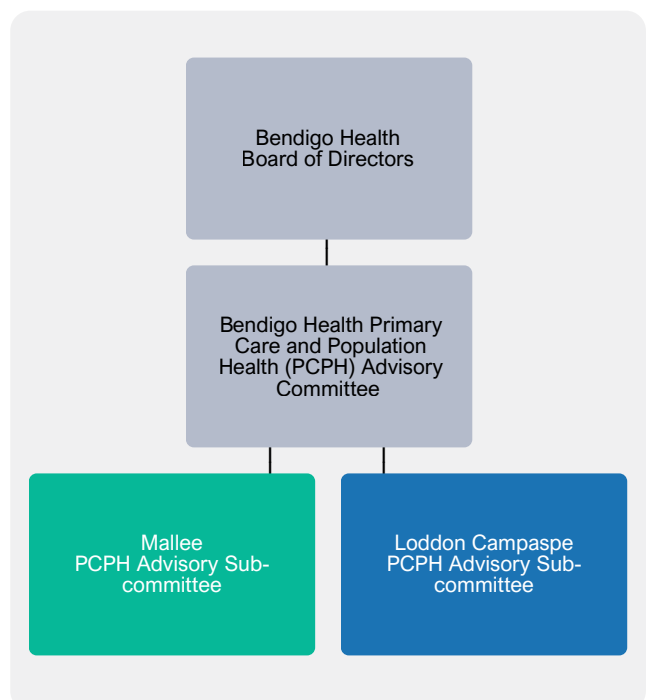
Population Health: Promote healthy, resilient communities and reduce the burden of disease through equity-focused, place-based initiatives.

Priority Populations: Support targeted strategies that enhance education, access and engagement among priority populations.



Our Governance Structure

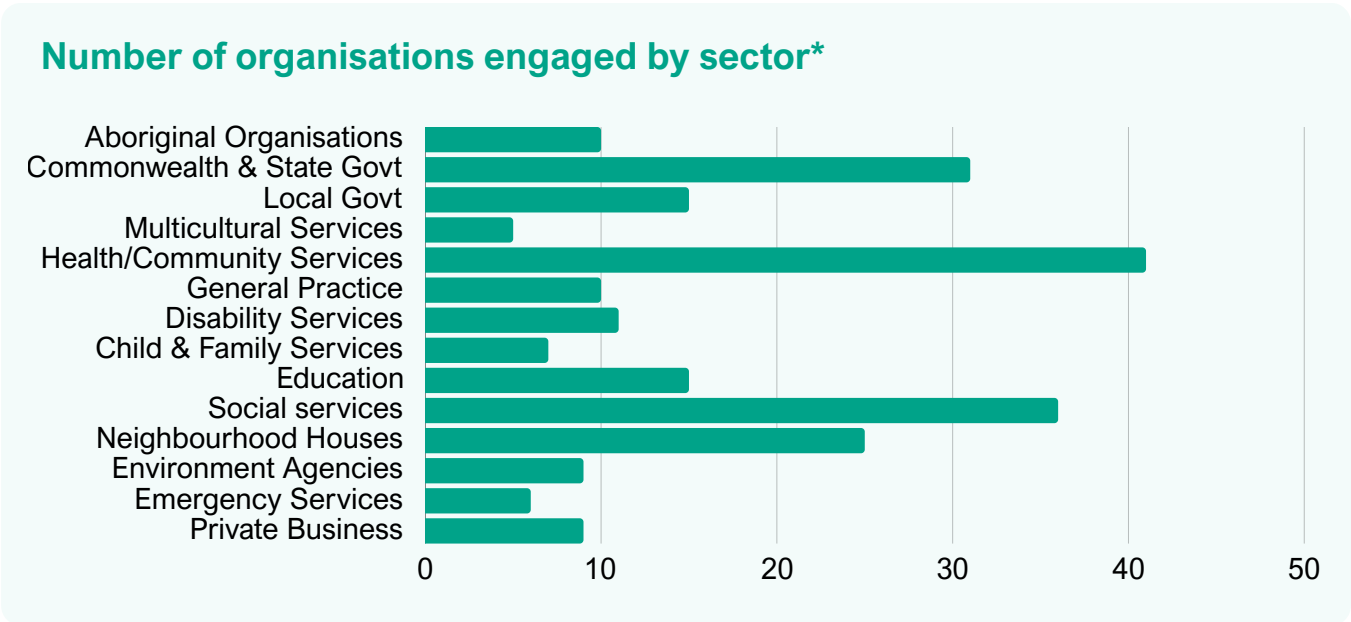
In consultation with stakeholders, the LMPHU is transitioning from three subregions to a streamlined two subregion governance model, Mallee and Loddon Campaspe, to address concerns about duplication, administrative burden and boundary misalignment. This refined structure reduces complexity for organisations operating across multiple LGAs and strengthens regional collaboration while maintaining a strong place-based approach.



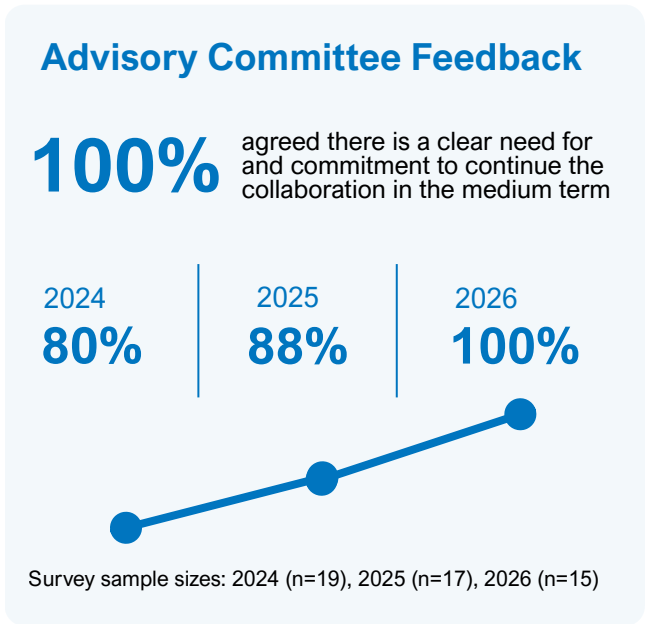
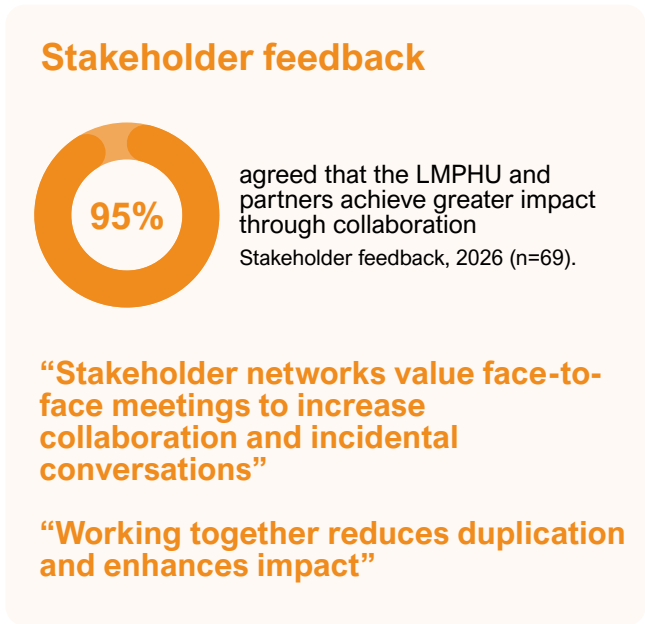
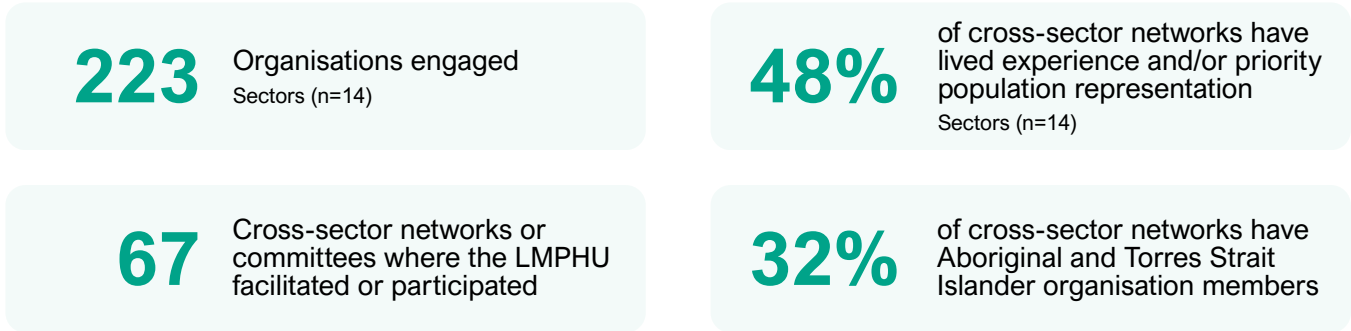
3. System Enablers

3a. Collaboration

Cross-sector collaboration fosters shared ownership of health outcomes, leverages diverse expertise, and supports more integrated and efficient responses to complex health challenges, contributing to value-based prevention initiatives.



*The LMPHU engages with organisations within and beyond the Loddon Mallee region



3b. Communication

Clear and consistent communication facilitates the translation of evidence into shared understanding and coordinated action across the public health system, while strengthening transparency, engagement, and trust among stakeholders and communities.

Media Engagements

45

Social media posts (reach 4,189)

7

Radio interviews

26

Newspaper articles

500

Video views

71,370

Website views

LMPHU Fortnightly Updates

We asked stakeholders (n=51) to rate the LMPHU Update (newsletter) overall. 100% of all respondents found the update useful.

1,188

Number of stakeholders (reach)

37%

Average opening rate

751

Average number of clicks per update on website links

Strong stakeholder engagement driving LMPHU website visits

Advisory Committee Feedback

93%

of respondents agreed communication from the LMPHU is timely, relevant and easy to understand

2024

79%

2025

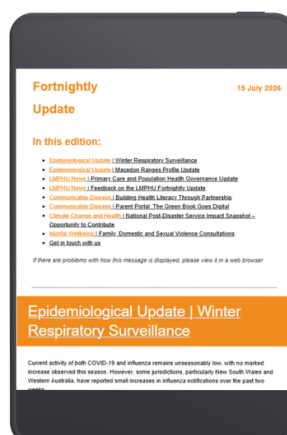
88%

2026

93%

Survey sample sizes: 2024 (n=19), 2025 (n=17), 2026 (n=15).

Overall stakeholder feedback was 93% (n=69) agreed that information and resources provided by the LMPHU are shared with others.



3c. Capacity building

Capacity building through workforce development, knowledge exchange, and resource alignment fortifies the system's ability to design, implement, and evaluate effective prevention initiatives.

Community Data

Community Data Profiles for all nine local government areas have been updated, and on request from stakeholders, the LMPHU have added 8 Town Data Profiles. The webpage this is located on had 3,285 views in this reporting period.

The Loddon Mallee Health Services Dashboard was launched, which maps health and social services across the region. The dashboard is designed to support service planning. When used with our community profiles it can help organisations understand local needs and plan services more effectively. Since going live in February 2026, the dashboard has averaged 325 views per month.

To further assist stakeholders to access data, a video explaining how to navigate the Victorian Population Health Survey dashboard has been developed.



Clinical Unit Head, Associate Professor Simon Crouch, presenting at the LMPHU Pandemic Preparedness Workshop, June 2026

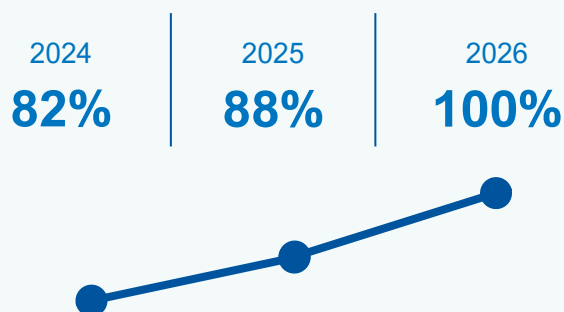
Sector Capacity building

62 LMPHU supported sector Capacity building sessions

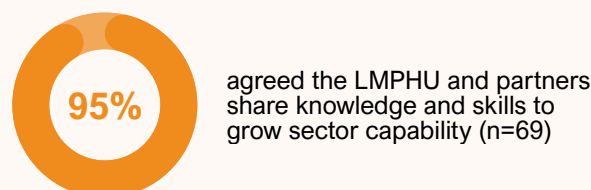
1,379 Stakeholders participating in Capacity building sessions

Advisory Committee Feedback

100% agreed the LMPHU and partners share knowledge and skills to grow sector capability



Stakeholder feedback



4. Health Protection

What we do

The Health Protection team works across the Loddon Mallee to prevent, detect and respond to public health risks. In partnership with health services, laboratories, local government and community organisations, the team investigates notifiable conditions, manages outbreaks, responds to environmental health incidents and supports emergency preparedness. Through surveillance, timely advice and coordinated public health action, the team helps protect communities and reduce the impact of infectious diseases across the region.



Disease surveillance

Monitor disease trends and emerging risks.



Outbreak management

Investigate and respond to infectious diseases.



Public health advice

Provide timely guidance to clinicians and communities.



Emergency preparedness

Strengthen regional readiness and response

5a. Operating context and recent trends

Over the past 12 months, the Health Protection Unit has responded to a changing and sometimes unpredictable public health environment. The team responded to a range of seasonal and emerging public health incidents across the Loddon Mallee region.

Infectious disease activity remained dynamic throughout the year. Seasonal respiratory viruses continued to circulate, alongside an increase in mosquito-borne disease activity following favourable environmental conditions. The team also responded to locally acquired measles, requiring a coordinated public health response across the Loddon Mallee region.

Winter respiratory conditions, including COVID-19, RSV and influenza, remained a focus throughout 2025/2026. Increased influenza activity during the season reinforced the importance of vaccination, surveillance and timely public health communication to reduce the impact of seasonal disease across the region.



Case studies

[Gastroenteritis](#)

[Q Fever Case](#)

5

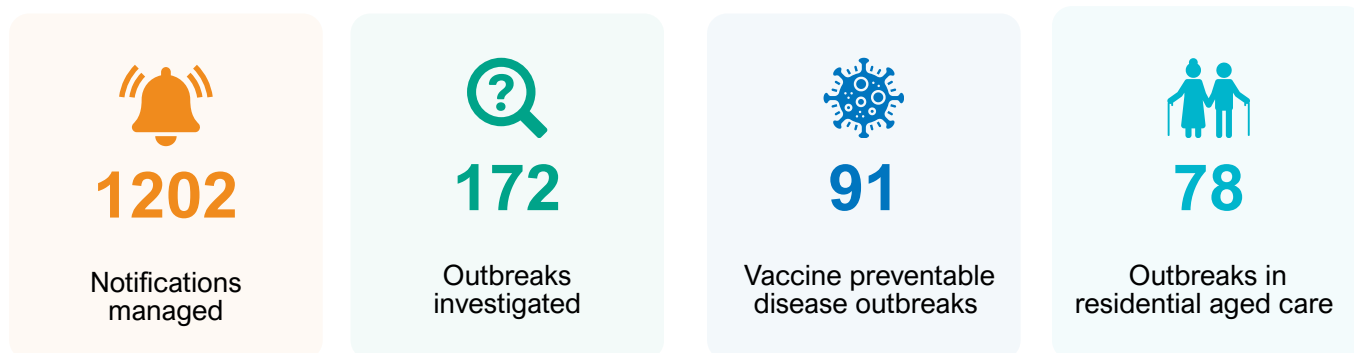
[Beat the Bite](#)

[Listeria Outbreak](#)

[Esoteric](#)

Health protection in action – year at a glance

The Health Protection team actively managed 1,202 notifications of infectious disease. This included the response to 172 significant outbreaks, requiring coordinated investigation, control measures, and ongoing advice.

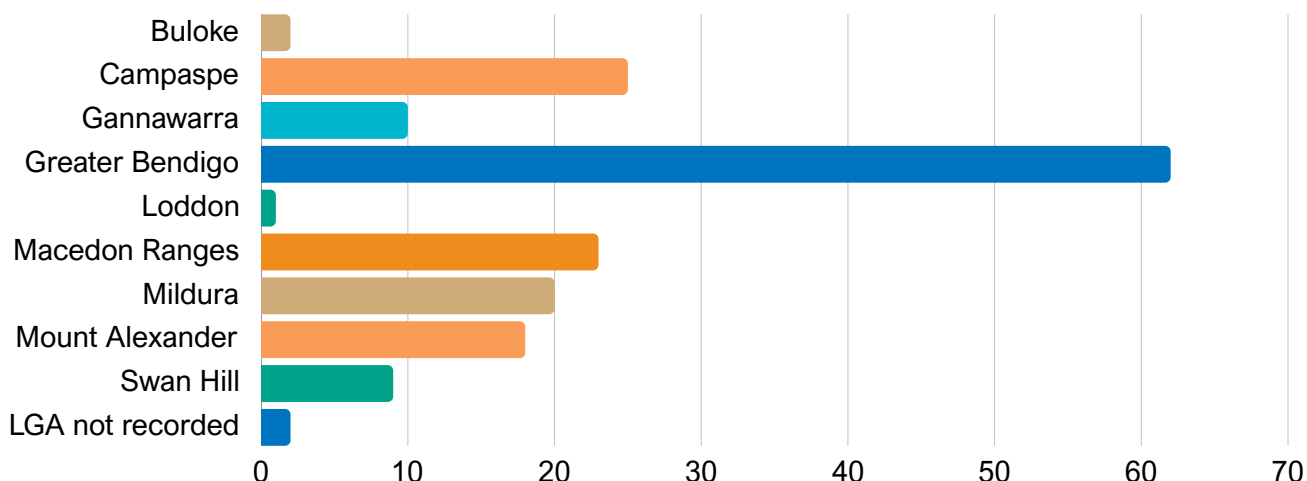


Outbreak profile

Vaccine preventable diseases represented the largest contribution to outbreak activity, associated with 91 outbreaks (53% of total outbreaks). These were predominantly respiratory conditions, with most occurring in residential aged care settings (85% of outbreaks), reflecting the increased vulnerability of older populations and the impact of seasonal illness.

Gastroenteritis outbreaks were a major contributor, linked to 78 outbreaks (45% of total outbreaks) across the region. These occurred primarily in early childcare and education settings (57 outbreaks) and residential aged care (19 outbreaks).

Outbreaks by LGA



Collaborative approach to outbreak management

Effective outbreak management relies on strong collaboration between multiple agencies, including:

- Local public health units, which lead the outbreak response, conduct epidemiological investigations and provide advice on control measures
- Local councils, responsible for environmental health and regulatory oversight
- Facility managers, who implement and monitor control measures within their settings
- Health professionals, who undertake clinical assessment, treatment and patient education
- Laboratories, which support timely identification of pathogens to guide response actions

4b. Seasonal preparedness

Preventive work remains a core focus, with 13 preparedness sessions facilitated across residential aged care facilities to support outbreak management, winter preparedness and earlier identification and management of risk.

Winter

Seasonal respiratory viruses continue to place significant pressure on health services each winter. During 2025 and 2026, the LMPHU coordinated a regional winter preparedness program to support health services, residential aged care facilities and primary care providers.

Activities included preparedness sessions, stakeholder resources, clinician education and targeted communications to support vaccination, infection prevention and timely public health advice. To improve accessibility, the LMPHU developed translated flu resources in 14 languages, an Easy English flu factsheet and a co-designed Karen language antibiotic factsheet to help priority communities access trusted health information. A seasonal clinician webinar was also delivered and recorded to support workforce capability across the region.



Summer

During summer, the LMPHU coordinated communication activities to reduce the health impacts of extreme heat, poor air quality and mosquito-borne disease. Working with local government and regional partners, the team delivered coordinated communications through media, newsletters, social media, website updates and targeted public health messaging.

A mosquito awareness campaign with school education resources and video was developed in partnership with Mildura Rural City Council, supporting communities to reduce mosquito breeding and protect themselves from mosquito-borne disease.

Highlights



Winter

13

Winter preparedness sessions delivered to residential aged care facilities

14

Languages available for the flu factsheet

1

Easy English flu factsheet developed

1

Co-designed Karen factsheet and video

1

Seasonal clinician webinar delivered and recorded

3

New language translations added in 2026

2

Stakeholder packs, aimed at RACF and ELC

4

Winter wellness videos

3

Resources promoting vaccination among older people



Summer

17

Social media posts and stories

18

Newsletter articles

5

Radio interviews and mentions

4

Media releases

1

Mosquito prevention campaign co-developed with Mildura Rural City Council

4c. Sexual Health

The LMPHU continues to participate in the Centre for Excellence in Rural Sexual Health (CERSH) Communities of Practice across Bendigo, Swan Hill and Mildura, strengthening partnerships with regional health, education and community organisations. The forums provide opportunities to identify emerging sexual and reproductive health issues, share local intelligence and inform collaborative initiatives.

The LMPHU supported the inaugural Let's Talk About It sexual health expo in Mildura, presenting local data on syphilis and its relevance as a Communicable Disease Incident of National Significance. The team also participated in a panel discussion with students and promoted the importance of testing through an information stall. In partnership with the Royal Women's Hospital (RWH), CERSH, Sunraysia Community Health Services and Swan Hill District Health, the LMPHU delivered two sexual and reproductive health update events for community clinicians in Mildura and Swan Hill. The sessions covered local STI and blood-borne virus trends, inequities affecting priority populations, local referral pathways and opportunities to build workforce capability through the RWH Clinical Champions Program for access to contraception and early medical abortion care.

A total of 50 clinicians attended the sessions, with participant feedback indicating a high level of satisfaction.

4d. MMR Vaccination Program

The Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit expanded access to free MMR vaccination across the region through a commissioned service model involving 15 health services, including community health services, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, pharmacies, councils and hospitals. During 2025–26, 1,849 MMR vaccine doses were delivered to adults aged 20–59 years, with 750 vaccinations administered in the final quarter alone.

The program combined local service delivery with targeted communications, community engagement and employer-based vaccination initiatives to improve awareness and access among priority populations. Partnerships with health services, Aboriginal health organisations, neighbouring public health units and Murray PHN supported the development of culturally appropriate resources, consistent regional messaging and enhanced promotion of measles prevention across the Loddon Mallee region.

Highlights



Sexual Health

- 3 Communities of Practice
- 2 Regional clinician education events
- 1 Regional sexual health expo supported

Shared learning

The LMPHU showcased regional public health innovation at the Public Health Association of Australia Communicable Disease and Immunisation Conference, presenting local initiatives that strengthen immunisation uptake, enhance disease surveillance, and improve equitable access to prevention programs.

Conference participation strengthened professional networks, promoted regional public health practice and enabled knowledge exchange with public health leaders from across Australia and New Zealand.



Jess Travers, Manager Health Protection
Tracey Watson, Team Leader Health Protection

4e. Emergency preparedness and response

The Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit hosted a Regional Pandemic Preparedness Workshop, bringing together 41 stakeholders from 32 organisations across health, local government, emergency management and community sectors to strengthen regional preparedness for future pandemics.

Professor Brett Sutton AO joined the day as the keynote speaker, sharing lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic and highlighting the importance of transparency, collaboration and community engagement during public health emergencies. Collectively, participants identified 10 priority areas to enhance regional coordination, communication, workforce surge capacity, data sharing and support for vulnerable communities. Insights from the workshop are informing the development of the Loddon Mallee Regional Pandemic Plan, strengthening a coordinated and partnership-based approach to future public health emergencies.

Highlights



Emergency preparedness

2

Emergency response requests

4

Internal simulation exercises

1

Regional Pandemic Preparedness Workshop

4f. Sustaining Readiness Through Workforce Capability

The LMPHU is investing in internal workforce capability to strengthen preparedness and response. This includes targeted training and role development through programs such as Emergency Management Liaison Officer (EMLO) and Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System (AIIMS), ensuring staff are well-equipped to operate effectively within emergency management structures and support coordinated responses across the region.

The team contributed to 2 separate emergency response requests during the Harcourt fires; these fires were a difficult time for the local community. The LMPHU supported the multi-agency response with public health insights and by amplifying air quality, safety, and community wellbeing messaging.

Following the Mallee flash flooding, the LMPHU undertook 4 internal simulation exercises to test and strengthen preparedness.



Dr Harp Dhillon, Public Health Registrar, facilitating stakeholder consultation at the LMPHU Pandemic Preparedness Workshop, June 2026

5. Prevention Priorities

5a. Climate Change

The LMPHU recognises climate change as a threat to population health. The Loddon Mallee region over the past 12 months has been impacted by multiple extreme weather events, including severe storms, flooding, bushfires and an extended heatwave, resulting in exacerbation of existing health inequities. Consistent with the LMPHU Population Health Plan, our work focuses on prevention, adaptation, and strengthening community resilience to protect health and wellbeing across the region.

Collaboration

The LMPHU has collaborated with local government, emergency management, sustainability teams, and community organisations to support integrated responses to climate-related health risks. These partnerships have advanced coordinated approaches to heat, extreme weather, and environmental change, with a focus on protecting populations most vulnerable to climate impacts. Working with networks including the Loddon Mallee Climate Change in Health Leaders Network and the Health Services Climate Change in Health Community of Practice has strengthened alignment between climate adaptation, public health planning, and community resilience initiatives.

Communication

The LMPHU developed a Climate Change and Health online training module which has been piloted and will be expanded to all Loddon Mallee health services. The LMPHU continues to promote climate and health messaging alongside local data and evidence to support informed decision-making.

Capacity building

The LMPHU has improved understanding of the health impacts of climate change and strengthened partner capability to respond. A key component has been our partnership with La Trobe University and the Violet Vines Marshman Centre for Rural Health Research to deliver 21 Climate Efficiency and Literacy workshops across the region, including in smaller rural towns. The workshops have supported stakeholder groups and residents to build confidence and practical skills to manage climate-related health risks in their homes, regardless of home ownership.

Highlights



Collaboration

21

Climate change sector networks that the LMPHU facilitates or participates in.



Capacity building

26

Climate change and health workshops, training and presentations

363

Attendees

6

Climate change/environment data points added to Community Data Profiles

1

Climate Change & Health online module developed and available for Health Services



Case studies

[Keeping cool in summer](#)

[Energy Efficiency & Literacy Workshops Pilot Program](#)

4

[Go Pack! - The Emergency Preparedness Bag for NDIS Participants](#)

[Building Climate Resilient Communities through Regional Partnerships](#)

5b. Healthy Food Systems

Healthy Food Systems remains a key prevention focus for the LMPHU, aligned with the Victorian Population Health and Wellbeing Plan priorities to reduce chronic disease, address health inequities, and strengthen local food environments. Poor diet continues to be a major modifiable risk factor across the region, with stakeholders consistently identifying food security, particularly food access and affordability, as an ongoing challenge.

Collaboration

The LMPHU has supported regional organisations and community groups to improve equitable access to healthy food by strengthening healthy food and food security networks. Through an expression of interest process, the LMPHU supported Mildura Community House and Northern District Community Health to enhance community garden connectivity and food production, with this work continuing into 2026–2027.

Communication

The LMPHU has promoted healthy eating, food security, and equitable food environments through regular communications, local data sharing, and evidence-informed resources. A key partnership with Sustain: The Australian Food Network has strengthened understanding of regional food system challenges, including delivery of the Year One Grocery Price Comparison Report.

This work has provided valuable insights into food affordability, increased awareness of cost-of-living pressures, and informed planning to improve equitable food access across the region.

Capacity building

Partner organisations have continued to prioritise healthy food systems during 2025–2026. Through the development of Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans, eight of nine local governments included actions related to healthy eating, food security, and sustainable food systems in their localised plans. To further support this work, the LMPHU has facilitated the Food-EPI+ self-assessment tool, enabling councils to evaluate and benchmark their policies against state and national recommendations. Campaspe Shire Council completed the assessment with the LMPHU support, recognised achievements, and identified practical opportunities for future action.

The LMPHU have also promoted the [Australian Food Atlas](#) as a tool for local government to build a retail food picture in the region to assist with determining food access and public health planning.

Highlights



Collaboration

10

Healthy food cross-sector networks (LMPHU facilitates/participates)



Capacity building

6

Healthy food workshops, training and presentations

97

Attendees

1

Research project Grocery Price Comparison Study including 32 supermarkets

1

LGA completed Food-EPI+ self-assessment tool



Case studies

2

[Grocery Price Comparison Study](#)

[The Campaspe Food-Epi+ Project](#)



Mildura city centre, Mildura LGA

5c. Wellbeing

Wellbeing remains a key priority across the Loddon Mallee region, with the LMPHU working alongside community partners, local experts, and people with lived and living experience to address inequities and strengthen inclusive, connected communities. In 2025–2026, partner organisations increased their focus on mental wellbeing promotion, with all local governments and 10 of 13 Community Health Organisations funded for health promotion activities embedding mental wellbeing actions into their strategic plans.

Collaboration

The LMPHU continues to support cross-sector mental wellbeing networks that strengthen partnerships, share knowledge, and guide place-based prevention initiatives. These networks increasingly incorporate lived and living experience perspectives and use the Victorian Wellbeing Strategy to inform local priorities and action. Key collaborative initiatives included Mallee Community Wellbeing Week, community education sessions on peri/menopause, participation in inclusive community events, co-designing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth-led social and emotional wellbeing resource and accessibility resources including social script and access keys for rural health services to support priority population groups access.

Communication

The LMPHU communication and education activities have promoted help-seeking behaviours, self-determination, and supportive environments across the region. Keeping Mentally Well service navigation resources are now available in all local government areas, supported by ongoing wellbeing communications targeting priority populations.

Capacity building

The LMPHU also delivered a broad range of capacity-building initiatives that combined lived experience perspectives with expert knowledge. Activities included disability inclusion training with Voice at the Table, autism inclusion workshops with Amaze, safeTALK and ASIST suicide prevention training, and a Prevention United Mental Health Promotion Masterclass.

The LMPHU have supported partner organisations to join a shared measures social inclusion project to enhance evaluation efforts.

Regional engagement was further strengthened through the Wellbeing Webinar Lunch and Learn Series. Recordings remain available online, and evaluation results showed that 94% of participants reported increased knowledge following the sessions. Overall, these efforts have reinforced regional capacity to promote mental wellbeing and create more inclusive, supportive communities.

Highlights



Collaboration

10

Wellbeing sector networks across all LGAs (LMPHU facilitates or participates)

9

Priority population focused networks

3

Family violence prevention networks



Capacity building

7

Organisations onboarded to the Social Inclusion Shared Measurement Project

17

Workshops, training and presentations

357

Stakeholders attended training

7

Lived and Living Experience voices showcased in Wellbeing seminar series

7

Service navigation resources developed/updated



Case studies

[Didgeridoo Therapy](#)

[Wellbeing Wednesday Forum Series](#)

[How to be in advisory groups. Building capacity in people living with intellectual and cognitive disability](#)

5

[Understanding and Embracing \(Peri\) Menopause – Community Education Sessions](#)

[Get Connected Social Prescribing](#)

6. Conclusion

Across 2025–2026, the LMPHU strengthened stakeholder engagement, deepened cross-sector collaboration, and continued to build the capacity of partners and communities to deliver effective public health initiatives.

Stakeholder feedback highlighted improvements across our key system-strengthening enablers: collaboration, Capacity building, and communication, reinforcing the value of our approach.

This year also marked the first year of implementing the 2026-2029 LMPHU Population Health Plan, with a strong focus on establishing the foundational work needed to support successful delivery of the four-year plan. In addition, the launch of the Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit Strategic Plan provided a clear long-term vision and strategic direction in strengthening our commitment to improving population health outcomes across the region.

As the LMPHU enters the second year of the Strategic Plan and the Population Health Plan, we are well positioned to build on the foundations of the past year by translating strategic priorities into measurable outcomes. By embedding our new subregional governance structure and through continued partnerships with communities, health services, local government, and Aboriginal organisations, the LMPHU will remain focused on strengthening the regional public health environment and improving the health and wellbeing of people across the Loddon Mallee.



Rosalind Park, Greater Bendigo LGA



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