NORTHERN Grampians SHIRE COUNCIL

To love where we live

Advocacy Prospectus

September 2026



Discover Northern Grampians

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we live and work, the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia, Jupagalk, Dja Dja Wurrung, and Djab Wurrung people.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present and extend that respect to other First Nations people who reside on, or are connected to, these lands.

We express our gratitude in the sharing of this land and our hope that we may walk forward together in harmony and in the spirit of healing.

Contents

1	Introduction	04
2	About our shire	05
3	Council vision and goals	09
4	Key challenges	10
5	Council's role	12
6	Advocacy principles	13
7	How we advocate	14
8	Advocacy priorities (lead, partner, support)	15
9	'Lead' priorities	16
10	'Partner' priorities	28
11	'Support' priorities	35

Introduction

Under the *Local Government Act 2020*, councils must give effect to several overarching governance principles, including:

- Achieving the best outcomes for the community;
- The economic, social and environmental sustainability of the shire;
- Pursuing innovation and continuous improvement;
- Collaboration with other Councils and Governments and statutory bodies; and
- Ensuring the ongoing financial viability of the council.

Council has prepared this Advocacy Prospectus in accordance with the governance principles set out in the *Local Government Act 2020*. The prospectus sets out council's priority matters for engagement with the Victorian Government and other key stakeholders, and the outcomes sought for the Northern Grampians Shire community. The priorities also align with the Council Plan 2025–29 and other adopted strategic documents.

Our community vision is "To love where we live". We cannot achieve this vision alone, which is why an advocacy prospectus is critical. It is designed to highlight the most pressing challenges and needs within our community, and the solutions council is seeking.

As a rural municipality, council relies on partnerships with the Victorian Government, the Australian Government and other stakeholders to progress priority projects and address community needs that extend beyond Council's direct responsibilities.

As a small rural council we need to work in partnership with, and advocate to, a range of stakeholders and all levels of government to deliver on these priorities.

About our shire

Northern Grampians Shire is located in the northwestern region of Victoria, approximately 230 kilometres from Melbourne. The municipality shares its boundaries with Yarriambiack Shire and Buloke Shire to the north, Loddon Shire, Central Goldfields Shire and Pyrenees Shire to the east, Ararat Rural City and Southern Grampians Shire to the south and Horsham Rural City to the west.

Northern Grampians Shire has a population of 11,950 residents, with the majority (70%) residing in the major towns of Stawell and St Arnaud. Halls Gap is a significant regional town and the small settlements of Great Western, Navarre, Stuart Mill, Marnoo and Glenorchy provide important focal points for local communities.

The shire covers 5,918 square kilometres of land and contains several natural features, including the Grampians Ranges in the south, the foothills of the Pyrenees Mountains in the northeast, and the Wimmera Plains in the northwest. The Grampians are a mountainous landscape of national significance consisting of rugged landscape ridges and escarpments. The surrounding farming country is attractive, containing mature river red gums and other native trees in paddocks and along roads and streams.

Our shire also boasts unique indigenous cultural heritage, impressive wine, sporting and gold history, as well as growing industry and agriculture opportunities.

The Avoca, Avon, Richardson and Wimmera rivers are all within the shire. The upper catchment of the Wimmera River supplies a secure water supply to thousands of farms and more than 50 towns in the Wimmera and Mallee regions. Other major environmental assets of the shire include Lake Lonsdale, Lake Fyans, Teddington Reservoir, Lake Batyo Catyo and Kara Kara State Forest.

Strategy advantages

Northern Grampians Shire is situated on multiple strategically important transport routes, including the Sunraysia and Western highways, Australia's third-busiest interstate freight route. Centrally located between Melbourne and Adelaide, Northern Grampians Shire provides a strategic advantage for businesses and investment. The municipality is also within close proximity of major regional centres, including Ballarat, Bendigo and Horsham.

Northern Grampians Shire's economy is heavily influenced by traditional industries, with the top three employment sectors being healthcare and social assistance, agriculture, and manufacturing. These three employment sectors reflect the region's dependence on service- and resource-based industries. In 2025, Northern Grampians Shire's GRP was estimated at $1.090 billion, growing at an annual rate of .8%, and annual economic output was $2.5 billion (Source REMPLAN).

The top three industries for economic output are mining, manufacturing and agriculture. Industry is generally concentrated in the towns of Stawell and St Arnaud and includes activities such as brick making, meat processing, steel fabrication, feed production, supply and service of farm machinery and small service industry.

The Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park is one of regional Victoria's biggest tourism destinations, receiving 2.249 million visitor trips in 2025, producing a total expenditure of $673 million.

The shire hosts the Stawell Underground Physics Laboratory, located approximately one kilometre underground in the Stawell Gold Mine. The facility is the only underground particle physics laboratory of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere and supports research in areas including dark matter.

Northern Grampians Shire is home to renowned tourism events, including the Stawell Gift and Grampians Grape Escape. An extensive events calendar attracts many visitors to the region. The shire also boasts a thriving arts and culture scene, with numerous public art, galleries and cultural spaces. St Arnaud has a Silo and Mural Art Trail, and WAMA Australia's first space dedicated to environmental art is located in Halls Gap.

Our shire at a glance



People & Place



11,950 Residents

49 Median age

5,918 sq.kms in size

3,370 kms of local roads

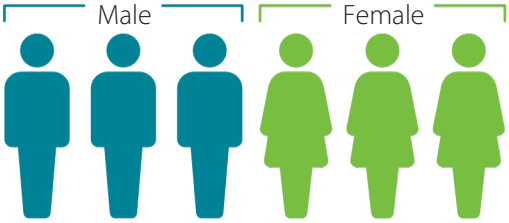
1,342,450 sq.ms of open space

Northern Grampians Shire
One of the most culturally diverse Local Government Areas in Western Victoria

229 Residents are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

50.1% Male

49.9% Female





35% Aged over 60

5.1% Identify as LGBTIQA

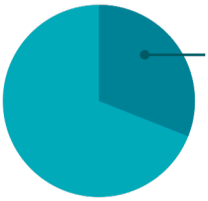


18.8% Born overseas

5.9% Born in non-English speaking countries

Health & Wellbeing





31% Of the population are over weight

35.7% Have a chronic health condition (SA 27%)

7.72% Of population have a severe or profound disability (SA 6.1%)

13.5% People experience food insecurity

59% 65 and over have two or more chronic conditions (SA 46%)

26% Experience high to very high psychological distress

Lower than state average access to GP's



74% Children with at least one decayed, missing or filled tooth



3077 Family violence incidents in 2023-24 (SA 1418)



59% Alcohol-related ambulance attendances

18% Of adults currently smoke tobacco



77% 18-24 year olds identified boredom/nothing to do as their primary concern

14% Young people have a long-term mental health condition (SA 10.6%)

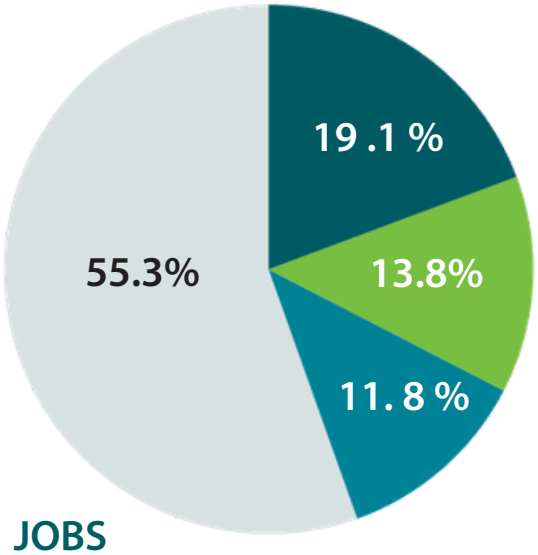
SA: State Average



$1,090,000
Gross regional product

1,214
Local businesses

500,000+
Annual visitors



JOBS

- Health care & social assistance
- Agriculture, forestry & fishing
- Manufacturing
- Other



The number of employed residents in June 2024 is estimated at 6,112 people, with 253 people unemployed

53%
Labour force participation rate (SA 62%)

4%
Unemployment rate (SA 3.7%)

50%+
More than half of households within Northern Grampians Shire are classified as low-income

38%
Completed Year 12 or its equivalent (SA 59%)

77%
Of 16 year olds engaged in full-time secondary education (SA 88.55%)

Education and employment, cost of living and climate/ natural disasters identified as top challenges for young people

SA: State Average

Council vision and goals

The Community Vision "To love where we live" is a shared hope of how our community sees life here in the next 15 years. It is all about what the community wants and hopes for people living in the Northern Grampians. It serves as a guide for collective action and decision-making to make that vision a reality.

To secure our shire's vision for the future, council must be ambitious, coordinated, and clear in communicating the investment we need to provide the infrastructure and services our community deserves.

Supporting the Community Vision are five goals identified within the Council Plan 2025-29. Developed in response to key issues and opportunity facing the shire, this advocacy prospectus aligns with these goals.

OUR VISION

To love where we live



GOAL 1

Live it up

Health, wellbeing and community goals

1.1 People feel connected, included and safe
1.2 Supporting healthy communities
1.3 Improving outcomes for children and young people



GOAL 2

Build it up

Education, housing and skills goals

2.1 Unlock land and housing
2.2 Building our workforce



GOAL 3

Business buzz

Agriculture, economy and tourism goals

3.1 Supporting farming and rural industries
3.2 Building vibrant local businesses
3.3 Enhancing tourism experiences



GOAL 4

Clean it up

Sustainability, climate and waste goals

4.1 Climate adaptation and preparedness
4.2 Cut waste and recycle properly
4.3 Drive energy efficiency
4.4 Protect our land, water and wildlife



GOAL 5

Do it well

Infrastructure, finance and corporate services goals

5.1 Asset Renewal and Maintenance Program
5.2 Financial viability
5.3 Responsive, innovative and efficient

Key challenges

There are a range of challenges facing Northern Grampians Shire. The identification of the challenges and opportunities have helped to shape the advocacy priorities.

Ageing population

Like many rural areas, Northern Grampians Shire faces challenges related to an ageing population and the outmigration of younger residents to larger cities for education and employment opportunities. An ageing population places higher demands on healthcare and aged care services. In rural and remote areas, access to healthcare and aged care services are often limited. Many elderly residents live alone, contributing to concerns about isolation and loneliness, which are exacerbated by unmet needs for formal assistance. This demographic shift is shaping local priorities, such as healthcare, social services, and accessible community infrastructure, particularly given the growing prevalence of age-related health conditions.

Housing

Northern Grampians Shire faces a critical housing shortage, significantly impacting businesses' ability to attract and retain workers, particularly in sectors such as healthcare, manufacturing and agriculture. The region's low housing vacancy rate (0.17%) forces many workers to commute from neighbouring areas, hindering economic and population growth and contributing to an ageing demographic and limiting regional economic growth.

Increasing housing supply and diversifying housing stock are essential to making the shire an attractive place to live and work. The population of Northern Grampians Shire is expected to grow by 16% by 2051, necessitating 1064 new homes, an 18% increase in housing stock.

Vulnerability to natural disasters

Northern Grampians Shire has been subject to several recent extreme weather events including floods (2022), droughts (2024-2025), bushfires and extreme heat (summer 2024-2025). These events have had significant impacts on the community, health, the economy and the environment.

The direct impacts of climate change, such as extreme heat, bushfires, droughts and floods, are not the only threats to communities. These events also lead to indirect effects such as changes in water quality, food safety, air quality and land use. Together these direct and indirect impacts affect key social determinants of health, including housing, education, socioeconomic status and food security. As a result, a range of health issues emerge, such as respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, and mental Illness.

Financial sustainability and viability

As a small rural council, we have long operated under significant financial constraints. This is largely due to our expansive geographic footprint, a dispersed population across the shire, and a low rating base. We also manage one of the largest infrastructure networks per capita in the region, with more than $41,000 worth of assets per resident.

A range of pressures are compounding our financial challenges, including:

- Operating under a rate-capped environment;
- Rising inflation and material costs;
- Reduced state and federal funding opportunities;
- Widening funding and asset renewal gaps;
- A changing and ageing demographic; and
- The need for increased staffing to meet emerging demands.

Council revenue is not keeping pace with the increasing costs associated with maintaining ageing infrastructure. Our current budget only covers 45% of the projected work required. While community expectations for service and infrastructure remain high, our ability to meet these needs is increasingly constrained by factors beyond our control. As a result, we are very reliant on grant funding to not only maintain, replace and upgrade the infrastructure we have, but to provide the level of services our community expects.

Community health and wellbeing

Access to healthcare and community health and wellbeing are significant challenges facing the community. Data shows Northern Grampians Shire has higher levels of chronic disease and obesity, alcohol-related incidents, self-reported fair or poor health, higher rates of psychological distress and lower levels of psychology services than either the western Victorian region or Victoria as a whole.

Educational attainment in Northern Grampians lags behind the state average, with only 37.9% of the population having completed year 12 or its equivalent, compared with 59.5% in Victoria. The number of Northern Grampians' youth not in paid work or enrolled in any education is almost double the Victorian average for 15 to 19-year-olds. Family violence rates are significantly higher than the state average, with 3077 incidents per 100,000 people, compared with 1418 across Victoria.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics' SEIFA Index of Relative Social Advantage and Disadvantage also ranks Northern Grampians Shire as the sixth-most disadvantaged Local Government Area in Victoria. This disadvantage contributes to preventable differences in health and makes it harder to access things that support good health, such as safe places to exercise, healthy food and medical care.

Renewable energy

The Victorian State Government is transitioning from coal-powered energy generation to renewable energy sources. Northern Grampians Shire is at the forefront of that transition for several reasons. Along with other parts of Victoria, Northern Grampians Shire is seen as being a naturally rich wind zone, making it a high-interest location for potential renewable energy projects. Additionally, there are two proposed transmission lines passing through the shire, the Western Renewable Link (WRL) and the Victorian New South Wales Interconnector (VNI). Given these developments, the Victorian Government has identified a large portion of the shire within the Western Renewable Energy Zone.

The uncertainty, complexity and lack of genuine consultation (including with local government) have led to mistrust and anxiety within our communities. This compounds with other mental health and wellbeing stressors for communities including floods, droughts, bushfire, and cost of living pressures.

Victoria's renewable energy transition presents opportunities to attract regional investment and diversify local economies. Opportunities also exist to improve the supply of housing, community services, infrastructure and the road network. However, balancing these opportunities with the protection of agriculture and community wellbeing remains a critical challenge.

Economic diversification and business growth

Northern Grampians Shire has a diverse economy, built largely on healthcare, agriculture and manufacturing. While these service industries contribute significantly to the local economy and employment, there is a need for continued diversification of the local economy to ensure long-term sustainability and job creation. There are significant existing workforce capacity challenges, labour shortages and skills gaps that are a result of long-term low unemployment, very high labour participation, and an ageing workforce.

Council's role

Council faces many challenges with increasing cost pressures from both federal and state governments, including rate capping, cost shifting, declining government grants, state levies, state and federal regulations and reporting obligations. Coupled with this is rising costs for construction, goods and services. Council will continue to look for new ways to efficiently deliver projects, programs and services.

Australia has three levels of government that work together to provide the services needed by the community. Partnerships with all levels of government, the private sector and community is critical to deliver on the needs and expectations of the community.

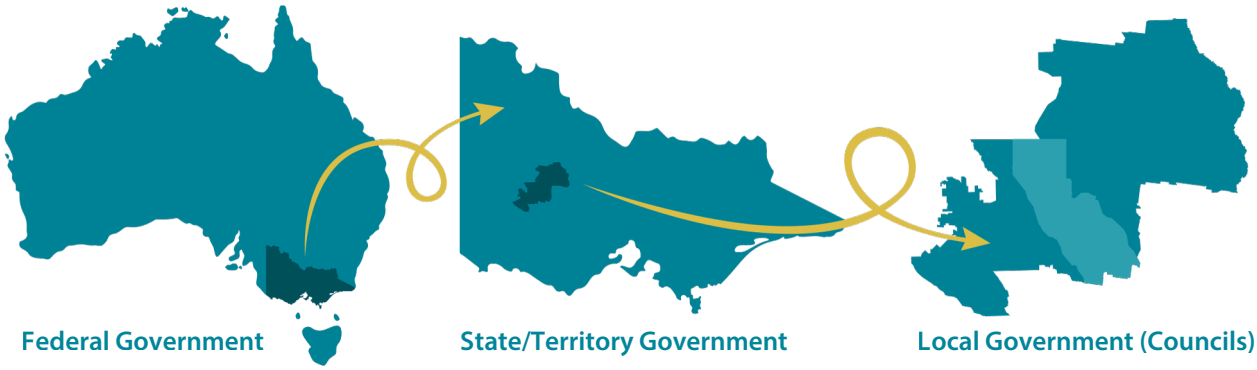
Advocacy is a key role of Local Government. It involves seeking support and investment from all levels of government and other organisations, and working collaboratively with communities and stakeholders to address inequities and drive changes in policy, process or practice.

Council advocates on the community's behalf across a wide range of issues. This includes pursuing action and investment related to council's own operations and facilities, as well as championing matters outside council's direct responsibility when they are important to the community.

Not all advocacy priorities are the direct responsibility of council, which highlights the importance of the Advocacy Prospectus as a tool to advocate to the relevant organisations, agencies and government departments.

In advocating, council will take one of three roles:

1. Lead – Council takes primary responsibility for the advocacy effort. This includes setting the agenda, drafting positions, coordinating engagement, and driving the case forward with stakeholders. Others may contribute, but council is the main driver.
2. Partner – Council works jointly with other councils, agencies or organisations where responsibility and influence are shared. Partners collaborate to shape priorities, pool resources and present a unified advocacy position, with mutual benefit to all parties.
3. Support – Council contributes to an advocacy effort led by another organisation or level of government. This may involve providing data, endorsing positions, co-signing letters, attending meetings, or lending public support, but not carrying the main responsibility.



Federal Government

Responsible for issues that affect all Australians (national issues):

- Medicare, Centrelink, payments and pensions;
- Post, telephone networks and the internet;
- Money;
- Immigration; and
- International trade and defense.

State/Territory Government

Responsible for issues that affect people in that state or territory:

- Public transport;
- Schools and education;
- Hospitals and health services;
- Police, prisons and emergency services;
- Public housing;
- Environmental protections;
- Major roads and freeways; and
- National and state parks.

Local Government (Councils)

Responsible for issues that affect local communities:

- Rubbish collection and recycling;
- Community infrastructure such as community buildings, local parks, playgrounds and sporting fields;
- Cultural and community activities and libraries;
- Regulatory services such as Local Laws, Planning and Environmental Health, and pet control;
- Land use planning;
- Local roads; and
- Maternal and Child Health.

Advocacy principles

The following principles underpin council's approach to determining our advocacy priorities:

Strategic
Council will take a strategic approach ensuring advocacy priorities are aligned with policy and plans adopted by the council, including the Council Plan 2025-29 , council's Capital Works Plan, and other relevant policies, plans and strategies adopted by council.

Advocacy ready
Items will be advocacy ready – scoped out, and with a clear ask. For larger projects, these will be staged and broken down into smaller stages.

Deliverable
Council has the resources – staff and/or financial – to commit to the advocacy priorities (note: where council is providing a financial commitment, it has been listed against each advocacy item).

Community benefit
The priorities have a clear community need and benefit and are backed up by evidence.

Responsive
Acknowledging council's strategic focus, there is a need to be responsive and adaptive to unexpected and emerging issues that may arise as a result of changing political and funding environments.

How we advocate

Advocacy takes a range of forms, including methods such as submissions, meetings, direct lobbying, letters, campaigns and forums. Advocacy will be undertaken by council officers, the executive team and councillors as appropriate.

Submissions and letters

Through direct and formal channels to Members of Parliament, state and federal ministers, and shadow ministers. Includes funding submissions and submissions in response to engagement processes and inquiries.

Meetings

Sitting down and discussing the issues and priorities, including with Members of Parliament.

Public awareness, media and campaigns

Using council communications to provide information, publish updates and support transparency on priority matters, including where community consultation or participation is required.

Platforms and networks

Engaging with relevant regional forums, peak bodies and networks to support coordinated messaging and strengthen council's evidence base and partnerships.

Community engagement

Engaging with the community to understand impacts and priorities, and to inform council's submissions and engagement with government.

Grant applications

Identifying and pursuing relevant funding opportunities to progress council priorities, including preparation of supporting business cases, project plans and co-contribution information where required.

Partnerships

Aligning our advocacy with other councils, organisations, community and peak bodies.

Existing partnerships

Councillors and council staff also represent the community through a range of peak bodies, alliances, groups and memberships. Through our representation, we ensure that our community's needs are included in the development of regional plans and strategies, advocacy, and government policy and priorities.

Regional memberships and groups:

- Wimmera Southern Mallee Councils Alliance (WSMCA)
- Rail Freight Alliance
- Grampians Wimmera Mallee Tourism, Visitor Economy Partnership
- Wimmera Southern Mallee Transport Group
- Sunraysia Highway Improvement Committee
- Western Highway Action Committee
- Wimmera Strategic Water Management Working Group

Peak bodies and representation:

- Municipal Association of Victoria
- Rural Councils Victoria

Advocacy priorities

Council's Advocacy Prospectus outlines where council will focus its advocacy efforts. A clearly articulated set of priorities will ensure a relevant, targeted and coordinated approach to advocacy that best utilises council and the community's resources. These priorities provide a framework for council to plan and deliver targeted advocacy to state and federal governments.

The advocacy priorities reflect the priorities identified by the community through the development of the Council Plan 2025-2029, annual budget, and other key strategic documents, alongside items identified and resolved at council meetings.

Priorities may change over time to reflect emerging issues, new evidence and changes to funding and policy settings. The Advocacy Prospectus will be reviewed periodically to ensure it remains current.

Lead	
Stawell Sports and Aquatic Centre (SSAC) Aquatics Redevelopment	Lead
Stawell Sports and Aquatic Centre (SSAC) Indoor Stadium and Gym Redevelopment	Lead
Halls Gap East Shared Path	Lead
Emergency Resilience	Lead
Central Park Netball Changerooms	Lead
North Park Athletic Track Resurfacing	Lead
Navarre Recreation Reserve Netball Court Upgrade	Lead
Lord Nelson Park Netball Court Resurfacing	Lead
Youth Support	Lead

Partner	
Renewable Readiness	Partner
Halls Gap East Sewer	Partner
Southern Wimmera and Northeast Pyrenees Pipeline	Partner
Western Highway Duplication	Partner
Financial Sustainability	Partner

Support	
Stawell Underground Physics Lab Experience Centre	Support
Mental Health Services	Support
Teddington Reservoir	Support
St Arnaud Hospital Upgrades	Support
General Practitioner Access	Support

'Lead' priorities



NORTHERN Grampians SHIRE COUNCIL

SSAC Aquatic Redevelopment

What is it?	Why is it needed?	The ask
Redevelopment of the aquatic component of **Stawell Sports and Aquatic Centre**, including a 25-metre indoor pool with accessible entry ramp, new change facilities, plant room upgrades and improvements to reception/foyer areas.	The existing aquatic facilities are ageing and do not meet current community demand or contemporary accessibility expectations. The centre currently has a 15m pool that services more than 500 learn-to-swim participants in addition to broader community use. The pool does not provide accessible entry via a ramp. Existing change facilities are non-compliant and are not co-located with the pool hall, reducing amenity and operational efficiency.	The total estimated project cost is **$29,149,226**. Council has made a commitment of **$5,445,441** towards the project with the remaining amount split equally between State and Federal Governments, totalling **$11,851,893 each**.

Priority specifications

Location
Stawell, Victoria 3380

State seat
Lowan

Federal seat
Mallee

Advocacy type
Lead

Partnerships
Sport and Recreation Victoria

Council plan goal
Live it up: Health, wellbeing and community

What has been done
- Feasibility study
- Concept designs including quantity surveying

Strategic alignment
- Council Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025–29
- NGSC Sport and Recreation Strategy 2024-34
- Activate 2020-30



SSAC Indoor Stadium & Gym Redevelopment

What is it?	Why is it needed?	The ask
Redevelopment of the indoor stadium and gym component of **Stawell Sports and Aquatic Centre**, including two netball-sized courts, upgraded gym and group fitness areas, accessible toilets and additional storage.	The current stadium comprises a single basketball court and is fully booked during the week, limiting access for community sport and recreation. The gym is ageing and does not provide adequate heating and cooling. The change facilities are ageing and have accessibility limitations.	**$14 million** for redevelopment of the indoor stadium and gym.

Priority specifications

Location
Stawell, Victoria 3380

State seat
Lowan

Federal seat
Mallee

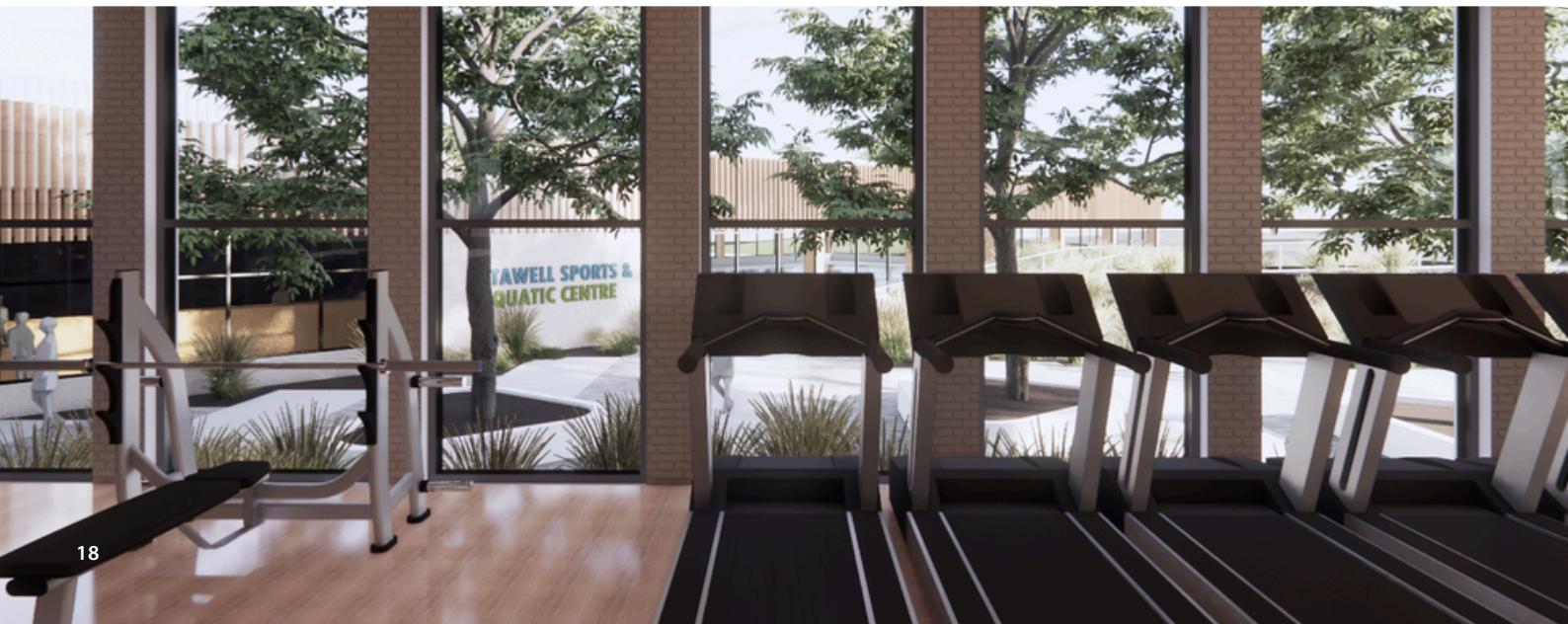
Advocacy type
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Partnerships
Sport and Recreation Victoria

Council plan goal
Live it up: Health, wellbeing and community

What has been done
- Feasibility study
- Concept designs including quantity surveying

Strategic alignment
- Council Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025–29
- NGSC Sport and Recreation Strategy 2024-34
- Activate 2020-30



SSAC Redevelopment Benefits

The Stawell Sports and Aquatic Centre (SSAC) redevelopment project (both phases) will generate a range of financial economic and social benefits to council, the community and broader Northern Grampians region.

Additional Utilisation

Increase capacity and attract more users to the facility.

	Stage 1 Redevelopment	Stage 2 Redevelopment	Total
Total additional users (#)	18,616	28,368	46,984
Total additional users (%)	25%	39%	64%
Total utilisation	**92,028**	**120,396**	

Additional Facility Income

Generate additional income through additional visits and utilisation of spaces.

	Cumulative additional income (20 years)	Annual average additional income
Total additional income ($)	$918,442	$45,922
Total additional income (%)	4%	4%
Total utilisation	**92,028**	**120,396**

Economic Benefits

Benefits to the Northern Grampians economy through additional facility utilisation and income.

Construction Benefits (Direct & Indirect)

During project construction the shire will experience economic benefits through output, job creation and value-add to the economy.

	Output ($m)	Value-added ($m)	Employment (jobs)
Stage 1 Redevelopment	$49.5	$13.6	76
Stage 2 Redevelopment	$23.2	$6.4	36
Total	**$72.7**	**$20.0**	**112**

Benefits for the Northern Grampians Shire reflect direct and indirect impacts.

SSAC Redevelopment Benefits (cont.)

Ongoing Operating Benefits – Additional Operating Income

Flow-on economic benefits through additional facility income which flows through the economy both directly, as well as indirectly through the supply chain.

	Output ($m)	Value-added ($m)
Cumulative (20 years)	$2,279,340	$1,259,634
Annual average	$119,965	$66,297

Ongoing Operating Benefits – Broader Economic and Social Value

Economic benefits beyond direct spending through healthier, more active populations (reduced healthcare costs, lower workplace and school absenteeism).

	Value ($m)
Per visit	$30.5
Cumulative (20 years)	$33.3
Annual average	$1.8

Social Return on Investment

The project will also generate a social return, based on estimated health and wellbeing benefits.

	Value ($m)
Per operating dollar ($)	$5.5
Cumulative (20 years)	$272.4
Annual average	$14.3

Additional Social and Community Benefits

The redeveloped Stawell Sports and Aquatics Centre will achieve other additional benefits for the community and local businesses. It will:

✓ Attract more events and competitions to SSAC, enhancing community engagement, social connections and civic pride.
✓ Support community liveability, wellbeing and inclusivity.
✓ Strengthen the market appeal of Stawell as a recreation-based destination.
✓ Encourage visitor and resident dispersal to Stawell from surrounding destinations.
✓ Contribute to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

Halls Gap East Shared Path

What is it?	Why is it needed?	The ask
A 3.3-kilometre extension of the existing pedestrian and bicycle shared path from Halls Gap to Halls Gap Zoo and the National Centre of Environment Art (WAMA).	This project will deliver a safe, direct shared path that separates users from vehicle traffic, significantly improving safety. It will complete a critical missing link, strengthening connections between key attractions, accommodation and local businesses, including high-use destinations such as Halls Gap Zoo (approx. 30,000 visitors annually, subject to confirmation). Improved connectivity will enhance visitor experience, support longer stays and increase local spend, while contributing to regional recovery following recent natural disasters and bushfires.	**$2.47 million** for construction of the shared path (total project $2.6 million) Please note - the original project scope concluded that a total investment of $3.5m was required, however council endeavoured to refine the scope and reduce the overall investment for financial sustainability reasons.

Priority specifications

Location
Halls Gap, Victoria 3381

Advocacy type
Lead

Council plan goal
Business buzz: Agriculture, economy and tourism

Strategic alignment
- Council Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025–29
- Active Victoria 2022-26
- Victorian Cycling Strategy 2019–28
- Transport Accessibility Strategic Framework (Victoria)
- Victoria's infrastructure strategy 2025-55

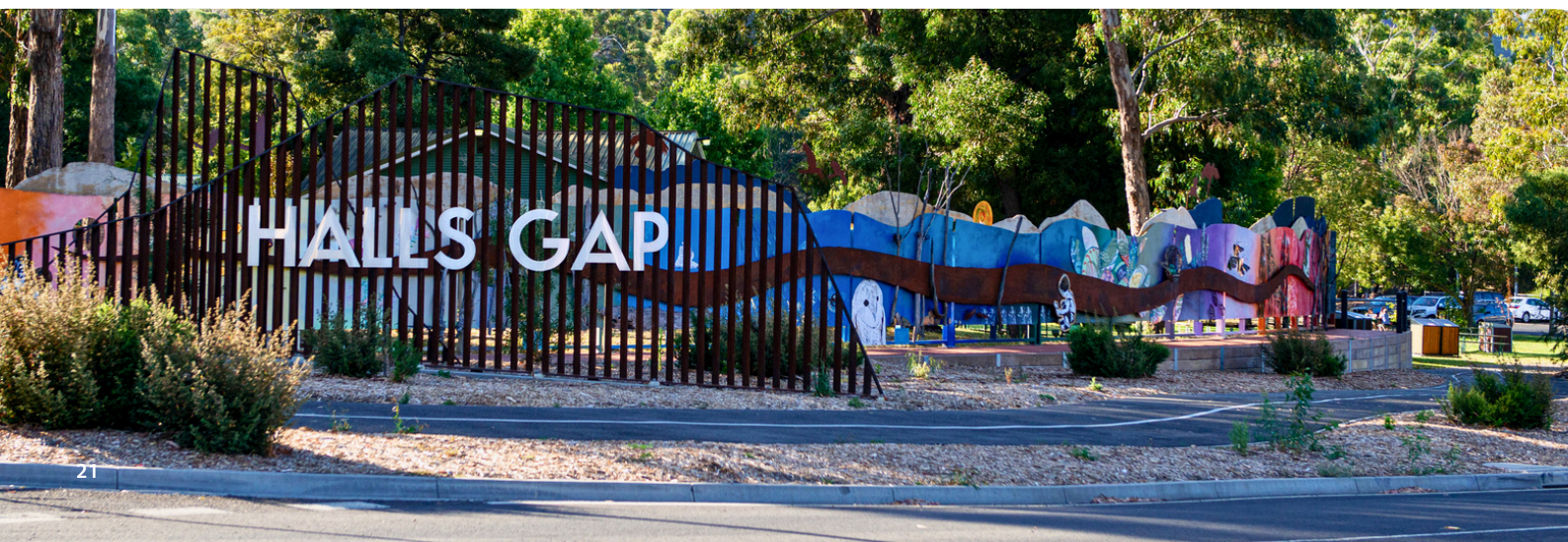
State seat
Lowan

Partnerships
Run the Gap Event Management

What has been done
Project Investigation Report has been undertaken, which includes defining the route and alignment, and project costing estimates.

Federal seat
Mallee

Existing commitments
- Council: $80,000 (FY 2026/27)
- Run the Gap: $100,000



Emergency resilience

What is it?	Why is it needed?	The ask
Council is seeking further funding to support our municipal emergency management responsibilities. The current funding under the Municipal Emergency Resource Program has not increased since its introduction, yet salaries and staff costs increase annually. The current funding model only provides council with funds to ensure it fulfils its basic roles in emergency management. The changing climate and community expectations is increasing the support needed for the community.	Current municipal emergency management funding limits council to minimum statutory compliance and does not enable proactive resilience building in communities. Climate change is driving more frequent, severe and prolonged emergencies, increasing operational complexity, recovery demands and pressure on councils and emergency services. At the same time, community expectations of council leadership, communication, preparedness and recovery support continue to rise. Targeted, sustained funding for community resilience will reduce risk, streamline emergency response, accelerate recovery and strengthen the effectiveness of Victoria's emergency management system.	Council currently receives $120,000 through the state's Municipal Emergency Resource Program Funding annually through LGV. Council is seeking to increase the funding model by $113,000 (Total - $233,818) to be able to resource two permanent full-time officers.

Priority specifications

Location
Shire wide

State seat
Lowan & Ripon

Federal seat
Mallee

Advocacy type
Lead

Council plan goal
Clean it up: Sustainability, climate and waste

What has been done
Several local government emergency management capacity and capability assessments have been conducted, which highlight council's resource limitations for emergency planning and resilience building activities.

- LGV Councils & Emergencies Project 2016-20
- Emergency Management Gap Analysis Project 2022
- Emergency Management Victoria Capability and Capacity Project 2025

Strategic alignment
- Council Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025–29
- Municipal Emergency Management Plan 2023-26
- Grampians Region Emergency Management Plan 2023
- Victoria State Emergency Management Plan 2024
- Community Resilience Strategy 2024



Central Park Netball Changerooms

What is it?	Why is it needed?	The ask
Upgraded netball change rooms to become female friendly, equitable and compliant.	As identified in the 2018 Northern Grampians Shire Council Netball Strategy, Netball Victoria facility audits, and recent participation growth at Central Park, there is need for upgraded change rooms as they currently do not comply with modern standards. An upgrade in change rooms facilities aligns with Netball Victoria Statewide Facilities Strategy 2026-28.	**$660,000** – Detailed design and Construction

Priority specifications

Location
Stawell, VIC 3380

Advocacy type
Lead

Council plan goal
Live it up: Health, wellbeing and community

State seat
Lowan

Federal seat
Mallee

Partnerships
- Netball Victoria
- Wimmera Football Netball League
- Stawell Football Netball Club
- Stawell Athletic Club
- Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly
- Sport and Recreation Victoria

What has been done
- Community engagement during Stawell Parks Precinct Plan and Council Plan process identifying the need.
- Central Park netball court and lighting upgrade, completed April '26.
- Central Park AFL/Cricket Female Friendly Change Rooms Upgrade, completed 2024.

Strategic alignment
- Council Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025–29
- Stawell Parks Precinct Plan 2018
- Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2024-34
- Activate 2020-30



Current state

North Park Athletic Track Resurfacing

What is it?	Why is it needed?	The ask
Upgrade the synthetic running track from six lanes to an athletics compliant eight-lane track and two additional long jump pits.	The project will upgrade the deteriorating synthetic surface to reduce maintenance impacts, upgrade to eight lanes to become regionally significant for athletics and cater for increased numbers of participants.	**$2.66 million**

Priority specifications

Location
Stawell, VIC 3380

Advocacy type
Lead

Council plan goal
Do it well: Infrastructure, finance and corporate services

What has been done
Costing and quotes have been obtained.

Strategic alignment
- North Park Masterplan 2022-32
- Council Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025–29
- Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2024

State seat
Lowan

Federal seat
Mallee

Partnerships
- Stawell Little Athletics Club
- Little Athletics Victoria
- Stawell Amateur Athletic Club
- Stawell Athletic Club
- Stawell Recreation Advisory Group
- Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly
- Sport and Recreation Victoria



Current state

Navarre Recreation Reserve Netball Court Upgrade

What is it?	Why is it needed?	The ask
The project comprises a netball court upgrade, to be constructed in concrete and acrylic surface.	Netball Victoria facility audits have revealed the court is failing and requires urgent upgrade. Netball is a major recreation activity for the township and surrounding area for female participants. A new concrete/acrylic court will provide a long-term solution minimising future maintenance requirements.	**$650,000**

Priority specifications

Location
Navarre, VIC 3384

Advocacy type
Lead

Council plan goal
Live it up: Health, wellbeing and community

State seat
Ripon

Federal seat
Mallee

Partnerships
- Netball Victoria
- Maryborough Castlemaine Football Netball League
- Navarre Sports Association (Incorporating Navarre Netball)
- Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly
- Sport and Recreation Victoria

What has been done
- Community engagement in Council Plan process identifying the need.
- Navarre Recreation Reserve facility upgrade 2025/26, completed April 2026, included female-friendly change rooms and new public amenities, extension to social rooms.

Strategic alignment
- Council Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025–29
- Netball Strategy 2018
- Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2024-34



Current state

Lord Nelson Park Netball Court Resurfacing

What is it?	Why is it needed?	The ask
Acrylic resurfacing of the two netball courts at Lord Nelson Park in St Arnaud.	Acrylic surfaces are required to be replaced every seven to 10 years and to ensure a safe playing surface is in place. The existing acrylic resurface at Lord Nelson Park is due for renewal after being completed in 2017.	**$100,000**

Priority specifications

Location
St Arnaud, VIC 3478

Advocacy type
Lead

Council plan goal
Live it up: Health, wellbeing and community

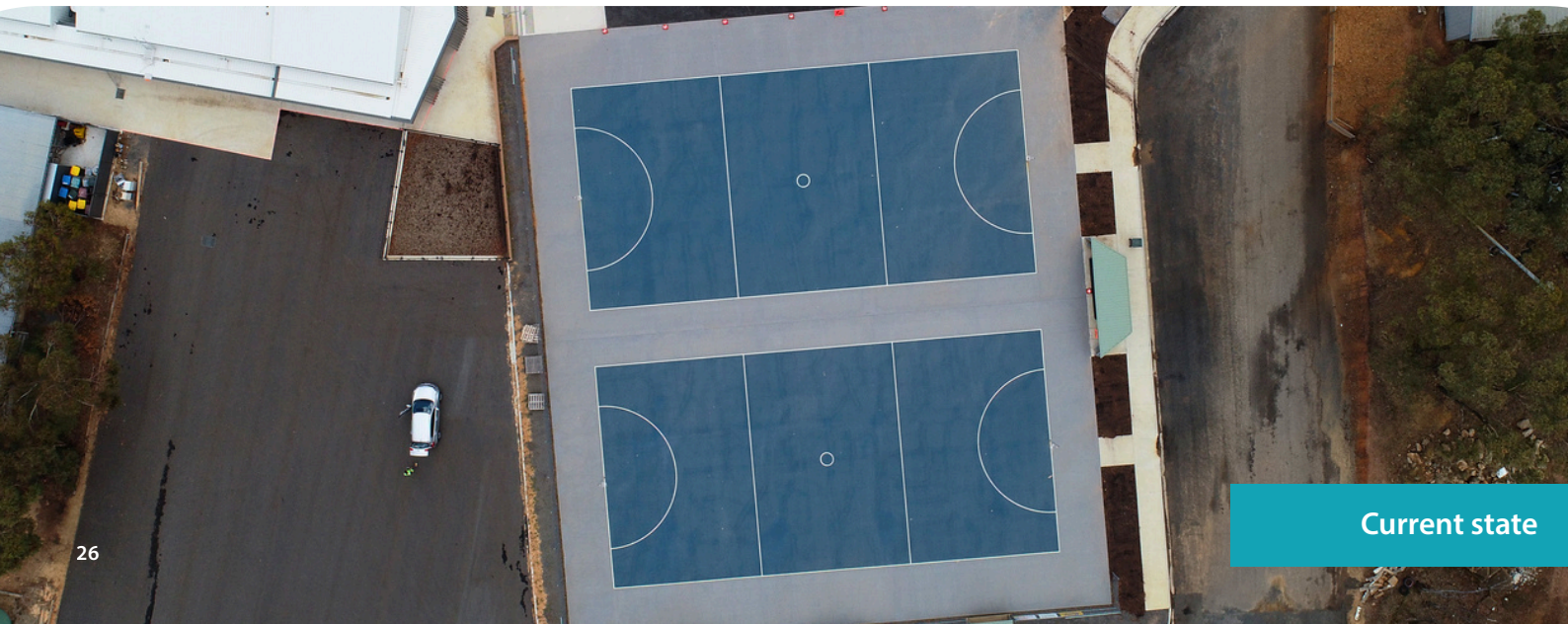
What has been done
- Netball Victoria netball facility audit.
- Clubrooms upgrade including female-friendly changerooms, public amenities and social space.
- Existing concrete base constructed.

State seat
Ripon

Federal seat
Mallee

Strategic alignment
- Council Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025–29
- Lord Nelson Park Precinct Plan 2015-24
- Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2024-34

Partnerships
- Netball Victoria
- North Central Football Netball League
- St Arnaud Netball Club
- St Arnaud Football Club
- Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly
- Sport and Recreation Victoria



Current state

Youth Support

What is it?	Why is it needed?	The ask
Live4Life is an evidence-based community impact initiative designed to enhance youth mental health and reduce suicide rates in rural and regional areas, while the Youth Community Development Officer will lead intergenerational projects, foster youth leadership, integrate youth voices in civic and community environments, and strengthen youth partnerships – delivering measurable improvements in mental health, community engagement and leadership opportunities for young people.	Over14% of young people in the shire have a long-term mental health condition. Rates of death by suicide in the Wimmera-Grampians region are 1.3 times the Victorian average. Suicide is the leading cause of death in young people aged 15 to 24 in the Western Victoria Primary Health Network catchment. Resilient Australia data (2021) showed that 73% of young people (grade three to year 12) in the shire had "little" or "no hope" for the future. Rural communities also face broader social challenges including higher rates of family violence, lower educational attainment and fewer employment opportunities for young people, all of which are known drivers of poor mental health outcomes. Without targeted investment in preventative, resilience and social connection-based initiatives, and broader social and civic opportunities for young people, they will continue to experience poor mental health outcomes.	Live4Life: **$450,000 over five years** of model implementation ($90,000 p/a) Youth Community Development Officer: **$85,500 per year**

Priority specifications

Location
Shire wide

State seat
Lowan & Ripon

Federal seat
Mallee

Advocacy type
Lead

Council plan goal
Live it up: Health, wellbeing and community

What has been done
- Desktop analysis and community engagement (adult and young people specific) via the Council and MPHW Plan 2025-29 planning process to determine need and identify gaps.
- Consultation and budget costings for Live4Life with the Live4Life organisation and potential partners.
- Delivery of pilot intergenerational projects in 2024-25, which informed the most effective models.
- Establishment of youth partnership framework to support collaborative initiatives on youth mental health and wellbeing (Northern Grampians Youth Collaboration).

Partnerships
- Local Learning and Employment Networks
- Community health services
- Neighbourhood Houses
- Headspace
- Schools and early learning
- Community groups

Strategic alignment
- Council Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025-29
- Youth Strategy 2025-28
- Building Community Resilience Strategy 2024
- Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023-27
- Victoria's Youth Strategy 2022-27
- National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Strategy 2021-31

Existing commitments
$150,000 VicHealth Grant supporting inclusive recreation opportunities for young people in the shire (state).

'Partner' priorities



NORTHERN Grampians SHIRE COUNCIL

Renewable Readiness

What is it?	Why is it needed?	The ask
Nine councils across northern and western Victoria, including Northern Grampians Shire, have joined forces under the Wimmera Southern Mallee Council Alliance (WSMCA) and commissioned the Resource Ready: North-Western Victoria Energy & Mining Impact and Readiness Strategy. The strategy calls for proper investment and due diligence from state and federal governments to ensure communities are prepared for major energy, transmission and mining projects. The strategy proposes 44 evidence-based actions across eight priority themes, including community readiness, infrastructure development, housing solutions, workforce planning, and agricultural sector protection.	Northern Grampians Shire Council sits within the Western Renewable Energy Zone. It sits at the crossroads of two major proposed transmission projects, VNI West and the Western Renewables Link (WRL). The shire hosts four operating renewable energy generators, with many more projects proposed. WSMCA is seeking support for three priorities actions with the Strategy. **Priority 1: Local Government Resourcing.** • Current compliance demands from renewable energy and mining projects is placing extensive strain on council resources (financial and people). Compounded by fires and natural disasters • Seeking funding for resourcing to address compliance costs associated with mining and the renewable energy transition. **Priority 2: Establish and Economic Transition Fund for the Wimmera Southern Mallee Region.** • Councils currently lack the capacity to address the challenges posed by economic transitions, including the impact on our roads, and the rising demand for housing and community infrastructure. • Seeking commitment for an Economic Transition Fund (ETF) to assist Councils in the Wimmera Southern Mallee to effectively respond to the economic transition from mining and renewable energy as identified in the Resource Readiness Strategy. **Priority 3: Active involvement in shaping the Community Benefit Fund** – with the aim of it funding the Economic Transition Fund. • A well-defined framework is required for the creation and management of the Community Benefit Fund to ensure rural Victoria is properly represented. Additionally, investments should align with the priorities of State, Regional, and Local Government • Seeking to be actively involved in both the scoping and implementation phases of the Community Benefit Fund(CBF). We want the Government to commit to ensuring that the fund supports strategic investment across the region and contributes to the financing of the Economic Transition Fund to address the Resource Readiness Strategy identified actions and priorities.	**Priority 1:** $300,000 per year for next five years ($1.5 million per Council). Total package for 9 Councils is $13.5million. **Priority 2:** Commitment to the Economic Transition Fund, and $750,000 upfront to fund the key actions to identify specific projects as outlined in the Resource Readiness Strategy. **Priority 3:** Local Government has a key seat at the table to input and design the community benefit scheme. The CBF is to fund the Economic Transition Fund and enable Wimmera Southern Mallee Councils and Community to respond to the Resource Readiness Strategy priorities and Actions.

Renewable Readiness (cont.)

Priority specifications

Location
Shire wide

State seat
Lowan & Ripon

Federal seat
Mallee

Advocacy type
Partner

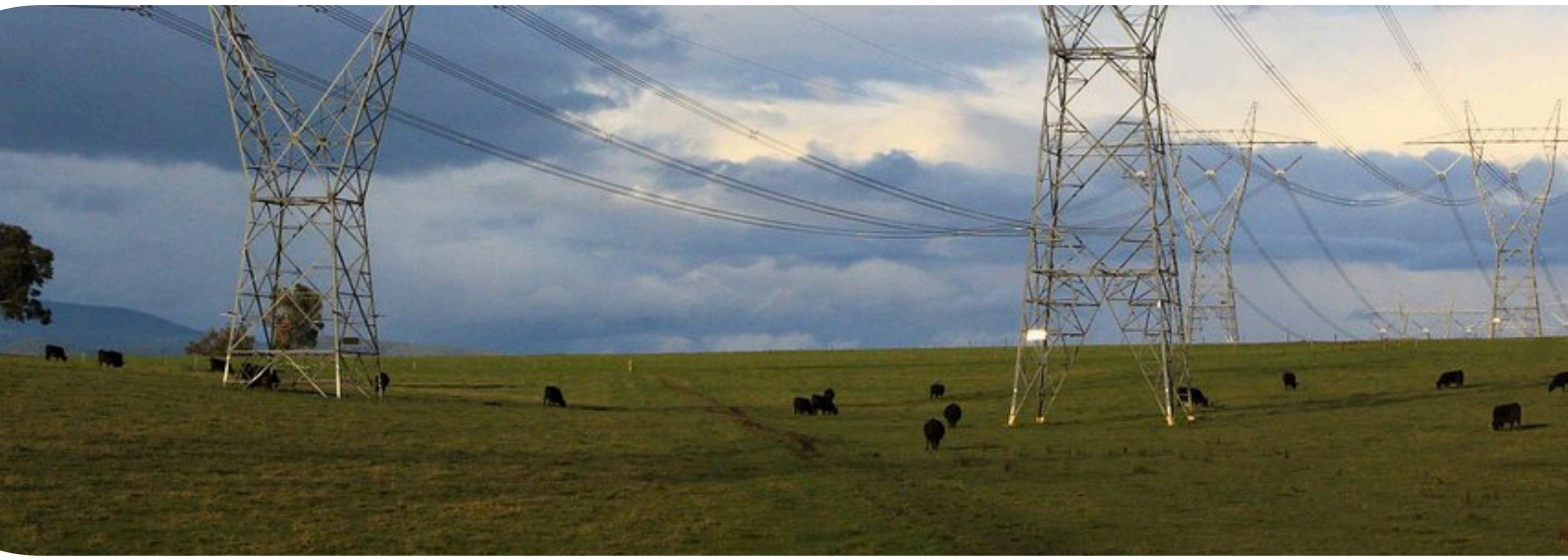
Partnerships
Wimmera Southern Mallee Council Alliance

Existing commitments
State Government provided $200,000 towards the Resource Ready: North-Western Energy & Mining Impact & Readiness Study.

Council plan goal
Business buzz: Agriculture, economy and tourism

What has been done
Resource Ready: North-Western Energy & Mining Impact & Readiness Study, 2026

Strategic alignment
- Council Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025–29
- Resource Ready: North-Western Energy & Mining Impact & Readiness Study, 2026





Halls Gap East Sewer

What is it?	Why is it needed?	The ask
A three-kilometre sewerage pipeline extending from the Clematis Drive Sewage Pump Station, Halls Gap, to strategic tourism and cultural sites. The project comprises the sewer main, pump station upgrades, connection works, approvals and project delivery costs.	The Halls Gap East Development Corridor, extending along Ararat–Halls Gap Road, has emerged as the primary location for future tourism and commercial development. The corridor already benefits from access to potable water infrastructure, however, the absence of reticulated sewerage has remained a critical constraint preventing development from proceeding at scale. The provision of sewer will activate approximately $26 million in committed private sector tourism investment along the Halls Gap East Development Corridor. The proposed sewer extension is a prerequisite for expansion of the Halls Gap Zoo, development of the Grampians Getaway/GROW Wellness Resort and Nordic Spa, and removal of operational constraints at the National Centre for Environmental Art (WAMA). Collectively, these developments are expected to generate about 30 ongoing full-time equivalent jobs across tourism, hospitality, wellness and visitor services, in addition to construction phase employment.	**$600,000** Trunk Infrastructure Fund (total project cost $1.85 million)

Priority specifications

Location
Halls Gap, VIC 3381

State seat
Lowan

Federal seat
Mallee

Advocacy type
Partner

Council plan goal
Business buzz: Agriculture, economy and tourism

Strategic alignment
- Council Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025–29
- Halls Gap Master Plan 2015
- Grampians Tourism Destination Plan 2014
- Northern Grampians Economic Development Strategy 2021-31

What has been done
GWM Water has undertaken preliminary feasibility assessment and early engagement with stakeholders, along withs securing of contributions from key tourism businesses.

Existing commitments
- $700,000 local businesses
- $550,000 GWM Water

Partnerships
- GWM Water
- Halls Gap Zoo
- GROW Wellness Resort
- National Centre for Environmental Art (WAMA)

Southern Wimmera & Northeast Pyrenees Pipeline

What is it?	Why is it needed?	The ask
Construction of a reticulated network of pipes, delivering water to rural, urban, recreational and environmental customers throughout the South Wimmera and North East Pyrenees (SWNP) region. The project would provide a dependable rural water supply to the region. The area of interest comprises some 354,219ha.	Victoria's western region is notorious for its hot, dry climate and frequent droughts. The SWNP struggles with unreliable rainfall and inadequate groundwater. Without intervention, the region will continue to face poor water security, hampering its economic, environmental and social growth. The inability to supply pressurised water to urban and rural customers within the SWNP region has resulted in: • Variability in the quality and availability of fit-for-purpose water has a dramatic impact on the profitability and viability of many farms and vineyards. • An absence of convenient, affordable water that is clean and drinkable exposes many households and businesses to significant financial and emotional stress. • The absence of water in the landscape threatens environmental, cultural and recreational value. • Delays in sourcing adequate volumes of water close to requirement diminishes the ability to prepare for and control the spread of fires. The economic benefits of these improvements are estimated at $150 million.	$5 million to undertake essential pre-construction works including: • Detailed design. • Geotechnical investigation/ground condition assessment. • Environmental Impact Assessments. • Customer/stakeholder consultation. • Update of project costing and business case based on assessments and detailed design.

Priority specifications

Location
Investigation area includes Glenorchy, Deep Leed, Greens Creek, Wallaloo East, Navarre, Tottington and Stuart Mill.

State seat
Lowan & Ripon

Federal seat
Mallee

Council plan goal
Business buzz: Agriculture, economy and tourism

Advocacy type
Partner

What has been done
- Feasibility study and business case.
- Aboriginal Waterways Assessment (underway).

Partnerships
- Pyrenees Shire Council
- Central Goldfields Shire Council
- GWM Water
- Central Highlands Water
- Victorian Farmers Federation

Strategic alignment
- Council Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025–29
- Pyrenees Shire Council Plan 2025-29
- Central Goldfields Shire Council Plan 2025-29
- Western Regional Sustainable Water Strategy
- National Water Initiative 2024
- Central Highlands Water Urban Water Strategy 2022
- Grampians Regional Climate Adaption Strategy 2021-25
- Wimmera Southern Mallee Drought Resilience Plan

Benefits
- $150 million in economic benefits, primarily increased agricultural productivity.
- Improved waterway health and environmental outcomes.
- Community health and wellbeing benefits.
- Improved regional drought resilience.
- Stronger support bushfire response.
- 250+ jobs during construction.

Western Highway Duplication

What is it?	Why is it needed?	The ask
The duplication of the Western Highway between Ararat and Stawell to create a four-lane divided highway, completing the progressive upgrade of the corridor between Ballarat and Stawell.	The Western Highway is a nationally significant freight and passenger route connecting Melbourne and Adelaide and forms part of the National Land Transport Network. The highway carries significant volumes of freight traffic supporting agriculture, mining, manufacturing and regional industries across western Victoria. The highway also provides the primary road access to Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park, one of Victoria's most visited regional tourism destinations. Safety concerns remain on unduplicated sections of the corridor. Project documentation identified 68 casualty crashes recorded between 2016 and 2026 along sections of the Western Highway between Ballarat and Stawell.	Funding to complete the duplication of the Western Highway between Ararat and Stawell.

Priority specifications

Location
Stawell & Great Western, VIC

Advocacy type
Partner

What has been done
- Strategic planning for duplication of the Western Highway between Ballarat and Stawell commenced in 2008.
- Environmental, traffic and transport impact assessments undertaken as part of planning for the Ararat to Stawell section.
- Options assessments and corridor investigations completed for sections of the remaining upgrade.

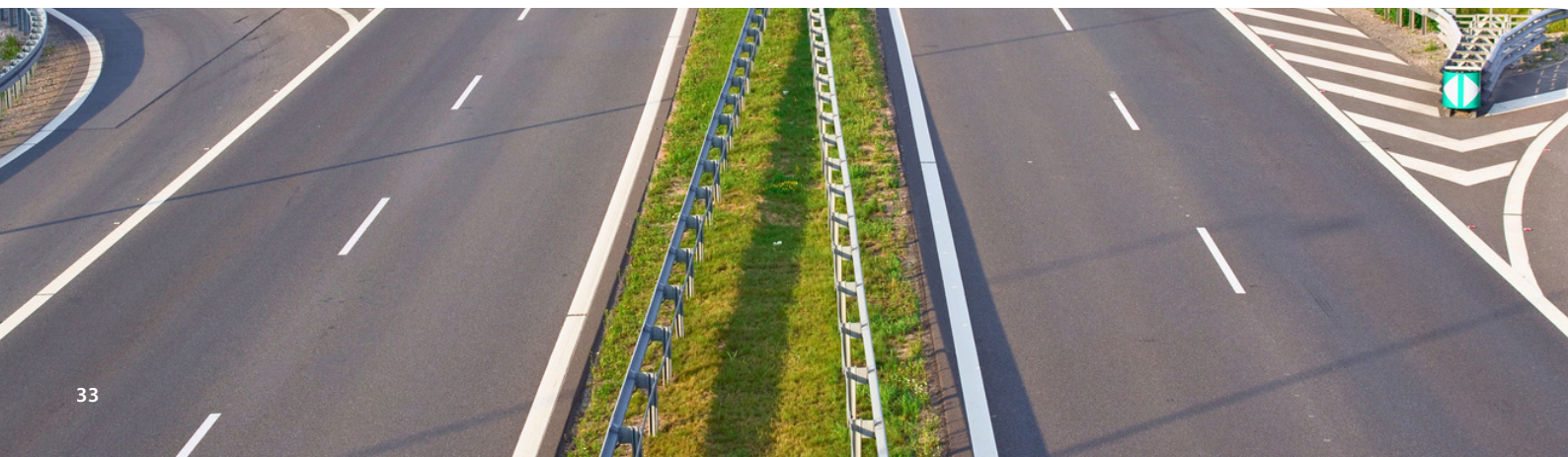
State seat
Lowan & Ripon

Council plan goal
Business buzz: Agriculture, economy and tourism

Strategic alignment
- Council Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025-29
- Asset Plan 2025-35
- Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Transport
- Strategy 2014
- Victorian Freight Plan 2025-30
- National Land Transport Network priorities
- Infrastructure Australia regional connectivity priorities

Federal seat
Mallee & Wannon

Partnerships
- Wimmera Southern Mallee Council Alliance
- Western Highway Action Committee



Financial Sustainability

What is it?	Why is it needed?	The ask
For local government to be financially sustainable in the long term, service and infrastructure standards should be able to be maintained without dramatic rate increases or disruptive cuts to services. Northern Grampians Shire Council is unsustainable as we have consistently run operating deficits and have no means to address these matters in our long-term financial plan. Small rural councils often face challenges due to structural factors – they cover large areas, manage many assets, have low populations, with low capacity to pay with limited own source funding.	Financial sustainability is key for all councils, but is particularly relevant to the 27 small rural councils that have been determined to be unsustainable. The most compelling metric regarding sustainability is infrastructure per capita. Small rural councils have substantially higher per capita infrastructure figures, $36,000, compared with metropolitan councils, $5,000. Northern Grampians Shire's figure is $41,000. This means that ratepayers have a disproportionally higher amount of infrastructure assets they are required to support. In addition, Northern Grampians Shire residents have a lower SEIFA score than average, meaning that they have less capacity to support the higher infrastructure renewal demands.	State Government: • No co-contributions required for grants funding. • Grants provided for asset renewal projects. Federal Government: • No co-contributions required for grants funding. • Grants provided for asset renewal projects. • Rate Cap increases should be inline with a Local Government cost index not a Consumer Price Index (CPI) as CPI doesn't reflect the input costs of service delivery.

Priority specifications

Location
Shire wide

State seat
Lowan & Ripon

Federal seat
Mallee

Advocacy type
Partner

Strategic alignment
- Council Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025–29

Partnerships
- Australian Local Government Association
- Victorian Local Governance Association
- Rural Councils Victoria

Council plan goal
Live it up: Health, wellbeing and community

What has been done
- We continuously review our expenditure to ensure we are operating at the lowest costs and review our processes to be as efficient as possible.
- We have rationalised the assets we have to ensure we are not maintaining assets that are not required or are underutilised.



'Support' priorities



NORTHERN Grampians SHIRE COUNCIL

Stawell Underground Physics Lab Experience Centre

What is it?	Why is it needed?	The ask
The Dark Matter Experience Centre is a proposed worldclass science and tourism attraction that translates the globally significant research undertaken at Stawell Underground Physics Laboratory into an immersive, public visitor experience. The centre will be a nationally significant science, education and tourism asset with a projected 29% return on investment, a compelling investment opportunity, enabling partners to support world leading science engagement, expanded education access and regional economic transformation, while creating a lasting national legacy.	• Victoria's student population is forecast to grow substantially, increasing demand for immersive, curriculum-aligned STEM education infrastructure that connects students with real-world science and research. • The project creates a new, year-round regional tourism drawcard, diversifying visitation beyond nature-based tourism and strengthening regional resilience. • The project has a benefit–cost ratio of approximately 3.0, delivering about $3 in economic benefit for every $1 invested. • Forecast visitation of ~160,000 visitors in the opening year, growing to ~300,000 annually at maturity, positioning it among Australia's leading regional science and cultural attractions. • The centre is projected to generate a $359 million economic net present value over 20 years, with significant flow-on benefits to accommodation, hospitality, retail and regional services.	That the Victorian and Australian governments, alongside philanthropic partners, commit **$57.4 million** in capital investment to deliver the Dark Matter Experience Centre.

Priority specifications

Location
Stawell, Victoria 3380

State seat
Lowan

Federal seat
Mallee

Advocacy type
Support

Council plan goal
Business buzz: Agriculture, economy and tourism

What has been done
- Feasibility study completed, confirming technical deliverability and economic viability.
- Capital Investment Concept and costings.
- Site secured: The site at 1 Skene Street, Stawell can be leased or acquired through other tenure. It has a vacant former tertiary education building, previously a Federation University campus.

Strategic alignment
- Council Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (2025–29)
- Experience Victoria 2033 – A Plan for a Vibrant Visitor Economy
- Victorian STEM Education priorities (Science Victoria / ATSE / Royal Society of Victoria)
- Australian Research Council (ARC) strategic alignment framework

Partnerships
- Stawell Underground Physics Laboratory (SUPL)
- University of Melbourne
- Swinburne University of Technology
- Grampians Wimmera Mallee Tourism
- Stawell Gold Mine


DM
EC





Mental Health Services

What is it?	Why is it needed?	The ask
A funding model that facilitates affordable and accessible mental health support in Northern Grampians Shire, including locally based psychologists, counsellors and allied health professionals, so residents can access care close to home.	Northern Grampians Shire residents experience disproportionately high levels of psychological distress while facing lower access to mental health services compared with the Victorian population. 26% of residents report high or very high psychological distress, while access to psychology services remains significantly below the state average. Intentional self-harm and hospitalisations in the Wimmera-Grampians region are also above the state average, while rates of death by suicide are 1.3 times the Victorian average. These challenges are compounded by increasing pressures facing rural communities, including drought, natural disasters, economic stress and structural service gaps. Northern Grampians Shire has experienced floods, drought and bushfire events in recent years, all of which place additional strain on community wellbeing and increase demand for mental health support.	A commitment to improving access to mental health and wellbeing services in the shire by: • Dedicated mental health inpatient beds in Horsham to service the Wimmera. • Increasing and improving funding models for regional mental health services. • Supporting the delivery of locally based services so residents do not need to travel long distances. • Ensuring services remain affordable and accessible (nil or low fee) for rural residents.

Priority specifications

Location
Shire wide

State seat
Lowan & Ripon

Federal seat
Mallee

Advocacy type
Support

Council plan goal
Live it up: Health, wellbeing and community

Strategic alignment
- Council Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025–29
- Victorian Mental Health and Wellbeing Reform 2025
- Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023–27
- Victorian Suicide Prevention and Response Strategy 2024–34
- Statewide Mental Health and Wellbeing Service and Capital Plan 2024–37
- National Suicide Prevention Strategy 2025–35
- National Mental Health Workforce Strategy 2022–32

What has been done
Desktop analysis and community engagement as part of the Council and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025-29 process.

Existing commitments
- Community wellbeing and health promotion initiatives delivered by council under the Council and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025-29.
- Residential and community mental health services funded via the State Government, delivered by health and community health services.
- Federal funding of benefit schedules, Primary Health Networks, and regional mental health reform.

Teddington Reservoir

What is it?	Why is it needed?	The ask
Advocacy support for GWM Water and Parks Victoria for the future security of Teddington reservoir system infrastructure renewal and water supply.	The Upper Teddington Reservoir is more than 130 years old, and independent assessments commissioned by Parks Victoria have identified ageing infrastructure and long-term safety risks that require structural intervention to maintain safe operation and avoid future decommissioning. Water reliability at the reservoir continues to decline, undermining environmental values, recreational use and community confidence in the asset. Without investment in supply, retention and supporting infrastructure, the reservoir's capacity to deliver sustainable outcomes will continue to diminish, placing further pressure on downstream systems and increasing long-term public risk and cost. Investigations by Parks Victoria and consultant SMEC identify the need for dam upgrades and vegetation management to protect water quality and biodiversity. Investment will enable a durable management model, including transfer to GWM Water.	**$30 million** in State Government funding to: • Fund critical water supply and retention infrastructure at Teddington Reservoir, including maintenance and integrity works to the dam wall to address identified safety risks. • Support access and camping infrastructure to sustain safe community and recreational use. • Enable a long-term management arrangement, including transfer of responsibility to GWM Water, in partnership with Parks Victoria.

Priority specifications

Location
Stuart Mill, VIC 3478

Advocacy type
Support

What has been done
- Independent SMEC engineering assessments (2020) identified ageing infrastructure, dam safety risks and upgrade options.
- Upper Teddington Reservoir Community Reference Group established, involving council, Parks Victoria, GWM Water, community representatives and Djarra.
- Ongoing discussions with Parks Victoria and GWM Water on long-term management and funding responsibilities.

State seat
Ripon

Council plan goal
Clean it up: Sustainability, climate and waste

Existing commitments
Parks Victoria holds an existing state allocation, with approximately $1.2 million spent and $2.2 million remaining; however, additional state investment is required to deliver priority infrastructure works and secure long-term management arrangements.

Partnerships
- Parks Victoria
- GWM Water
- Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation (Djarra)

Federal seat
Mallee

Strategic alignment
- Council Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (2025–29)
- Victorian Government's Water for Victoria
- Australian Government's National Water Initiative

St Arnaud Hospital Upgrades

What is it?	Why is it needed?	The ask
A comprehensive redevelopment of the existing hospital to deliver a modern, fit-for-purpose regional health facility that meets current clinical standards, supports integrated acute and aged care services, and ensures long-term healthcare access for St Arnaud and surrounding communities. The project will deliver: • New acute inpatient beds • Residential aged care facilities • Urgent care bays • Diagnostic services • GP and community health facilities	The existing hospital infrastructure is outdated and no longer fit for purpose, limiting the ability to meet contemporary clinical, safety and accessibility standards. Without investment, residents will continue to face long travel distances to access essential health services, placing pressure on vulnerable populations including older residents and people with chronic conditions. The project delivers significant social and economic benefits, including: • Improved health outcomes. • Workforce attraction and retention. • Construction and ongoing employment. • Strengthened regional liveability and resilience.	Capital funding support towards the total end project cost of **approximately $101–$102 million**, to enable delivery of the staged hospital redevelopment as outlined in the endorsed master plan. This investment is critical to progress stage one works and unlock the broader redevelopment required to secure sustainable healthcare services in the East Wimmera region.

Priority specifications

Location
St Arnaud, VIC 3478

State seat
Ripon

Federal seat
Mallee

Advocacy type
Support

Council plan goal
Live it up: Health, wellbeing and community

What has been done
- Hospital master plan completed (Option 3E identified as preferred).
- Cost Plan A – Revision 2 finalised (detailed staging, contingencies and escalation).
- Staged delivery approach defined, including:
  - Stage 1: Hospital and aged care buildings
  - Stage 2: Community health replacement
  - Stage 3: Additional aged care capacity (future)

Strategic alignment
- Council Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025–29
- Victorian Health System Strategy / Department of Health Strategic Plan 2023–27
- Victorian Health Services Plan Reform
- National Strategic Framework for Rural and Remote Health
- Aged Care Reform Agenda (Australian Government)

Existing commitments
East Wimmera Health Service – Project leadership, master planning and staged delivery commitment.

Partnerships
East Wimmera Health Service (EWHS) – Project lead and asset owner.



General Practitioner Access

What is it?	Why is it needed?	The ask
A place-based intervention to stabilise and restore access to general practitioner services in St Arnaud, addressing an imminent risk of GP service collapse through workforce attraction, short-term cover, and medium-term service sustainability solutions led by Murray PHN.	• St Arnaud relies on a single medical practice staffed by two GPs. Loss of these GPs would leave the town without any local GP service. • GPs are absent for three to four months per year, during which access to primary care is already significantly constrained. • St Arnaud has one of the lowest GP access rates in western Victoria, well below regional and state averages. • EWHS provides urgent and low-acuity care, but is not a full service hospital; residents must travel 64 to 77 kilometres to Stawell or Maryborough, or more than 100km to Bendigo, for higher-acuity care. • Loss of local GP access would directly undermine: ◦ Urgent care viability; ◦ Chronic disease management; ◦ Reduced hospital bypass and ambulance demand; ◦ Health outcomes for an older, lower-income community.	State and Commonwealth co-funding of a coordinated, place-based model to prevent loss of GP services and associated system impacts.

Priority specifications

Location
St Arnaud, VIC 3478

State seat
Ripon

Federal seat
Mallee

Advocacy type
Support

Council plan goal
Live it up: Health, wellbeing and community

Partnerships
- Murray Primary Health Network – Lead agency, Thin Markets initiative
- East Wimmera Health Service (EWHS) – Urgent care provider and system partner

Strategic alignment
- Council Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025–29
- Victorian Health Services Plan 2024
- Victorian Rural Generalist Program (VRGP)

What has been done
- Formal advocacy to the Victorian Minister for Health outlining the critical GP access risk in St Arnaud.
- Active participation in Murray PHN Thin Markets and co-design process for St Arnaud.
- Place-based GP access discussions involving:
  - Murray Primary Health Network
  - Department of Health
  - East Wimmera Health Service
  - Council leadership



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