

## **Submission in response to the Social and Economic Benefits of Improving Mental Health – Issues Paper**

Moonee Valley City Council is pleased to have the opportunity to make a submission to the Mental Health Royal Commission.

Moonee Valley City Council welcomes the Productivity Commission's enquiry into the social and economic benefits of improving mental health in Australia.

This submission provides an overview of the City of Moonee Valley, our position on mental health, work undertaken to improve mental health and wellbeing outcomes and responds to the Productivity Commission's Issues Paper (January 2019).

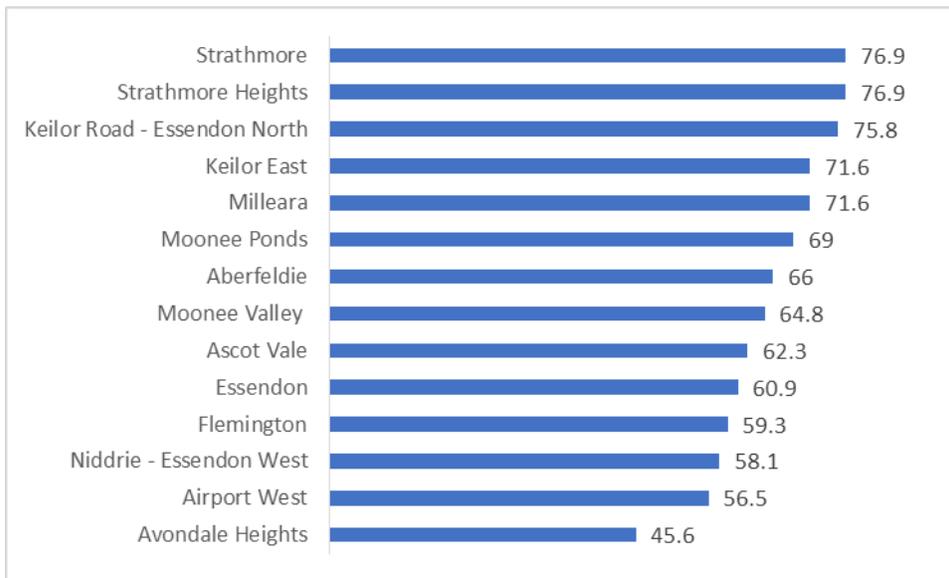
### **1. Snapshot of mental health in Moonee Valley**

The mental health and wellbeing status of the residents in the City of Moonee Valley is described by the following indicators:

- A higher proportion of the residents in Moonee Valley report high or very high psychological distress (14.3 per cent) compared with the North and West Metropolitan Region – West Region (13.2 per cent) and Victoria (12.6 per cent).
- A higher proportion of residents in Moonee Valley have an adequate work-life balance (58.9 per cent) compared with Victoria (53.1 per cent).
- Moonee Valley score of resilience out of eight is similar to that of Victoria (6.6 and 6.4 respectively)

Moonee Valley Community Survey respondents were asked to record their mental wellbeing on a scale with poor being lowest to excellent being highest. The proportion of people who selected either excellent or very good as a proportion of all respondents was lowest in the neighbourhoods of Avondale Heights, Airport West, Niddrie-Essendon West and Flemington (45.6 per cent, 56.5 per cent, 58.1 per cent and 59.3 per cent respectively). See figure 1 below:

**Figure 1 – Self-reported mental wellbeing City of Moonee Valley, 2016**



## 2. Strategic Context

Our commitment to mental health is outlined in two of Council's strategic documents which set out our strategic direction and focus for what we aim to achieve:

### ***MV2040***

The MV2040 Strategy is our long term plan with a vision of a healthy city, where together we will create and continually improve the conditions that enable all of us to enjoy the highest level of health and wellbeing possible.

The MV2040 Strategy is our 'umbrella' strategy which will guide all of our future work through action plans to deliver on the five themes of the strategy:

- Fair
- Thriving
- Connected
- Green
- Beautiful

We've developed implementation initiatives for these themes based on our 13 neighbourhoods and a neighbourhood planning approach. This means we identify local priorities and tailor responses to suit each neighbourhood, while improving the health and vibrancy of all parts of our city.

A strategic direction target of the Fair theme of MV2040 is that:

*Moonee Valley is a city where residents report their health as being very good and know how to access the appropriate services to manage their physical and mental health*

This will be achieved through:

- Promoting mental health and wellbeing in both youth and early years services and education settings
- Reducing discrimination arising from mental health challenges
- Advocating for services for people of all ages with mental illness

For further information see - <https://www.mvcc.vic.gov.au/About-the-Council/Plans-and-strategies/MV2040.aspx>

### ***Council Plan 2017-21 integrating the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan***

Our Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan is integrated into the Council Plan, which aligns with the MV2040 strategy. The health and wellbeing priorities in the Plan for the 2017-21 Council term are:

- gender equity and prevention of violence against women
- active transport
- mental health and alcohol and other drugs
- reducing inequalities
- creating liveable neighbourhoods
- employment

Each of the themes frames a set of objectives and strategies which will support us in achieving our vision of being a city of clean, green and beautiful, vibrant, diverse and sustainable community that people experience as friendly and safe to live in.

For further information see - <https://www.mvcc.vic.gov.au/About-the-Council/Community-health-and-wellbeing/Health-and-wellbeing-planning>

## **3. Advocacy Strategy**

Council recently developed an Advocacy Strategy 2018-21 which outlines the key priority projects we are asking other levels of government and organisations to partner with us to deliver over the coming years. The projects identified in this strategy align with the themes and objectives of the Council Plan and MV2040.

One of our **top tier advocacy priorities is an expanded mental health service for young people**. Specifically Council is advocating for:

1. \$600,000 per year to expand and continue to deliver Council's Thriving Minds Program with local schools

2. A headspace clinic for Moonee Valley
3. Address the NDIS mental health gap

### **Thriving Minds Program**

Moonee Valley City Council has developed and implemented a pilot project called **Thriving Minds** – an early intervention response to what young people have been telling us on a national and local level.

The Thriving Minds Program model involves partnering with schools to deliver nationally accredited youth focused Mental Health First Aid for teachers and school staff, students, parents and community members to assist identification and response to mental health issues in young people as they arise.

The purpose of Thriving Minds is to help Year 10 students better understand mental health issues, build emotional resilience and know where to go or who to turn to when they need support. The project aims are to:

- Respond to the increase in mental health needs for young people in Moonee Valley
- Improve partnerships between schools and wellbeing organisations and services
- Build school capacity to respond holistically to mental health needs in their students
- Promote help seeking behaviours in young people

Through the pilot Thriving Minds program, we partnered with three Moonee Valley schools in 2018 to deliver 51 workshops over seven weeks to 378 Year 10 students. We also delivered two, two-day workshops to 20 teachers, as well as two, two-day workshops to 23 Council staff.

Feedback at the end of the pilot year was overwhelmingly positive with schools reporting many more previously unknown young people self-referring to school wellbeing teams for support.

Council is keen to expand the Thriving Minds program, offering it to all ten secondary schools across fifteen campuses throughout Moonee Valley. A \$600,000 contribution per year will help us hire a Thriving Minds Project Coordinator and three Thriving Minds Facilitators, together with youth counselling and youth case management staffing support.

### **A headspace clinic for Moonee Valley**

headspace centres act as a one-stop shop for young people who need support with mental health, physical health (including sexual health), alcohol and other drugs, or work and study support.

Face-to-face hub-style services like headspace clinics play a vital role in providing people with the support and advice they need in one convenient setting. However, with many of these services located in the outer suburbs where single points of high demand are focused, they can be inaccessible to people who require support in the inner metropolitan area. For a young person in Flemington hoping to access a headspace clinic the closest current service is in Glenroy, which is not easily accessible by public transport from many suburbs within our municipality.

A headspace located in Flemington would provide a convenient point of access to support services for young people both within Moonee Valley, and throughout the inner west.

### **Address the NDIS mental health gap**

The “Mind the Gap” report produced by the University of Sydney and Community Mental Health Australia identified that people with Asperger’s and High Functioning Autism are most risk of not being eligible for the NDIS.

In response to this gap Council are in the process of rolling out the “The Lab” program ([www.thelab.org.au](http://www.thelab.org.au)) across the municipality. The Lab is a technology club for people with High Functioning Autism/Asperger’s and aims to address some of these “service gaps” within Moonee Valley. Council will be running three programs commencing from 1 July 2019.

## **5. Response to Issues Paper**

As outlined in our Council Plan 2017-21 incorporating the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan we support the development and implementation of an integrated planning approach in line with the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*. Cooperation across Council and the support and participation of community and other partners is required to address mental health issues.

Council supports initiatives aligned to our strategic priority actions in relation to mental health:

- Promoting positive mental health in education settings through community education, programs and public campaigns, including a Young People’s Mental Health First Aid initiative in schools.

- Delivering universal youth mental health partnerships and targeted individual support through our youth case management and counselling services.
- Attracting community and specialist service providers and strengthen services to address mental health.

Council's response to the most relevant questions raised in the Productivity Commissions Issues Paper are outlined below:

## QUESTIONS ON SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION

*Are there particular population sub-groups that are more at risk of mental ill-health due to inadequate social participation and inclusion? What, if anything, should be done to specifically target those groups?*

### **Young People**

Research has found that young people in Moonee Valley experience comparatively poorer levels of mental and emotional wellbeing compared to other population sub-groups and subsequently this is a priority area for Council.

- There is a lack of specialist youth mental health services located within Moonee Valley, with the closest Headspace in Glenroy or Sunshine, outside the municipality. Young people face transport and other access challenges to attend these, including long waitlists.
- 19.5 per cent of young people in Moonee Valley have reported high levels of psychological distress, well above the Victorian average of 13 per cent.
- Approximately 50 per cent do not have positive psychological development, higher than the Victorian figure of 21.9 per cent.
- More than 20 per cent do not have a trusted adult or someone to turn to for advice in their life.
- Approximately 30 per cent were dissatisfied with their quality of life, 17 per cent higher than the Victorian figure.

In order to target young people, Council recommends building on existing promising practice. Council's **Thriving Minds** initiative provides an encouraging example which involves partnering with schools to deliver nationally accredited youth focused Mental Health First Aid for teachers and school staff, students, parents and community members to assist identification and response to mental health issues in young people.

### **Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Women**

- At the 2016 Census, the labour force participation rate of residents on the Flemington Public Housing Estate in Moonee Valley was 33 per cent compared to 60 per cent for Victoria.
- Cohorts particularly affected are young people (38 per cent unemployment rate) and women (30 per cent unemployment rate).
- These are much higher when compared to the Victorian unemployment rates for the general population (5.4 per cent), for young people (14 per cent) and for women (6 per cent).
- There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that there are high levels of under-reporting for family violence incidents amongst culturally and linguistically diverse communities living in the Flemington and Ascot Vale housing estates, and a need for culturally appropriate services for these communities.

Place-based initiatives that address the determinants of mental-ill health and aim to empower CALD women through financial independence and social connectedness, are likely to have a positive impact on mental health outcomes. Promising practice is exemplified through Council's Flemington Works project is using a co-design approach and working with young people and women living on the Flemington Housing Estate to address entrenched disadvantage. Related Women's programs include:

- Flemington Works Women's co-design: Working with local women to design responses and deliver projects improving employment outcomes for women living on the Flemington Housing Estate. This process itself provides women with short-term employment, building professional networks, workplace experience and confidence. The process will unpack what has/hasn't worked previously, building culturally-appropriate prototypes delivered by women in partnership with local agencies.
- Micro business Support: supporting resident-owned and operated microenterprises. To date 20 have been established with 9 run by women living on Flemington Housing Estate. Some of these have been established through the Stepping Stones Micro Business Program (25 women have graduated in 2018 with many joining Council's Local Business Registry and receiving on-going support through Flemington Works). Moonee Valley's Harmony Day event was a Twilight Market (pictured) with all food-stores provided by these emerging businesses.
- Social procurement: Using social procurement clauses to secure employment outcomes in Council's contracts (has secured 35 employment outcomes through this process to date).
- Women's Leadership: a 16 week program to help MV women develop the confidence and skills to advocate for change and develop and implement a local community projects. The program includes weekly workshops with experts and community leaders, project support and course accreditation (8 units) for Certificate 3 of Community Services from Victoria University. 21 women completed the program in 2018 (12 women from the Flemington Estate), which

will run again in 2019. The projects span a range of issues including family violence, intergenerational relationships, social support, career pathways and health and wellbeing.

- Young Women's Leadership (Girl Got This): designed for young women across Moonee Valley aged 12 to 16 and includes a series of workshops and activities aimed at developing practical skills, community connections and confidence. The program creates opportunities for young women to pursue their interests and ideas, and use these to contribute to their community. (One participant from the Estate).
- Other social support services: are also provided out of the Flemington Community Centre (including homework clubs, parent support groups, playgroups, housing, relationship counselling, financial and legal service outreach etc).

Opportunities exist to connect intersecting issues and responses which both strengthen women's financial independence, address gender equity, improve social connectedness and mental wellbeing outcomes (particularly in CALD communities).

On a wider level race based discrimination has a clear impact on people's wellbeing. There is a clear link between this discrimination and its impact in reducing hope and confidence in people seeking jobs.

## QUESTIONS ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

*How effective are mental health related supports and programs in Australian education and training settings in providing support to students? How effective are programs in educating staff, students and families, on mental health and wellbeing? What interventions are most effective? What evidence exists to support your assessment?*

The Thriving Minds Program was designed to help address the mental health service gap in Moonee Valley and a gap in the education of staff, students and families, on mental health and wellbeing. The Thriving Minds program addresses the gap by:

- Providing a holistic approach in responding to mental health problems within the school context to avoid the need to have several training packages
- Being flexible and easily implemented by school staff with minimal preparation time for teachers
- Developing local mental health and wellbeing resources
- Delivering a sustainable approach to health and wellbeing strategies across the school
- Helping to develop resilience, confidence and knowledge for teachers and have well supported young people

A large part of the Council's Youth services team's role also involves working with young people to build their capacity to engage in employment (through practical support as well as managing psychological barriers like anxiety, depression etc), as well as the reciprocal relationship between poor mental health and unemployment. Research has consistently shown that engaging in meaningful work adds to Young People's sense of identity, purpose, autonomy, connectedness and overall wellbeing.

## **4. Summary**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Mental Health Royal Commission.

In summary, research has found that young people in Moonee Valley experience comparatively poorer levels of mental and emotional wellbeing compared to other population sub-groups and therefore this is a priority area for Council.

To address mental health issues within the youth cohort Council's main preventative program is the Thriving Minds Program which involves partnering with schools to deliver nationally accredited youth focused Mental Health First Aid for teachers and school staff, students, parents and community members to assist identification and response to mental health issues in young people as they arise.

Council is advocating for \$600,000 per year to expand and continue to deliver Council's Thriving Minds Program with local schools.

Council also supports and is advocating for a headspace clinic located in Flemington which would provide a convenient point of access to support services for young people both within Moonee Valley, and throughout the inner west.

There is also an opportunity to address the intersecting issues and responses which both strengthen women's financial independence, address gender equity, improve social connectedness and mental wellbeing outcomes (particularly in CALD communities) through targeted place-based economic inclusion initiatives.

To discuss this submission further please contact:

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