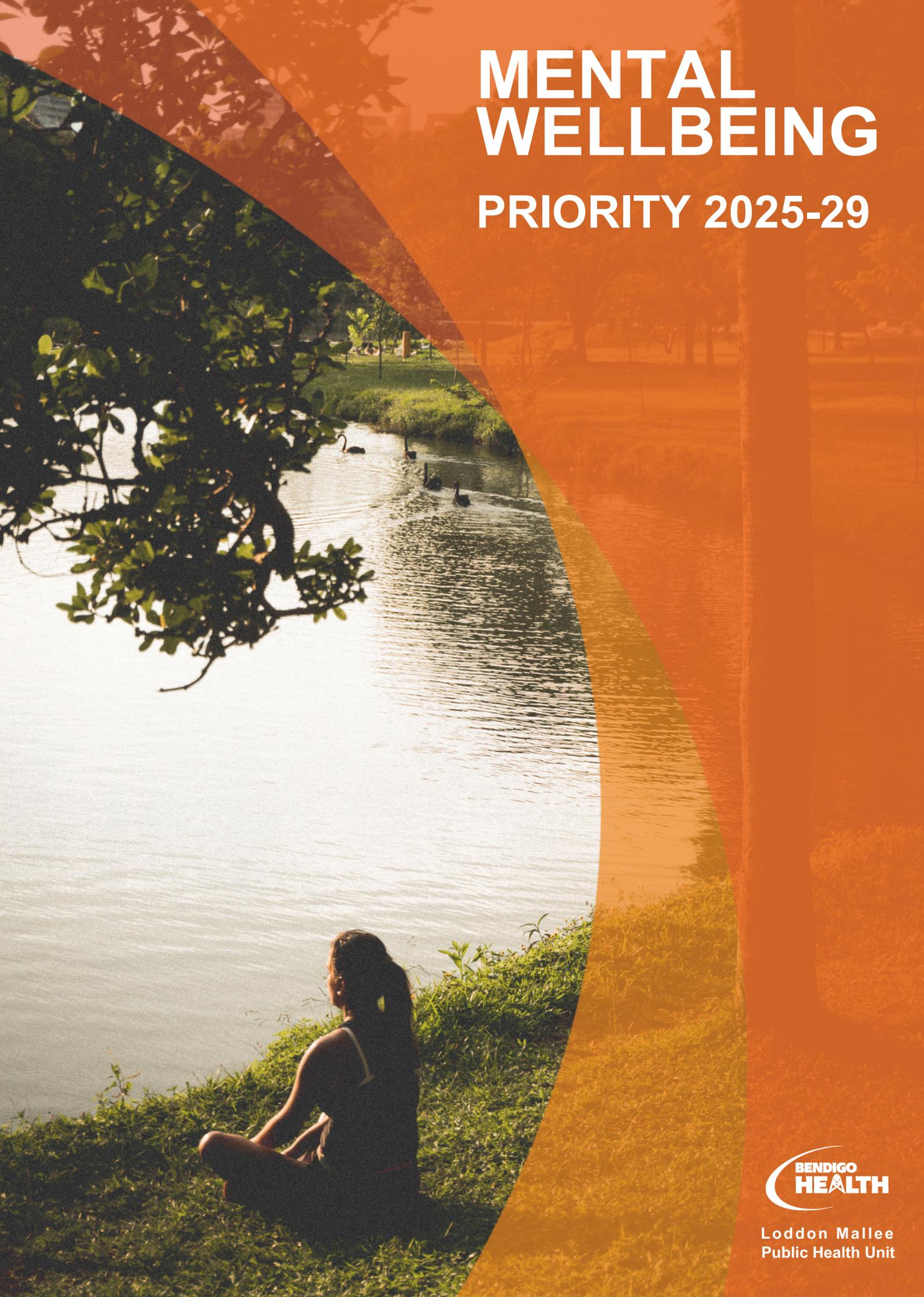


MENTAL WELLBEING

PRIORITY 2025-29



Loddon Mallee
Public Health Unit

Produced by Bendigo Health,
Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit
Created on the 05 March 2025

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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

Why it is a priority

Improving mental wellbeing is a priority area within the [Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan](#). Each year, one in five Victorians experiences a mental health condition, with 45 percent of Victorians affected at some point in their lifetime. Mental wellbeing was also selected as the top priority across the Loddon Mallee during initial stakeholder consultations in 2022.

The Loddon Mallee region has been significantly impacted by multiple disaster events during the last five years, including the floods in 2022 and the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies show both direct and indirect exposure to floods can have negative effects on mental health. It is essential to provide mental health and wellbeing support across the spectrum of prevention and early intervention for flood-affected communities to help them heal and recover.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and wellbeing has been substantial. The measures implemented to prevent the spread of the virus have the potential to exacerbate existing social, economic, and health disparities. This could particularly effect regional and rural communities and increase psychological distress among vulnerable individuals.

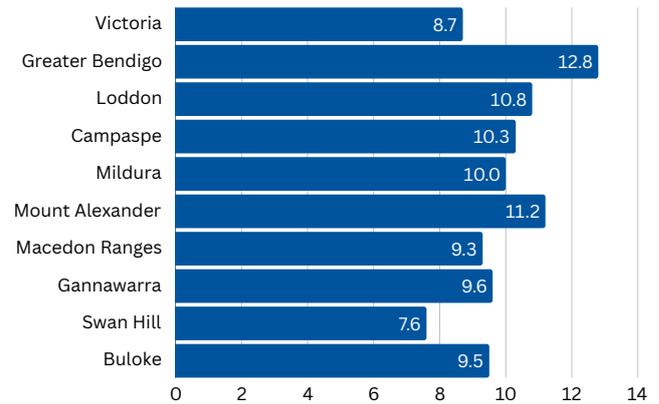
Mental health conditions often overlap with chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancers, as well as issues related to alcohol and substance misuse and problem gambling. These conditions share numerous risk factors and can act as risk factors for one another and frequently co-occur.

Mental wellbeing is influenced by the context of the local community. Individuals from minority groups, such as those who are Culturally and Racially Marginalised (CARM), LGBTQIA+ individuals, and people who are living with a disability or neurodiverse, often face stigma and encounter barriers in accessing the support they need to feel included in their communities.

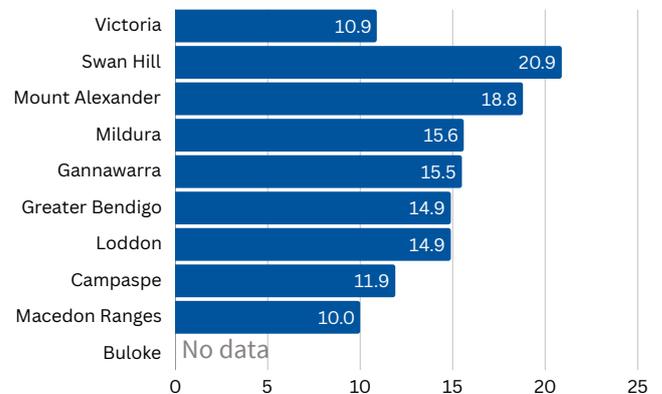
What the data told us

Most local government areas (LGA) in the LMPHU region have higher suicide rates and report a mental health condition than the Victorian rate. Most of the LGAs also have lower proportion of people who thought multiculturalism definitely made life in their area better, compared to Victoria.

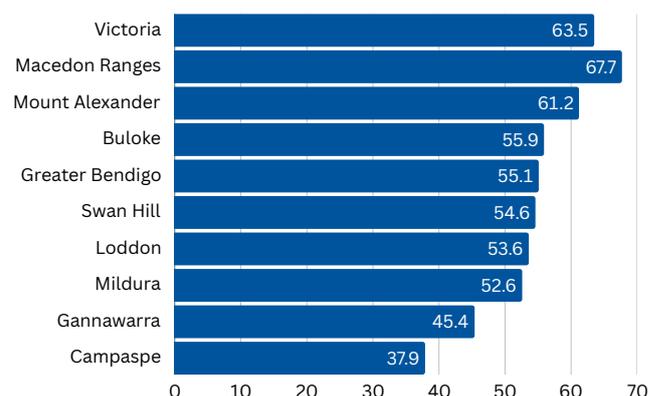
People who reported they had a mental health condition (ASR per 100), 2021 ^[2]



Deaths from suicide and self inflicted injuries, 0-74 yrs (rate/100,000 pop), 2018-2022 ^[2]



Adults who thought multiculturalism definitely made life in their area better (%), 2020 ^[1]



[1] Victorian public health and wellbeing outcomes, Public Health Division, Department of Health
 [2] Public Health Information Development Unit (PHIDU), Torrens University Australia

The work so far

Enhance mental wellbeing through a prevention-focused approach, promoting resilience, connection and early intervention strategies across the Loddon Mallee region

1. Raise awareness of mental health and wellbeing and reduce stigma to encourage people to reach out for help when they need it

The LMPHU Mental Wellbeing team has supported various activities and events throughout the Loddon Mallee region to reduce stigma and raise awareness about mental wellbeing:

- **Mallee:** efforts have been made to share resources and support local RUOK Day initiatives as well as promote the upcoming *Exploring Wellness Initiative* alongside local partners
- **Murray:** multiple events have been supported including Mental Health and Wellbeing Expos, HALT sessions and community connection activities
- **Loddon:** notable activities have included the establishment of a Blue Tree in both Loddon and Bendigo, community information sessions at local libraries in Mount Alexander, and personal training events in the Macedon Ranges

2. Promote prioritisation of self-care and resilience through education

The LMPHU has facilitated multiple training events across the Loddon Mallee region:

- **Mallee:** initiated a partnership with Mallee Wellbeing to create, test and distribute resources aimed at enhancing community wellbeing, for Ouyen and Robinvale communities
- **Murray:** supported a number of initiatives for young people including training, a community forum and headspace mental wellbeing podcast challenge involving six schools. Various community cuppa and create sessions were also held
- **Loddon:** funding was provided for Mental Health First Aid Training in the Macedon Ranges. Additionally, educational resources and packages were shared among the Public Health Unit to improve understanding of the needs within priority communities

3. Build community capacity to support family, friends and neighbours with their mental wellbeing

The LMPHU has actively supported training and mental wellbeing events throughout our region, which includes developing resources and participating in community wellbeing supports:

- **Mallee:** funded and supported Cultivate counselling sessions in Ouyen, Robinvale, Sea Lake and Murrayville
- **Murray:** funded and supported a number of trainings including Standard and Youth Mental Health First Aid, safeTALK, safeYARN, Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training and Motivational Interviewing Training
- **Loddon:** supported various events such as Pride, Wear It Purple Day and multicultural community gatherings. They have also collaborated with volunteers and the Bendigo Hospital to foster a more inclusive environment

Municipal public health and wellbeing planning 2025-2029

The Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 requires councils to have regard to mental wellbeing and inclusive communities when preparing their municipal public health and wellbeing plans.

Tackling mental health inequalities and impacts on health through municipal public health and wellbeing planning provides guidance for Councils to protect and improve the health and wellbeing of their communities.

VicHealth has developed a module to support local government; Creating Connected and Supportive Communities. This includes actions and case studies on:

- Co-designing with young people for better community wellbeing
- Building proud and inclusive communities
- Addressing social determinants of mental wellbeing

4. Strengthen community connection to enhance social supports that can be activated in times of environmental and public health events

There has been a particular focus on supporting Social Prescribing initiatives across the region through the development and sharing of resources, as well as the support of multiple programs:

- **Mallee:** initiatives have been supported to include young people in creative arts sessions and music sessions, and funding of the Nyah District community garden
- **Murray:** community capacity-building and workforce development programs have been supported, as well as social prescribing mapping and development of a 5 Ways to Wellbeing activity registry
- **Loddon:** actively involved in supporting social prescribing initiatives, organising suicide prevention walks, hosting community events and LGBTQIA+ events. They have worked in partnership with networks and stakeholders to deliver activities that promote community connectedness

5. Support training/initiatives that are inclusive and provides an environment where people feel safe to be themselves

Trainings provided across the LMPHU catchment:

- Mental Health Promotion Masterclass
- Gender Impact Assessment Training
- Inclusive Workplaces
- Gender Equality
- Active Bystander

Initiatives supported include:

- Reconciliation Week
- NAIDOC Week
- KCLC Multicultural Flavours Festival
- Kyabram District Health Service LGBTQIA+ Brush, Munch and Sip event
- Echuca Moama Pride clothing swap
- Bendigo Pride in the Park
- Castlemaine Pride
- Trans Day of Awareness
- International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOBIT)
- Neurodiversity Celebration Week

6. Raise awareness of mental health services and create a network of support and referral systems for individuals in need

See a list of our networks below:

Mental Wellbeing Networks Loddon Mallee

Mallee

- Northen Mallee Integrated Mental Health Leadership Network
- Rainbow Ready Roadmap Community of Practice
- CARE (Collective Action for Respect & Equality) Connector Community of Practice
- School Focused Youth Wellbeing Network
- Cultural Significant Events Working Group

Murray

- Buloke Gannawarra and Swan Hill Healthy Minds Network
- Campaspe Murray Mental Health and Wellbeing Network
- Campaspe Murray Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Working Group
- Murray Prevention Network
- Buloke Loddon Gannawarra Executive Group
- Campaspe Multicultural Connections Group

Loddon

- Loddon Healthy Minds Network
- Greater Bendigo Prevention Network
- Greater Bendigo MAZN Network
- Mount Alexander Connectors
- BULORTJ
- Mount Alexander Suicide Postvention Action Group
- Mount Alexander Alcohol Harm Prevention Action Group
- CSC LGBTQIA+ Working Group
- Get Connected Working Group
- Macedon Ranges Suicide Prevention Action Group
- Rainbow Ready Roadmap Community of Practice
- Rainbow Lighthouse LGBTQIA+ Mental Health Network
- Healthy Communities Network
- National Network of Mental Health Promotion Officers

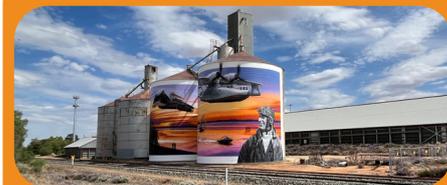
Click on picture below for more place-based activities



Loddon sub-regional update



Mallee sub-regional update



Murray sub-regional update

Stakeholder consultations

As part of the planning process for the LMPHU Population Health Plan 2025–29, stakeholders are invited to the Mental Wellbeing Forum on 29 April 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.

Aligning our work

- An [outline](#) of Wellbeing in Victoria: A strategy to promote good mental health | Victorian Department of Health
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Outcomes and Performance [Framework](#) | Victorian Department of Health
- Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration [Framework and Implementation Plan](#) | Gayaa Dhuwi
- Mental Health Promotion [Competency Framework](#) | Prevention United
- Mental Health Lived Experience Engagement [Framework](#) | Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
- Lived Experience Governance [Framework](#) (2024) | Mind Australia
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience-led Peer Workforce [Guide](#) | Black Dog Institute
- Victorian Suicide Prevention and Response [Strategy](#) (2024-2034) | Victorian Department of Health
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention [Strategy](#) (2025-2035) | Department of Health and Gayaa Dhuwi

- Balit Murrup: Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing [framework](#) 2017–2027 | Health and Human Services
- Victorian Eating Disorders [Strategy](#), 2024-2031 | Department of Health

References/sources

1. McEvoy, M., Parker, C., Crombie, A., Skinner, T. C., Begg, S., Faulkner, P., & Caccaviello, G. (2021). Loddon Mallee healthcare worker COVID-19 study—protocol for a prospective cohort study examining the health and well-being of rural Australian healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. *BMJ open*, 11(8), e050511.
2. Victoria. Department of Health. Prevention and Population Health Branch, issuing body. (2011). *Victorian public health and wellbeing plan* Retrieved April 3, 2025, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-3393867072>
3. *Public Health and Wellbeing Act, 2008* (43rd), s46. <https://content.legislation.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/08-46aa043%20authorised.pdf>
4. Victoria. Department of Health., issuing body (2024). *Mental health and wellbeing in Victoria*. Victorian Government Library Service, Werribee, Victoria
5. Victoria. Department of Health., (issuing body.) (2022). *Youth mental health and wellbeing Victoria*. Victorian Government Library Service, Werribee, Victoria
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