

VitalSigns®

Taking the pulse of our community

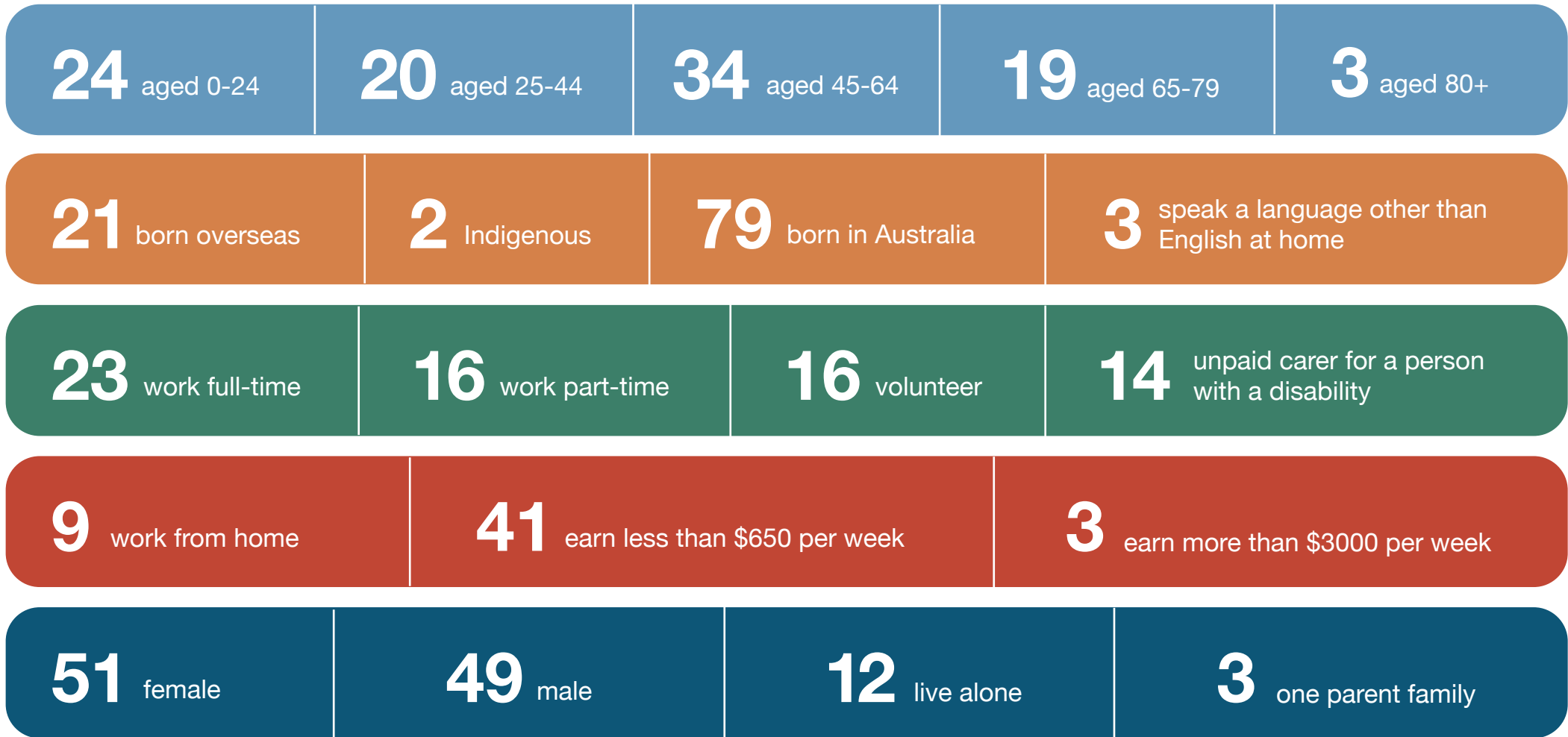
Boolarra 2025 Report on Gunaikurnai Country

Welcome to Boolarra’s second Vital Signs Report. This provides another snapshot, five years on, of how our community is faring in key quality of life areas: Health & Wellbeing, Education & Learning, Economy, Environment and Belonging. This Report reflects some of the changes brought about by the Covid pandemic.

Using credible data combined with people’s lived experiences, the goal of this report is to build a better understanding of challenges and opportunities in Boolarra and its surrounding communities. This understanding is vital to making our community a better place for everyone, now and forever.

We acknowledge the Gunaikurnai people, and we pay our respects to Elders past and present, whose knowledge and wisdom have ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices, shaping and caring for this precious land and ensuring its abundance. We aim to work respectfully with all people and to encourage a lighter footprint on the land, to ensure that it remains environmentally, economically, and aesthetically sustainable.

If Boolarra was a village of 100 people



Current statistical data does not allow for non-binary identification



What you love about where you live

- “Fresh air, helpful, friendly people who have time to stop and talk and help out. Informative community newspaper. The way people band together to support local events, etc.”
- “I love the strong sense of community”
- “Our fight, drive and ability to work together to get things done. Also the space, freedom and atmosphere.”

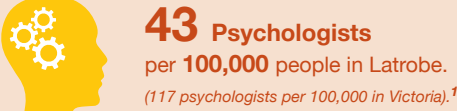
HEALTH & WELLBEING

Without good physical and mental health, we cannot thrive as individuals or as a community.

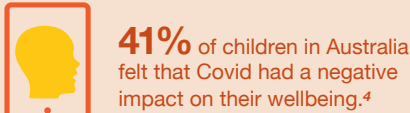
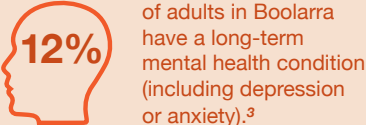
The data highlights that access to health services, mental health and family violence remain vital issues for our community and it gives a snapshot of our health behaviours. Our mental health has been further impacted by Covid and localised natural disasters.

Access

There continues to be more GPs per head of the population in Latrobe in comparison to Victoria, but the number of psychologists has reduced by 26% between 2018 and 2024. Since Covid, increasing Telehealth appointments has assisted in ensuring easier access to a range of health professionals.



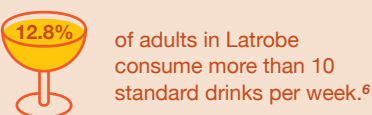
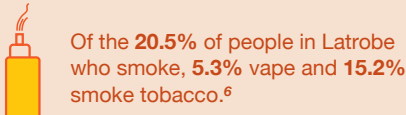
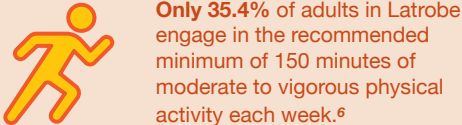
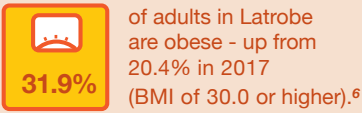
Mental Health



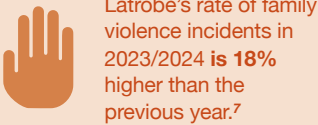
Natural disasters cause significant stress and mental ill-health to local residents. Rob Gordon, disaster psychologist notes that ‘for about 65% of people, the symptoms have subsided by about 10 months...so 35% will be struggling through the second year’.⁵

If you, or anyone you know needs support: Beyond Blue **1300 224 636**. Lifeline **13 11 14**. Kids Helpline **1800 55 1800**.

Health Behaviours



Family Violence



Family and domestic violence support lines: Respect National Hotline **1800 737 732**. Safe Steps **1800 015 188**. The Orange Door **1800 319 354**. Men's Referral Service **1300 766 491**. Kids Helpline **1800 55 1800**.

Source. ¹ PHN Gippsland Population Health Planning Hub 2024. ² General Practice of the Nation 2022, RACGP. ³ ABS Census 2021. ⁴ Covid-19 and Kids' Wellbeing, Australian Human Rights Commission, 2022. ⁵ Dr. Rob Gordon, What to expect in the Second Year, Australian Red Cross Webinar 2021. ⁶ Victorian Population Health Survey 2023. ⁷ Family Violence Data by Local Government 2024, Table 2, Crime Statistics Agency.

'Stormbirds Program' helps recovery at local schools

The Stormbirds program has supported small groups of students to work through the impacts of change wrought by the 2024 storm. Five educators were trained in this evidence-based program which works to create a safe space for the students to recognise feelings, develop coping skills and resilience, and to practice new ways of thinking and responding to uncertainty brought about by natural disasters.

One of the five educators trained was Sarah Linton, teacher and welfare coordinator at the Mirboo North Primary School. She explained:

"The theme throughout the four weeks is that change is the one constant that happens in our life. The only thing we can rely on is that change will always be in our life. Sometimes you think it has been a long time and [that the storm] isn't still impacting the kids, but what they remember and the thoughts that come out are really interesting."

Sarah noted that two of the things common to most experiences were the sound of chainsaws, and that students felt that they were being listened to."



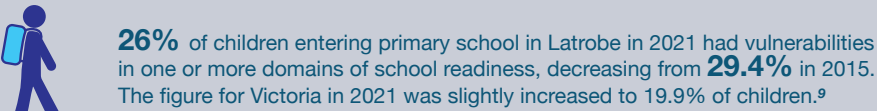
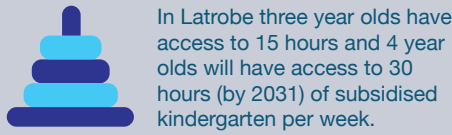
EDUCATION & LEARNING

Access to Education is vital to health and wellbeing and empowers children and adults.

The data shows that not as many of our young people go on to further education compared to the Victorian average, but those who do have better employment outcomes. The data also shows that we have a strong uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships.

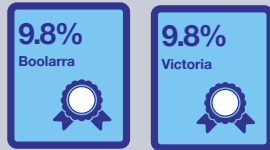
Early Learning

Access to high-quality preschool programs is a proven strategy for lifting outcomes for all children.



Educational Attainment & Pathways

The Census gives a snapshot of educational attainment in our community, which reflects our socioeconomic make up.¹⁰



Completed Diploma or Advanced Diploma.¹⁰



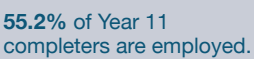
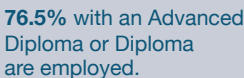
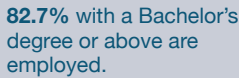
Completed a Bachelor's Degree or above.¹⁰

A snapshot of the post-school destinations of those who completed school in Latrobe in 2023.¹¹

2023 Report



In Australia employment outcomes are strongly linked to education.¹²



Lifelong Learning



Access to affordable community-based lifelong learning is a strength of our community. There are opportunities for formal and informal learning through local organisations, such as the CFA, the Community newspaper, Arts organisations, U3A and other groups. These improve personal and professional skills, as well as building social cohesion.

Source. ⁸ Table 3A.18, Productivity Commission Report on Government Services 2022. ⁹ PHIDU Social Health Atlas, Early Childhood Development table, 2021. ¹⁰ ABS Census 2021, Educational Attainment. ¹¹ On Track Survey 2023, Victorian Department of Education No. 02/2017. ¹² Table 22, ABS Education and Work Report, May 2024.

Supporting transition to further education

Students of any age from the Mirboo North district can apply for an Education Support Award to assist with the financial costs of transitioning into tertiary level studies.

"The costs faced by local students seeking to further their studies through TAFE or University are significant. These include fees, materials,

laptops, also rent and accommodation bonds for those moving away from home. Before you even go to the first lecture, you can be up for \$10,000," explained Diana Mueller, Director of the Mirboo North & District Community Foundation. "The Education Support Program is targeted at giving students the capacity to meet these costs."

"Feedback tells us that financial support over two years has been really important for students, as often financial support dries up in the second year of studies, yet their costs of living continue to rise," explains Anne Marie Dieperink, Executive Officer of the Community Bank, Mirboo North & District.



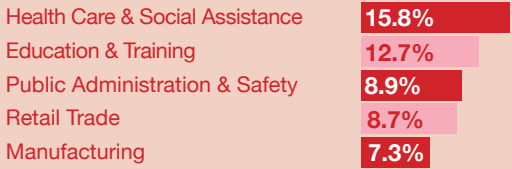
ECONOMY

Economic viability and sustainability are vitally important for building strong rural communities.

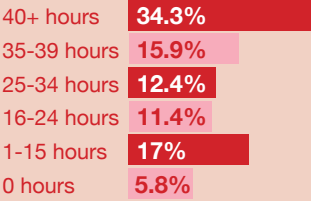
While our unemployment rate remains low, our labour force participation rate has declined and there is a shortage of labour. The Health & Social Assistance sector provides the most jobs in Latrobe, with the Construction and Retail sectors jointly in second place.

Boolarra Community Snapshot

Where we work ¹³



How we work ¹³



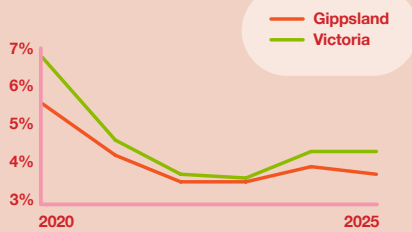
Employment

Labour shortage is a feature of the post-pandemic environment. Regional areas have seen a **136.3% increase** in online job advertisements from 2020 to 2025.



While vacancy numbers have decreased, there are still **25% more** job advertisements currently in Australia than in 2019.¹⁴

Gippsland's unemployment rate has fallen since 2020 and is slightly lower than the state unemployment rate. However, Gippsland's youth unemployment rate is higher (**14.8%**) than Victoria's (**10.6%**).¹⁶

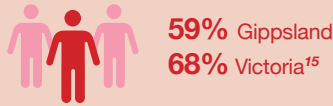


Participation

As of 2025, **59%** of people 15 years of age and over living in Gippsland were participating in the labour force. That is, they were employed in jobs or unemployed and looking for work.¹⁵

40.4% were not in the labour force, and may be undertaking other activities such as studying, retirement, caring for children, or may be unable to work.¹⁵

Gippsland's labour participation rate is lower than Victoria's



Industry



The Latrobe economy supports 35,322 jobs. **19.3%** of the jobs in Latrobe are in the Health Care & Social Assistance sector, with Retail Trade jobs and Construction jobs coming joint second at **10%** each.¹⁷



The largest contributors to Latrobe's gross revenue are the Electricity, Gas, Water & Waste Services sector (**\$4.1 billion**), the Manufacturing sector (**\$2.4 billion**) and the Construction sector (**\$2.2 billion**).¹⁷

Source. ¹³ ABS 2021, accessed via Remplan / Latrobe. ¹⁴ Jobs and Skills Australia, Vacancy Report, June 2025. ¹⁵ Jobs and Skills Australia, Gippsland Employment Region Labour Market Dashboard, March 2025. ¹⁶ Jobs and Skills Australia Labour Market Overview – Victoria. ¹⁷ Latrobe Economic Profile, Remplan.

Energy resilience for local small businesses

In 2024 local business and community development organisation, Mirboo Country Development Inc (MCDI) was successful in receiving a grant of \$146,000 in support of energy resilience for local small businesses from Ausnet's Energy Resilience Community Fund.

"Energy resilience was a big concern for local small businesses after the February 2024 Storm knocked out power to the town for days. This prolonged power outage caused significant stock losses for food businesses and others simply couldn't operate, threatening their viability." explained Kelly McCarthy, President of MCDI.

The grant has funded an electrical assessment for these businesses, the upgrade of necessary circuits and electrical infrastructure, then the install of changeover switches to enable connection to generator power.

This infrastructure will benefit not only the business owners but will also benefit the wider community by enabling access to goods and services during an emergency.



ENVIRONMENT

Our environment is vital to our health, quality of life and survival.

The natural environment is one of the reasons we love where we live. Maintaining our region's biodiversity and managing the impact of climate change is an increasing imperative and a priority for our community.

Biodiversity

Boolarra is located in the Strzelecki Ranges Bioregion which is one of the most cleared bioregions in Australia. Changes to the native habitat as a result of human and natural activity have put many of our unique species at risk.

The storm that hit the Mirboo North area in February 2024 resulted in **50% of canopy loss across 95 hectares and 30%-50% canopy loss across another 62 hectares.**¹⁸



Native forest logging ended in January 2024 in this region and across Victoria.



Preserve Our Forests members discovered a viable population of **35** Greater Gliders, a species listed as 'threatened to extinction' in Victoria.

Energy and Waste

Electricity generation in Australia 2023/24

The proportion of electricity generated by renewables increased to **35%** in the 12 months to June 2024¹⁹, up from **19.7%** in 2018-19.²⁰ These figures includes all electricity generated outside of the electricity sector, including by industry and households.



46% Coal¹⁹
Down from 58.5% in 2019.²⁰



17.2% Gas
In Victoria this is less than 5%.¹⁹



1.7% Oil¹⁹
Down from 2.1% in 2019.²⁰



18.3% Solar¹⁹
Up from 6% in 2019.²⁰



5% Hydro¹⁹



11.6% Wind¹⁹
Up from 6.7% in 2019.²⁰

Boolarra's uptake of rooftop solar has increased to **46.1%** from **33.1%** in 2020.²¹



Waste

The State Government's Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021 requires all Victorian Councils to provide access to a standardised four stream household waste and recycling system, including a Food and Garden Organics service, by July 2027.²²

Climate Change

Climate change is the most significant environmental challenge facing us. As an agricultural region, our economy and our farmers are particularly vulnerable to its impact.



More days over 35 degrees.



Less annual rainfall, but more intense rainfall events.



More days with high and extreme fire danger.



More extreme weather events (bushfires, droughts, floods & storms).



Decreased water flow in rivers and wetlands.



Increased weed and pest distribution.

Source. ¹⁸ Victorian Dept Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Community Information session, Mirboo North, May 2024. ¹⁹ Commonwealth Dept Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water, Australian Energy Update 2025. ²⁰ Australian Energy Update 2019, Department of Environment and Energy. ²¹ Australian PV Institute. Solar Map 3871, 30.06.25 ²² South Gippsland Shire Council, Waste and Resource Recovery Plan, 2024 to 2034

Biodiversity improvement through habitat protection

As noted in our last report, Preserve our Forests, a local environmental group was successful in spearheading a community effort to prevent plans to log three native forest coupes on the edge of Mirboo North, when it secured a designation of 'Immediate Protection Area' for this threatened forest.

Preserve our Forests have continued their advocacy over the last five years to ensure that this protection would be ongoing and were delighted when it was announced in September 2025 that this important piece of forest has finally been protected as a Conservation Park through Victorian state legislation.

"This could not have happened without the continued support of our community to protect this 'refugia essential' to our native species, an abundance of orchids and other beautiful native flora," says Marg Thomas from Preserve our Forests. "Securing the habitat in this native forest became even more significant after the huge tree loss caused by the 2024 supercell storm. We look forward to making this new Conservation Park more accessible to locals and visitors alike."



BELONGING

Participation and our connections in the community help to develop a sense of belonging, which is vital to building healthy, inclusive communities.

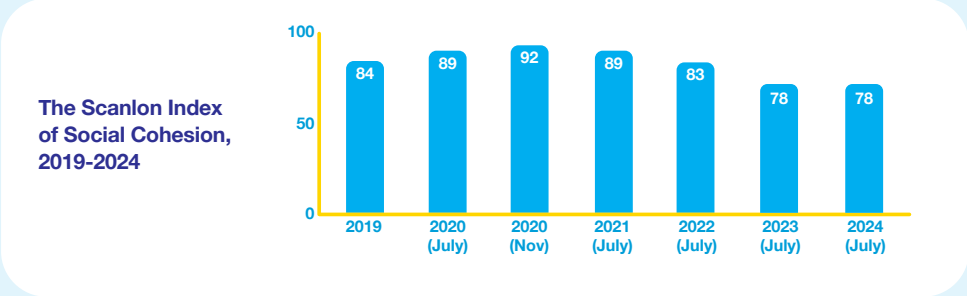
Belonging continues to be a strength across our district. Volunteering has reduced since the Covid, putting pressure on local community organisations.



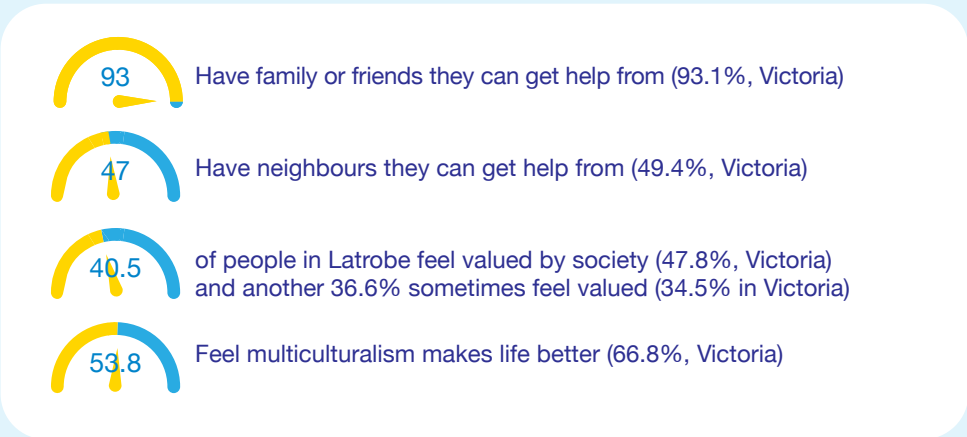
Social Cohesion

The Scanlon Foundation produces the Mapping Social Cohesion Survey and Report annually.

Reports indicate that social cohesion in Australia increased during Covid, and then declined. The 2024 Report shows that social cohesion has been stable from 2023, but is below long-term average.²³

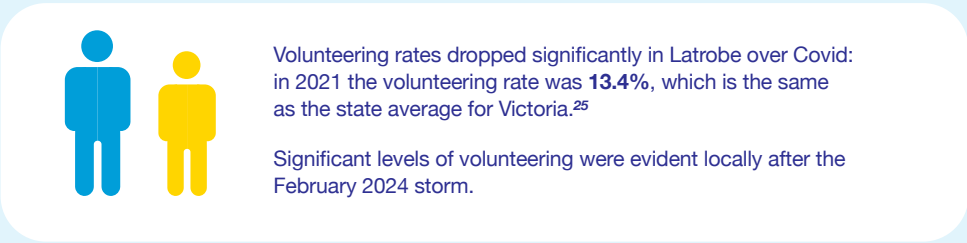


Latrobe is at or below the Victorian State average in the following measures of social cohesion.²⁴



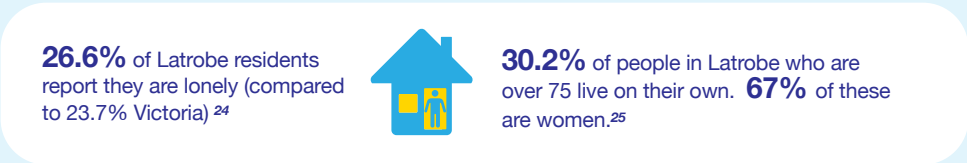
Volunteering

Volunteering promotes personal community wellbeing through building connections and bringing community projects to life



Social Isolation

Social isolation can arise from physical isolation, lack of public transport, poor mental health or lack of connection with the community.



²³ Scanlon Foundation, Mapping Social Cohesion 2024 Report. ²⁴ Victorian Agency for Health Information. Victorian Population Healthy Survey 2023, by LGA ²⁵ ABS Census 2021

Music and Arts Venue at Old Boolarra Post Office

With more than 22 years' experience staging music events, the Boolarra Folk Festival Committee has decided is bringing to life a historic community asset to provide a venue for music, arts and culture to be accessible all year round.

This project, which restores and extends the historic Old Boolarra Post Office, has been ten years in the making. It will not only preserve the heritage of this historic building, but will create a flexible, accessible venue for local musicians, performers, artists in the local area.

"The building, which is to be completed mid-2026, will include indoor and outdoor spaces, a performance area, kitchen and amenities," explains Grant McNeill. "With its central location opening on to Centenary Park, the venue will host events, workshops and classes that celebrate local talent and expose locals and visitors to new creative experiences and learning."



Why did we produce this report?

The Mirboo North & District Community Foundation and the Community Bank, Mirboo North & District are proud to present you with the second Vital Signs report for our region. This is yet another major collaborative project of both organisations who have a shared vision to foster strength and prosperity for the communities in our District.

We are hoping that this report will lead to a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities before us as a community. This report is merely a starting point from which further discussion will enable us to target our community's resources to those areas.

How to use this report

This report is to get you thinking and chatting with your friends, family and work colleagues. Discuss questions like:

- What issues do you care about?
- What data surprises you?
- What would you do to make a difference?
- Will this data change the focus of your community organisation?

How can you get involved?

Tell us what you or your community organisation thinks. How should we make the most of our opportunities or tackle our challenges?

Offer your time and expertise to tackle initiatives that improve our community outcomes.

About the Mirboo North & District Community Foundation

The Community Foundation's mission is to build stronger communities through:

- Granting: over \$2 million in grants since 2010;
- Donations received: \$2 million since 2010;
- Investing: in Mirboo North Medical Centre facility leased to local medical practice;
- Facilitating: in knowledge and community solutions, through projects like this Vital Signs Report.

Together we Thrive.

Ruth Rogan, Mirboo North & District Community Foundation
ruth.rogan@mirboodistrictfoundation.org.au

About the Community Bank, Mirboo North & District

The Community Bank is a locally owned business that operates a "profit for purpose" model. Our banking profits are returned to our local community through sponsorships, grants and donations. We have returned \$2.7million in community contributions since opening in 2010.

When you choose to bank with us, you're not just opening an account, you are backing a model that reinvests in our community's wellbeing and development. This is banking that supports our clubs, funds scholarships, and helps local businesses grow.

If you want your banking to make a difference where it matters most, keep your banking local and help build a brighter future for our community.

Anne Marie Dieperink, Community Bank, Mirboo North & District
srcel1@bigpond.com

UN Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 global goals adopted by all UN member states in 2015 to achieve peace and prosperity for people and the planet by 2030. These goals serve as a blueprint to end poverty, protect the environment, promote wellbeing, and ensure sustainable development across the globe. There is an intersection between the UN Sustainable Development Goals and what the data and our experiences tell us about life in our district. We highlight this intersection through the inclusion of the relevant SDG icon in each domain.



Our District

This Vital Signs collaboration covers the following district: the main towns of Mirboo North, Boolarra, Yinnar and Thorpdale, as well as the smaller towns and communities in-between including Mirboo, Mardan, Dumbalk, Hallston, Allambee, Childers, Narracan, Delburn, Budgeree, Yinnar South, Jumbuk and Boolarra South.

The population of this district is approx. 8,700 and is part of three different Local Government Areas: Latrobe, Baw Baw and South Gippsland.

For this reason this collaboration has produced four Vital Signs reports: one for each of Mirboo North, Yinnar, Boolarra and Thorpdale, which reflects their own local data and the data of their Local Government Area.

A word about the data

While we have endeavoured to use local data wherever possible, much of the data used in this report is only available at a Local Government Authority (LGA) or larger population level. Data relating to Boolarra in this report, generally encompasses the town and surrounding communities.

Vital Signs is a community check-up conducted by community foundations around the world that measures the vitality of our communities and identifies significant trends in a range of areas critical to quality of life. With special thanks to the Toronto Foundation for developing and sharing the Vital Signs concept. Community Foundations Australia manages the licensing of Vital Signs within Australia. The Vital Signs® Trademark is used with permission from Community Foundations of Canada.