

Age Friendly Monash

Our journey towards becoming an age friendly community 2021-2025.

Introduction

The **Monash Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021–2025** brings together all areas of Council that contribute to shaping a healthy city. It outlines strategic priorities aimed at enhancing the health, happiness, and overall wellbeing of the Monash community. The Plan also recognises the diverse needs of different community groups, including a strong focus on creating an Age-Friendly community.

At the time of this plan's development, we were experiencing a time like no other with the COVID-19 pandemic. This plan played a major role in supporting the community to recover from the resulting broad ranging social and economic impacts. Our focus working towards an Age-friendly community included:

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Apply an age-friendly and dementia lens to public spaces to increase perceptions of safety for the ageing community.
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Explore opportunities to improve mobility and transport options and services that respond to the diverse needs of the community. •Deliver programs like Community Transport to support access and inclusion.
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Provide outreach support to those at risk of homelessness or who are homeless, with a focus on older, disadvantaged, or marginalised groups.
Social Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Deliver a diverse and meaningful social inclusion program. •Facilitate intergenerational interaction through services and programs.
Respect and Social Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Actively include LGBTIQ+ older people through positive and supportive themes in programs and events. •Establish Monash as a dementia-friendly community.
Civic Participation and Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Encourage older people from diverse backgrounds to participate in civic roles.
Communication and Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Educate and raise awareness on ageism and elder abuse.
Community Support and Health Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Provide a range of programs that support wellbeing for older people. •Provide outreach support to socially isolated or vulnerable individuals.

Key achievements

Monash Council remains committed to creating an inclusive, Age-friendly community where older people live safely, enjoy good health, and stay involved in local activities. Over the past four years, Council has delivered a wide range of initiatives focused on promoting wellbeing, reducing isolation, enhancing mobility, and fostering civic participation. Through strong partnerships, community engagement, and evidence-informed planning, these programs have addressed the diverse needs of older adults in our community. The following summary highlights the key achievements delivered in the Monash Health and Wellbeing Plan that reflects our progress towards being an Age-friendly community.

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

Significant strides were made in enhancing the safety and inclusivity of public spaces for older residents by applying an Age-friendly and dementia-friendly lens to urban design. A notable achievement includes the integration of insights from the Positive Ageing Reference Group (PARG) into the Seniors Exercise Park Feasibility Study, ensuring that infrastructure planning reflects the needs of older adults. Additionally, the "places to rest" mapping project—conducted by Age-Friendly Ambassadors and volunteers in 2019-2020—has been successfully embedded into Council's urban design and asset management processes. This has led to more thoughtful placement and upgrading of public seating, directly supporting comfort, accessibility, and wellbeing for all our community.

Transportation

Meaningful progress was made in enhancing mobility and transport options to meet the diverse needs of its community. The Council continues to deliver inclusive programs such as Community Transport, which supports access and participation for transport-disadvantaged residents. A key initiative is the community shopping pick-up and drop-off service, operating twice weekly and serving up to 11 clients per day. A comprehensive review of this program—comparing pre- and post-COVID usage—led to a more efficient service model through the consolidation of service days and client scheduling. In response to community feedback from the Seniors Festival Coach Trip, the PALS Day Trip Program was launched in February 2023. This initiative offers older residents opportunities to visit destinations they may not feel confident reaching alone, while fostering social connection and inclusion.

Monash Council participated in a working group for the Innovative Community Transport Solutions Project. The Innovative Community Transport Solutions Project – Key Findings, Opportunities and Next Steps Report, identified key barriers to transport access for vulnerable groups and proposed a roadmap for improvement. The report recommends developing flexible, on-demand transport models, enhancing digital tools for booking and coordination, and fostering stronger partnerships across sectors. It also calls for sustainable funding, better integration with public transport, and increased community engagement to ensure services meet local needs. These actions aim to create a more inclusive, accessible, and responsive community transport system across Victoria's Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Housing

Monash Council has demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting older, disadvantaged, and marginalised residents at risk of homelessness through its community outreach program. This initiative provided tailored support to vulnerable individuals across a range of settings, including home visits, libraries, neighbourhood houses, the civic centre, and via phone and email. The duration of support varied from single interactions to sustained engagement over several months. Clients often presented with complex needs, with the most common issues being access to My Aged Care services and securing stable

housing. This flexible, person-centred approach has been instrumental in connecting residents with essential services and improving their overall wellbeing.

Social Participation

A broad and impactful social inclusion program that supports healthy, active ageing and fosters community connection was successfully delivered through both Commonwealth and Council-funded initiatives. The Positive Ageing Lifestyle (PALS) program has become a cornerstone of engagement for older adults in Monash. With over 500 activities attracting approximately 40,000 participants, and 3,500 quarterly program guides distributed via post, email, libraries, and community centres, the program has demonstrated strong reach and relevance. Feedback from participants highlights the program's role in preventing isolation, promoting motivation, and creating opportunities for meaningful social interaction. Complementing this, the Commonwealth Home Support Program offers tailored social support, including transport-assisted group outings and the Halcyon Dementia Day Centre, which provides a safe, enriching environment for individuals in the early stages of dementia. Together, these initiatives reflect Council's commitment to inclusion, wellbeing, and community vitality for older residents.

Intergenerational connection was successfully fostered through a range of innovative programs and partnerships. A collaboration with Cabena Child and Family Centre brought together social inclusion support groups and local playgroups, creating joyful shared experiences across generations. In partnership with Swinburne Institute of Technology, the Council also contributed to an intergenerational research initiative, resulting in a practical resource to guide the development of future programs. A standout achievement was the award-winning *Golden Tales* Project—an intergenerational storytelling competition that united young people and older adults through creative expression. With over 240 heartfelt submissions of stories, poems, and artwork, the project not only won the LGPro Positive Ageing and Wellbeing Award but also powerfully demonstrated the role of storytelling in building empathy, challenging ageism, and celebrating the richness of shared human experience. This initiative has become a cornerstone of Council's commitment to inclusion, wellbeing, and lifelong connection.

A partnership was established with Monash University to explore the experiences of older Australians during the COVID-19 pandemic. Council's role was to support with the recruitment of older residents to participate in a critical study examining loneliness among individuals aged 65 and over. The study focused on the lived experiences of older adults who were already experiencing loneliness prior to the pandemic. Using solicited diaries, researchers investigated how these individuals coped with the extended lockdowns in Victoria, Australia—one of the most prolonged lockdown periods globally. The findings were published in *The Gerontologist*, a peer-reviewed journal of The Gerontological Society of America that features multidisciplinary research on ageing and social issues. The final report, titled *Pandemic Diaries: Lived Experiences of Loneliness, Loss, and Hope Among Older Adults During COVID-19*, offers valuable insights into the emotional and social impacts of the pandemic on this vulnerable population. Project results informed priorities to address loneliness for an older population. The inaugural Monash Council's Loneliness Framework approach to addressing loneliness in the community is to improve overall community wellbeing and social connections in Monash.

Respect and Social Inclusion

Monash Council continues to champion inclusion for older LGBTIQ+ residents through diverse programs and events. Highlights include the *Top Ten Moments in Victoria's Very Queer History* event, weekly *Rainbow Connections* gatherings, and the *Out and About* feature in the *BeWell* newsletter. Celebrations like the LGBTI+ Seniors Festival Dinner and an *Age Well Adventure* to the Pride Centre further strengthened

community connection. The Council also promoted Midsumma Festival and allyship resources, reinforcing its commitment to visibility, support, and belonging.

Significant progress has been made toward becoming a dementia-friendly community by partnering with local organisations to reduce stigma, raise awareness, and foster understanding. Over 800 community members have engaged in a wide range of initiatives, including *Become a Dementia Friend* sessions, the *Understanding Dementia* series and a Dementia Awareness Forum. A key partnership was established with Monash University's Turner Institute for Brain and Mental Health to support the Healthy Brain Project. The project's findings were shared with the community, highlighting protective factors for brain health and strategies to delay the onset of dementia. Additional activities such as brain training sessions, professional development for Community Support Workers, and public education on risk factors like nutrition, sleep, hearing, and heart health have further strengthened community knowledge. Events like the screening of *June Again* and the ongoing maintenance of a dedicated dementia support webpage have also contributed to this effort. A dedicated working group has been established, and Council is now developing a formal action plan to guide its journey toward becoming a dementia-friendly organisation.

Civic Participation and Employment

Monash Council actively supports civic engagement for older residents through two key initiatives: the Positive Ageing Reference Group (PARG) and the Age Well Network Forum (AWNf). The AWNF brings together community leaders, service providers, and experts quarterly to collaborate on enhancing the wellbeing of older adults in Monash. Meanwhile, PARG comprises a diverse cross-section of older community members who provide valuable feedback on Council policies, services, and communication strategies. These groups play a vital role in shaping inclusive, Age-friendly initiatives and promoting positive, active ageing across the municipality.

Communication and Information

Proactive steps were taken to educate staff and the broader community about ageism and elder abuse. As a proud member of the Southern Melbourne Elder Abuse Prevention Network (SMEAPN) and the national EveryAGE Counts coalition, Council has supported advocacy efforts to challenge ageist attitudes and promote respect for older people.

As part of ongoing efforts to combat ageism, several initiatives have been launched, including the promotion of the EveryAGE Counts campaign. Staff and community members were encouraged to take the "Am I Ageist?" quiz and pledge their support for creating a world free from ageism. The campaign was officially launched at the *Age is No Barrier* event, which brought together 80 residents. Attendees were inspired by a series of short films that challenged ageist attitudes and encouraged reflection and action toward building a more inclusive and respectful society for people of all ages. Ageism awareness training is also promoted internally to staff. To mark World Elder Abuse Awareness Day on 15 June, the Civic Centre is lit in purple, accompanied by a social media campaign and an annual community event. Through its SMEAPN partnership, Council helps deliver educational events that empower older adults to understand their rights and reduce the risk of abuse.

The Positive Ageing Directory was developed to help older residents reconnect with social activities and community life following the COVID-19 pandemic. This directory features a wide range of clubs and community groups specifically for older adults in the City of Monash. As part of our commitment to supporting independent living, the Positive Ageing Directory has now been integrated into Monash Council's online Community Directory. This move enhances accessibility, allows community groups to keep their information up to date, and offers the convenience of downloading a printable PDF version. To make

it easier for residents to find relevant services and activities, a dedicated 'Older Adults' category has been added to the Community Directory, streamlining the search for Age-friendly groups and resources.

Community Support and Health Services

Monash Council continues to prioritise the health and wellbeing of older residents through a diverse range of programs and partnerships. In collaboration with health and community organisations, Council has delivered a comprehensive information series addressing key lifestyle and health topics such as road safety, dementia awareness, hearing, nutrition, diabetes, exercise, sleep, heart health, assessment and care, and physical activity. These topics are carefully selected based on local health data and community feedback to ensure relevance and impact. This proactive, evidence-informed approach empowers older adults with the knowledge and tools to make informed decisions and maintain a healthy, active lifestyle.

Monash Council's community outreach program has played a vital role in supporting socially isolated and vulnerable individuals through a flexible, person-centred approach. Support was delivered across a variety of settings—including home visits, libraries, neighbourhood houses, the civic centre, and remotely via phone and email—with engagement ranging from one-off interactions to ongoing assistance over several months. While many clients sought help accessing My Aged Care services or securing stable housing, others presented with complex challenges such as hoarding, loneliness, family violence, mental health concerns, financial stress, and the need for material aid. This tailored support model has been instrumental in connecting residents with essential services, addressing immediate needs, and improving overall wellbeing.