THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION (WHO) DEFINES HEALTH AS:

“a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

OVERVIEW

The health and wellbeing of a community is determined by a range of factors. Access to good medical care is important, however, the individual, social, cultural, environmental and economic factors that cause ill health are also essential elements to consider in determining the health of a community.

The health and wellbeing of a community can be addressed by improving the conditions and circumstances in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. Educational success, job security and good housing standards are all factors that contribute to good health.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Bega Valley Community Profile the population of the Shire is 32,999. The Bega Valley has a higher proportion of older people over 65 years compared to the rest of NSW, as well as a much lower proportion of people between
the ages of 20-34. The Bega Valley’s ageing population is expected to increase, which will further increase the demand for health services, including specialist disability and aged care services.⁵

The Bega Valley has a significant number of people aged 50-69 years. This is a time when generally people are growing older yet still active and healthy. During this stage people may still be building careers, actively travelling, raising families and possibly planning retirement. At this stage of life people are often seeking personal fulfilment, which may be obtained through volunteering or travel.⁶

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

There are a range of social determinants that impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. According to NSW Health the determinants of health include:⁷

- Income and social status
- Education levels
- Employment and working conditions
- The physical environment
- Gender and age
- Personal behaviour and coping skills
- Genetics
- Social support networks and culture
- Access to and use of health services

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE

In NSW, socio-economic disadvantage is measured by the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSD). The average score for NSW is 1000, the lower the score indicates greater disadvantage. Bega Valley Shire as a whole has a score of 976.9 meaning that many residents in the Shire are more disadvantaged than average. However there are differences in the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) between the various towns within the Shire.⁸

The Bega District has a score of 922.5, which is well below the average NSW score. Compared to NSW as a whole, Bega Valley
residents on average, have lower incomes and are less likely to have undertaken tertiary studies or be in a skilled occupation.9

HEALTH AND WELLBEING LOCALLY

ACCORDING TO THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION:10
“the leading global risks for mortality in the world are high blood pressure, tobacco, high blood glucose, physical inactivity, and overweight and obesity. These risks are responsible for raising the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and cancers. They affect countries across all income groups.”

According to Cancer Australia it is expected that by the age of 85 years, one in two men and one in three women will have been diagnosed with cancer in their life.11 Cancer incidence rates in the Bega Valley are 504.4 per 100,000 which is the second highest in the Local Health District. The Cancer Institute NSW has reported that between 2006 and 2021 the incidence of cancer in NSW is projected to increase by 44%. The Southern NSW Local Health District (LHD) is expecting the greatest increase at 70%.12

It is well documented that tobacco smoking has a strong relationship with lung cancer, respiratory disease and cardiovascular disease. Simply, smokers are less healthy than non-smokers and use more medical services. In the Southern NSW LHD 15% of men are daily smokers compared to over 10% of women.13 Smoking during pregnancy is still an issue that needs addressing, the most recently available figures indicated that 15.4% of NSW mothers smoked during pregnancy.14

Diabetes is a chronic disease characterised by high blood glucose levels and the rates are increasing significantly. There are three types of diabetes, however type 2 diabetes accounts for 90% of all cases. Type 2 diabetes usually affects adults and is influenced by lifestyle factors such as a poor diet and lack of physical activity. In the Southern NSW LHD 15.4% of men have been told by a doctor or hospital they had diabetes or high blood glucose, this compares to 8.3% for the whole of NSW.15

The most recent NSW Health Survey shows that 11% of people in the Southern NSW LHD have reported having high or very high levels of psychological distress.16 On average, men and women with the most socio-economic disadvantage tend to report higher levels than more affluent people. The NSW Health Survey 2004 showed that 31%
of women in the 25-34 year age group in the Greater Southern Area Health Service (now the Southern NSW LHD) reported high levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms.17

A LIVEABLE COMMUNITY

ACCORDING TO THE BEGA VALLEY SHIRE COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN: “a liveable community is a place where everyone regardless of age or circumstance can enjoy a safe, involved and affordable community life. The health and wellbeing of residents is an important indicator of the quality of life experienced by the community as a whole and can affect the ability of residents to participate in community life. Factors that impact on a community’s wellbeing include the social, cultural and economic conditions that residents experience such as access to education, transport and sustainable employment opportunities. Built and natural environments are also key aspects in supporting individual and community wellbeing, living amenity and lifestyle.”18

The exact meaning and usage of the term community is debatable, however it is usually defined around the idea of a common identity. This identity may be based around a geographical location, for example the Bega Valley community or a smaller community such as the Candelo community. Community may also be based around gender, race, age or special interest groups, examples of these types of communities are the sporting community, the arts community or the Indigenous community.19

Employment & Income

Employment, income and social status are a determinant of health. It has been identified that job security increases health and wellbeing, whereas higher rates of illness are associated with higher levels of unemployment.20 Employment affects self-esteem, furthermore various types of employment can have a direct effect on health due to risk of accidents, exposure to hazardous substances or causing high levels of stress.21

Bega Valley residents on average have limited employment opportunities and lower income levels than the NSW average. According to the 2011 Census, the median weekly household income for people aged 15 years and over in the Shire was $848, compared to $1237 for NSW and $1234 for Australia.22 Income is a significant determinant of standard of living and can affect people’s choices regarding healthy lifestyle options. For example, healthy food usually costs more and when families are short of money they tend to buy food that is more filling rather than more nutritious.23

The major industries that employ people in the Bega Valley are agriculture, forestry and fisheries, manufacturing, construction, retail trade, accommodation and food services,
Community Wellbeing

and health care and social assistance.\textsuperscript{24} 2011 census figures show that 12,463 people living in the Shire were employed, 54\% of whom were working full time and 43\% part time. The unemployment figure at the time of the census was 5.9\%, which was the same as the rate for the whole of NSW. The unemployment rate for young people in the Shire is higher than the overall rate at 11.9\%.\textsuperscript{25} It is understood that many young people leave the Shire for education and employment opportunities.

Housing

Unaffordable, unsuitable and insecure housing can negatively affect the health of individuals.\textsuperscript{26} Children living in inadequate housing conditions, such as damp and cold houses, are particularly at risk of negative health outcomes and in particular, are more likely to suffer from respiratory illnesses. Furthermore, overcrowding and high density housing are factors that influence higher accident rates for children, due to the lack of play space and associated difficulties in supervising children whilst they are outdoors.\textsuperscript{27}

The Bega Valley Shire is not immune to problems associated with housing affordability and security. The Shire has been identified as having the highest rate of homelessness in South East NSW.\textsuperscript{28} Homelessness is associated with a range of problems, including depression and problems accessing health services.\textsuperscript{29} Within the Bega Valley Shire Council boundary, there is a continuing move towards settlements with more than 1,000 residents, and a slow decline in the rural population. Some areas have experienced fast growth, Tura Beach’s population grew by 50\% in the decade to 2002 and is an example of population growth caused by the ‘sea change’ phenomenon. Bega Valley is classed as a ‘coastal lifestyle destination’ as it is too far from a capital city to allow commuting or easy weekend trips. According to Gurran et al, these types of locations are characterised by a higher median age of resident than sea change communities nearer cities.\textsuperscript{30}

Price rises for rental and purchase properties are a particular challenge for Bega Valley residents as salaries are lower than for NSW as a whole. There are also 25\% more of the Shire’s population compared to NSW who are not of working age - below 15 years old or over 65. Furthermore, more people claim welfare benefits than on average in the State.
Many jobs that are being created in the retail, tourism and hospitality sectors are modestly paid and often seasonal or casual.\textsuperscript{31}

Analysis of housing loan repayments in the Shire compared to the whole of NSW, show that there are a smaller proportion of households paying $2,600 per month or more and a larger proportion of households paying less than $1000 per month. Analysis of rents in the Shire showed 2.4\% of households were paying high rental payments ($400 per week or more) and 24.4\% were paying lower rental payments (less than $150 per week). This compares to 28.1\% and 17.6\% respectively for the whole of NSW.\textsuperscript{32}

Education

Education is a factor that contributes to good health, higher education levels often means a better chance at finding employment in a preferred occupation and receiving a good income level. These factors help people to gain the knowledge and confidence needed to look after themselves and to access good health care.\textsuperscript{33}

Education and learning are important social issues for any community. The Bega Valley Shire has a smaller proportion of residents who have completed Year 12 compared to NSW as a whole, 35\% and 48\% respectively. The Bega Valley also has a substantially smaller proportion of its population who have acquired post school qualifications, compared with the NSW average. Only 10.6\% of Bega Valley Shire residents have secured a Bachelor’s degree qualification or higher, compared to 16.5\% for NSW as a whole.\textsuperscript{34}

In recognition of the difficulties young people face, both the State and Federal Governments have introduced programs aimed at assisting young people at risk of disengaging and providing funding to youth engagement organisations in the community. A lack of post-school education options and the need to retain students in school for longer are important issues for our community, particularly for young people and Aboriginal people.

Closing the Gap is a Federal strategy that local education providers are working towards. It aims to reduce Indigenous disadvantage with respect to life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, educational achievement and employment outcomes.\textsuperscript{35}

The National Youth Participation Requirement, introduced in 2010, stipulates that young people must be formally engaged in full-time education or some form of formal training (or combination of both) up to the age of 17 years. Traineeships and apprenticeships are available in the Bega Valley and they can be very successful for both the employer and young person. It can be a challenge to navigate through education and employment options in the Bega Valley due to the dispersed town settlements, limited transport options, resources and life skills.

There are public primary schools in most towns within the Bega Valley Shire, there are also three private primary schools as well as two public and two private high schools. There are Preschools, Child Care Centres and Family Day Care providers also operating in the Bega Valley and all these services are working towards the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), which is part of a national reform for early childhood education and care.

Bega TAFE provides several education and training opportunities on campus in Bega. Available courses on offer range from Certificate to Diploma level in areas such as Human Services, Tourism and Hospitality, Business Arts and Information Technology, Trades and Technology (including Horticulture) and General Education and Access. Fast Track also provides a range of commercial short courses.

The Bega Valley Shire also has a campus of Wollongong University and a TAFE college. However, it is understood that many young people leave the Bega Valley Shire for
tertiary educational opportunities, as the educational facilities offer a limited range of courses. The Australian National University (ANU) has a Rural Medical School in the Bega Valley and the University of Canberra now run student-led health clinics in Eden.

After decades of major change in work and leisure patterns, there is a need for related changes in the way that people learn. There is a growing focus on providing lifelong learning opportunities which leads to more inclusive, creative and vibrant communities. Lifelong learning involves all forms of learning, both formal and informal, with the home and the workplace increasingly becoming places for learning. Changes in technology are providing more opportunities for informal learning.

Eurobodalla Adult Education has opened an office in Bega, the University of the 3rd Age (U3A) is also very active, in particular for older people living in Tura, Merimbula and Pambula. Courses on offer range from French language and Tai Chi to Photography and Computers. This type of learning promotes wellbeing and lifelong learning opportunities.

Libraries play an essential role in developing and supporting lifelong learning communities. Free access to educational books, resources and technology such as computers, printers and the internet means that our libraries make learning possible for many. The library is also seen as a social meeting place with all ages of the community being involved in activities.

**Transport**

Good transport policies typically have positive health benefits. To this end the Australian Local Government Association has entered into a partnership with four other groups to encourage active transport, such as walking, cycling and the use of public transport. Active transport is more cost effective than other forms of physical activity, such as accessing a gym, and can also be a more affordable transport option. It also has the potential to address social disadvantage by enhancing social interaction and connectedness.

Transport has been raised as an issue that affects many aspects of life in the Bega Valley. People in this community are often more isolated than people in other communities due to the spread of townships. Therefore, access to a private vehicle or public transport is crucial in enabling people to access health and other services which are usually located in the major centres of the Bega Valley Shire. Private buses offer extensive school runs and scheduled services to the public, however trips are limited in the evenings and on weekends, and may be unaffordable to many people. The Red Ticket system for seniors is also run through the private buses and has been a great initiative by the State Government to support older isolated people to get out and about with a day trip costing only $2.

Car ownership for families in the Bega
Valley is particularly important. Recent ABS census data indicates that over 37% of households in the Bega Valley Shire own just one car, this coupled with the lack of public transport is a significant issue.\textsuperscript{37}

There is an airport located at Merimbula which supports tourist and business opportunities with two flights to Sydney and one to Melbourne daily. This supports residents to access family, friends and city services however, this is not an affordable option for many residents.

Using bicycles as an alternative form of transport has strong support in the community through the establishment of a bicycle users group. Increasing the use of bicycles promotes health and environmental benefits. The lack of cycle ways and bike tracks around towns limits the use of bicycles as a safe transport option. Bike travel between towns may not be feasible for many people due to the long distances and the lack of bicycle lanes on highways. However, bike riding within towns may be an option for more people and could reduce the demand on limited parking spaces in the Bega Valley Shire.

**Food Security**

Food security refers to the consistent availability of food in sufficient quantities and having the resources to obtain nutritiously appropriate food. Knowledge about basic nutrition, food preparation and storage along with adequate water and sanitation are also an element of food security.

Food choices and healthy eating habits can be influenced by local governments. Through ensuring breastfeeding and baby-care facilities are included in developments, identifying and developing sites for community gardens, planning and considering the location of food outlets and ensuring availability of healthy foods at meetings and community events.\textsuperscript{38}

South Coast Producers Association (SCPA) market days are held every second Friday in Bega. The market aims to encourage the growth of local and South East Regional producers as well as providing people with fresh seasonal produce that supports the environment by reducing the food miles travelled. Other Farmers Markets are also held in areas such as Candelo, Merimbula and Pambula.

**A PHYSICALLY ACTIVE COMMUNITY**

It is important to increase awareness within the community of the importance of physical activity and healthy eating. Encouraging a physically active community will help prevent and manage chronic disease, maintain a healthy body weight and assist with psychological wellbeing. Physical activity may take place through organised exercise and sporting pursuits, everyday household or incidental activities or through work-related endeavours. It is understood that people who live outside the
major cities or in the most disadvantaged areas, are less likely to undertake the recommended levels of physical activity.\textsuperscript{39}

The Bega Valley community is well placed to engage in physical activity. The Shire has a natural environment that is conducive to physical activities such as ocean swimming, bushwalking and mountain biking. The Bega Valley Shire also has a variety of community supported sports clubs and associations. Encouraging further physical activity can be achieved by ongoing investment in recreation facilities, physical activity programs, pathways and bike tracks.\textsuperscript{40} Council recognises that the provision and maintenance of recreational facilities, whether natural or constructed, promotes health and wellbeing in the community.\textsuperscript{41}

National physical activity guidelines recommend combining an active lifestyle with healthy eating. When planners are designing the physical environment, optimally it should be undertaken in a manner that is conducive to good health. Being active every day in as many ways as is possible can go a long way to achieving greater health and fitness benefits, for example, changing lifestyle choices and habits, such as walking or cycling instead of using the car. Australian adults are recommended to incorporate at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most days of the week. In the Southern NSW Local Health District it has been reported that 64% of men and only 45% of women are undertaking an adequate amount of physical activity.\textsuperscript{42}

The built environment can have an impact on people’s health and healthy behaviour. The recent concern about the lack of physical activity, growing levels of obesity and mental illness, as well as social and environmental inequalities have placed an emphasis on the links between planning built environments and people’s health. Good design, planning and consultation create healthier communities and support wellbeing and social cohesion.\textsuperscript{43}

A SAFE COMMUNITY

Community safety

A safe community is an essential component to the health and wellbeing of the residents of the Bega Valley Shire. Safety concerns, whether real or perceived, are a significant barrier that prevents people from choosing active transport such as walking or cycling instead of passive transport like driving their car. Speed and volume of traffic are one concern, however design factors are also influential in people choosing to walk or cycle.\textsuperscript{44}

Measures that address crime and violence in our community are another element that contributes to our health and wellbeing. The NSW Government has guidelines in place to ensure that developments provide safety and security to users and the community. The guidelines can be used to justify modification of a development if it presents a crime risk. Neighbourhood design plays an integral part in supporting/enhancing the health and wellbeing of a community by encouraging social inclusion, community interaction and by being conducive to physical activity. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is a strategy that aims to reduce opportunities for crime by using design and place management principles to reduce the likelihood of crimes taking place.\textsuperscript{45}

The Bega Valley Shire appears to have a relatively low crime rate. The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) ranks LGAs in NSW (with populations of more than 3000), from number 1 (being the highest crime rate) to 140, based on the rate of particular crimes per 100,000 people. The Bega Valley Shire 2011 rankings for some crimes are listed below:

- 69 assault - non domestic violence related
- 88 sexual assaults
- 97 steal from dwelling
- 98 steal from motor vehicle
- 111 robbery
- 123 motor vehicle theft
- 125 break and enter – dwelling
It is noteworthy that drug and alcohol crimes appear to be a more pressing issue in the Bega Valley Shire, with a ranking of 21 for possessing and/or using cannabis and 39 for liquor offences.\textsuperscript{46} Cannabis and alcohol abuse is understood to have a significant negative impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals and their families.

**Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence is a concern in the Bega Valley community and has been raised as an issue during past community consultations. The overwhelming majority of domestic violence in Australia is perpetrated by men against women, and children can also be the victims. However, it is recognised that women can also be the perpetrators of family violence and men the victims. Sexual violence affects almost one in five Australian women and physical violence affects at least one in three women. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women report higher levels of physical violence and furthermore, women with disabilities are more vulnerable to violence.\textsuperscript{47}

In 2011, the Bega Valley Shire recorded 119 (289.8 per 100,000) incidents of domestic violence related assaults. The Bega Valley is ranked 70 out of 140 local government areas in NSW for this particular crime. The Shire also ranked 51 for breaching an apprehended violence order and 88 for sexual offences, these are often crimes associated with domestic violence.\textsuperscript{48}

The true incidence of domestic and family violence is not able to be provided, as there are many forms of violence that are not physical and not reported to police. Other forms of violence include “emotional and psychological abuse, intimidation, harassment, stalking and sexual assault, and can include animal abuse targeting pets, and damaging personal or joint property”.\textsuperscript{49}

There are a few key organisations and programs in the Bega Valley Shire that deal with the issues relating to domestic violence and assist in providing support for those affected. These organisations include the Women’s Resource Centre, the Women’s Refuge Centre, Far South Coast Family Support Services, South East Women and Childrens Service (SEWACS), Police Citizen’s Youth Club and the Council’s Brighter Futures program.

**AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY**

Inclusive communities seek to include and value all people even if they have opposing views and this can in part be achieved by building social capital. Social capital may be considered as the glue that holds communities together. The idea of social capital revolves around human relationships and social obligation and reciprocity, which results in people doing things for each other.\textsuperscript{50} The social capital of a community increases when people interact with each other regularly and where they can develop trusting relationships through working as volunteers or being members of playgroups or committees.\textsuperscript{51}

**Community Development**

Community development has a range of important dimensions including social, economic, political, cultural, environmental and personal/spiritual development. It is important to achieve a high level of development in all of these areas to have a healthy and functioning community.\textsuperscript{52}

Empowering people to take charge of their lives by raising awareness of the factors that influence their health is a role that organisations working in health promotion and community development can be involved in. In the Bega Valley there are a range of community education programs and services provided by non-government organisations, local government and other agencies. Community development is a process that works with people and communities to identify needs or objectives and aims to empower people to help develop confidence and access resources to take action.\textsuperscript{53}
A recent report prepared for the Australian National Preventative Health Taskforce states that:

“Choosing to eat healthy food, being physically active, limiting alcohol consumption and not smoking requires people to be empowered to make these choices.

It means that the healthy choice must be physically, financially and socially the easier and more desirable choice relative to the less healthy option. This is not always the case, particularly with decreasing social position.”

ACCESS AND EQUITY

There are challenges in maintaining and improving wellbeing of the community in Bega Valley due to the spread of the population across a large area. Some communities are isolated rural localities with limited services available to cover this dispersed population. The SEIFA profile for the Bega Valley shows that there are a number of localities in the Shire whose residents face a high level of disadvantage (see Figure 1). The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) states that people who live further away from major cities are usually less healthy.

The Bega Valley Health Service has facilities based in Bega, Pambula and Eden. The Shire has two acute care hospitals and one community health service delivering services from various centres. Building a new regional hospital has been an issue raised in the Shire for many years. Agreement has been reached and construction on a new regional hospital is due start in 2013. Council supports the construction of the new hospital in Bega and the retention of the Pambula Hospital to complement the new regional hospital.

Accessing and using health services has been identified as a determinant of health. According to the NSW Population Health...
Survey 2010, 27.7% of men and 38.6% of women in the Southern NSW LHD experienced difficulties accessing health care when they needed it. This compares to 15.3% of males and 20.7% of females for NSW as a whole. In 2005 it was reported that there were no GPs who routinely bulk billed in Eden, Merimbula or Pambula. The number of GP’s per resident population is low in the Bega Valley, this limited availability of GP services, particularly those that bulk bill, and long wait times to see doctors is a significant issue. The limited access to specialist medical services within the Bega Valley Shire and the need to travel to specialist medical and hospital services outside the region is an ongoing concern. Affordable dental services are also a significant issue that needs to be addressed in the Bega Valley.

Recognising and Addressing the Inequities in Health

WHO describes health inequities as the “unfair, unjust and avoidable causes of ill health.” WHO recommends addressing health inequities by improving the conditions and circumstances in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. It also suggests addressing the drivers of these living conditions. The distribution of power, money and resources are best influenced by government policy at all levels. Equity is not synonymous with equality, equity is best described as equal access for equal need. The groups that typically experience systemic inequity in Australia are Indigenous Australians, socioeconomically disadvantaged people, people living in rural and remote areas and those with disability. Evidence clearly indicates that people from disadvantage circumstances have higher rates of death and illness. There is a broad range of factors that influence health and wellbeing in our community, including employment, income, housing, education and transport.

Australians, on average, have a relatively healthy and long life. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people typically experience much greater ill health and have a shorter life-expectancy. In 2011, 2.8% of the Bega Valley Shire’s population was Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, slightly higher than the NSW and national average of 2.5%.
Roles of Government in Health

The Federal Government, primarily through the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA), develops national health policies and contributes funding towards health services provided by State and Territory governments, as well as the private sector.

The NSW Government delivers health services, including most hospitals as well as community and public health services. The Bega Valley Shire is part of the Southern NSW Local Health District (LHD).

Local Government’s role in health and wellbeing generally includes managing garbage disposal, ensuring a clean water supply and undertaking health inspections to ensure hygiene standards are upheld. The Bega Valley Shire Council is also involved in home care, childcare, some community service programs and community development. Council’s role in planning and development as well as providing and managing facilities and services, is important in creating healthy and supportive environments.

Healthy Communities Initiative (HCI)

‘Live Life Bega Valley’

The Australian Government is supporting Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the delivery of effective community-based physical activity and healthy eating programs as well as the development of a range of policies to support healthy lifestyle behaviours. Bega Valley Shire Council was successful in its' application for HCI funding from DoHA.

Funding for the HCI will be used to implement the ‘Live Life Bega Valley’ project and it will run until June 2014. It aims to help reduce the prevalence of overweight and obesity within the target populations of the Shire by maximising the number of people, predominantly not in the paid workforce, who are engaged in proven or innovative physical activity and healthy eating programs. An integral part of the HCI is to make recommendations for policy and procedure change at local government level in order that the physical and social environment be more conducive to health.

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