Foreword

We are pleased to present the Bega Valley Shire Council’s Social Issues Paper 2012. This follows on from Council’s previous Social Plans covering the periods 2000-2005 and 2006-2011.

The introduction of the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework (IPRF) as the key planning process for local government to identify a range of issues, including social and community, has seen a move away from the mandated social planning framework that has underpinned previous social plans. However, there has been a strong push for a process that identifies those community issues, previously reflected in the social plan, which will act to inform both the community and Council.

There are a number of Social Issues Papers contained within this document which address a range of issues affecting our community today. The Social Issues Paper is written as a dynamic document and as significant changes occur for particular target groups or issues they will be updated or revisited. The target groups covered are not an exhaustive list and as community issues are highlighted consideration will be given to developing additional Social Issues Papers.

A number of issues from the previous social plans reappear in this Social Issues Paper reflecting the complex and long term nature of many social and community issues affecting our Shire. Often Council is only one of many stakeholders involved in addressing social issues and the challenge ahead is to work with others to achieve maximum benefits for our community.

Council is currently working on a range of strategies, long, medium and short term, to address some of the issues highlighted in this document. Details are outlined in Council’s annual Operational Plan, Delivery Plan (2011-2016) and longer term Community Strategic Plan. These documents are available on Council’s website.

This plan could not have been developed without significant contribution from a range of people. We wish to thank all of those who participated in community and other consultations, community members, government and non-government representatives who gave feedback on issues.

Cr Bill Taylor
Mayor

Peter Tegart
General Manager
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RECOGNISING OUR ABORIGINAL CUSTODIANS

The Bega Valley Shire acknowledges, by way of our Memorandum of Understanding with the Bega, Eden and Merriman’s Local Aboriginal Lands Councils and the Native Title Holders, that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants, custodians and native titleholders of all lands and waters in the Shire. We recognise Aboriginal spiritual, social and cultural connections to these lands and waters and state our commitment to ensuring that Aboriginal rights, as enshrined in legislation, are upheld and not eroded.

COUNCIL’S VISION

The Bega Valley will be a community that works together to achieve a balance between quality of life, sustainable development and conservation of the environment.

“All the things that Council has traditionally been responsible for - our roads, building, waste and water services - are important things, but they are a means to an end, it is the people that we are most concerned with.”

Cr Bill Taylor
Mayor
October 2012

Acknowledgements

This Social Issues Paper has been prepared by Council, with feedback and contributions from numerous organisations and individuals across the Bega Valley.

The majority of the photos within the papers were taken by Tonia Liosatos at a range of community events with permission from community members. We would like to thank and acknowledge the other people and organisations that supplied photos including Stuart Cameron, Local Aboriginal Lands Councils and Tulgeen Disability Services. We acknowledge that these wonderful photos of local people add value to the Social Issues Papers.

The Social Issues Paper is available via the Council website, as an entire document or by individual section: www.begavalley.nsw.gov.au

Hard copies are available on request.
For inquiries please contact Council on 6499 2222

Disclaimer: The photos that appear in these Social Issues Papers show a range of people participating in positive ways in our community. The people that have consented to having their photo included are not connected to the social issues defined in these papers.
The Bega Valley Shire is a rural area on the far south coast of NSW and borders the State of Victoria at its southern boundary. The Shire covers a large geographic area of 6052 square kilometres and has a population of 31 950 (ABS 2011), living in three large towns as well as a number of villages and smaller rural communities. Major industries are agriculture, fishing, oyster harvesting, forestry, retail and tourism. The Shire’s population has grown steadily over the past few decades, particularly in the towns and villages (Profile ID).

The median weekly income is $848, which is lower than the Regional NSW average of $961, 23% of the population are couples with children and 14% of the population are older people with no children.

In comparison with the NSW average the Bega Valley has a relatively higher population of older people. There are relatively low numbers of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds but a relatively large Aboriginal population.

The Bega Valley Shire is a regional community made up of a number of communities, each with their own needs, issues and priorities. Given the way that the population is scattered over a very large area it is not surprising that transport was consistently raised as a significant issue. This is also a contributing factor to the issues facing young people in the Bega Valley, which was the other most consistently expressed need. Significant social issues to be addressed include offering young people a diverse range of activities after high school. Another social issue for the Shire as a whole is the changing proportion of older people in the community. There is an increasing trend for people from the cities to retire to coastal and rural areas such as those in the Bega Valley Shire. The implications of this are wide spread particularly in the provision and planning of infrastructure and services for older people into the future.

THE AIM OF THE SOCIAL ISSUES PAPER

The aim of this Social Issues Paper is to identify key social issues affecting our community. It is not designed to be an in depth study of each issue or target group, rather an overview of those issues that will highlight particular areas of concern or need in the Shire. It aims to:

- Develop an understanding of the needs of communities, including disadvantaged groups.
- Identify opportunities to respond to community needs, and in partnership with others.
- Identify services, facilities and processes required to address priority community needs.
- Advocate for additional or expanded resources to meet community needs.

Each section of the Social Issues Paper provides reference to background documents and, where applicable, further reading on the specific issue.

This will be a dynamic document and as developments arise affecting the community sector. These issues papers may be updated and/or redeveloped. As it is not possible for this Social Issues Paper to address every social or community issue, the target groups chosen were reflective of the mandated target groups under the previous state social planning framework.

and should be seen as a starting point, the target groups identified here are not an exhaustive list, neither are the issues covered in the Social Issues Paper.

The document will work in two key ways, as an informing document to guide Councillors decision making in the review of the Community Strategic Plan, and four year delivery plan, as it relates to community and social issues. It will also be an important resource for the community and those organisations working across the Shire to address the issues identified, it is hoped that this will be a document that can be used to support funding applications as was the case with previous social plans.

The development of the Social Issues Papers has involved targeted community consultation through a number of different processes and incorporates some of the consultation Council conducted as part of its Community Strategic Planning process. The participation of a range of stakeholders, including children and community members has been critical in its development.

Other methods used to identify and prioritise social needs have included surveys, consultations, literature reviews of research and publications, information from demographic and other available data and the assessment of the outcomes from the last social plan. As it is not possible for the Social Issues Paper to address every social or cultural issue raised it has been necessary to identify priority areas.

To enable the information from all the consultations to be effectively used it needs to be analysed in relation to how consistently the issues were raised across the Shire, the extent to which the needs are supported by demographic or other evidence and the representativeness of the sample of the community that was consulted.

This Social Issues Paper addresses both general community social issues and particular target groups within the community. The broad community issues of affordable housing, transport, health/wellbeing and learning/education, were identified and are covered in the community wellbeing paper.

**METHODOLOGY**

The methods used to identify social needs in the Bega Valley Shire were based on both qualitative and quantitative information. Consultation with the community has been a continuous process throughout the life of the previous social plan. Council staff also participated in networks and forums designed to address issues affecting specific target groups within our community and have used information gained from these forums.

**The methods used to collect information and analyse social needs included:**

- Community consultations held in Bega in March 2012 with service providers who work with the targeted populations in the Social Issues Papers.
- Feedback from online surveys in March 2012. (Bega Valley Views 2030, an online community engagement tool).
- The evaluation of the 2000-2005 and 2006-2012 social plans
- Review of existing research and reports available on social, community and cultural issues relevant to the Bega Valley Shire
- Demographic, statistical and research information
SOCIAL JUSTICE PRINCIPLES

The development of this Social Issues Paper has been underpinned by a set of principles which provide a social justice framework for developing inclusive communities. The Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework requires that Council apply the following social justice principles when undertaking its consultation and developing its plans:

1. Equity – involving fairness in decision making, prioritising and allocation of resources, particularly for those in need.

2. Access – having fair access to services, resources and opportunities to improve quality of life.

3. Participation – the maximum opportunity to genuinely participate in decisions which affect their lives.

4. Rights – equal rights established and promoted, with opportunities provided for people from diverse linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds to participate in community life.

Council has committed to these principles in the development of the plans and strategies in the adopted Integrated Planning and Reporting framework. Council has also applied a quadruple bottom line matrix to gauge the impacts of all key actions on the social, economic, environmental and civic leadership fabric of the area.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census data and other statistical information has been used to gain a better understanding of our population, how it is likely to change and the socio economic and other indicators relating to the issues covered in this document. Council utilises the services of id Profile to analyse and present the census and other statistical data to better reflect what is happening for the community of the Bega Valley Shire.

id Profile have developed a number of tools available for the whole community to utilise including community profile and atlas, population forecast and economic information. These can be found at:


There is also a considerable body of social research available on a range of issues that affect the social wellbeing of communities. The research that informs this document is referenced in each of the Social Issues Papers.
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.\textsuperscript{9}

HEALTH AND WELLBEING LOCALLY

ACCORDING TO THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION:\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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%.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{18,19}

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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{23}

The major industries that employ people in the Bega Valley are agriculture, forestry and fisheries, manufacturing, construction, retail trade, accommodation and food services,
and health care and social assistance. 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%. 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. 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. 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. 28 Homelessness is associated with a range of problems, including depression and problems accessing health services. 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. 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.\(^{31}\)

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.\(^{32}\)

**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.\(^{33}\)

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.\(^{34}\)

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.\(^{35}\)

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.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.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.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.40 Council recognises that the provision and maintenance of recreational facilities, whether natural or constructed, promotes health and wellbeing in the community.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.32

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.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.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.45

The Bega Valley Shire appears to have a relatively low crime rate. The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOSCAR) 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. 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.

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.

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”.

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. 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.

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.

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.
“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.

This initiative was funded by the Australian Government.
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According to the NSW Minister for Citizenship and Communities:

“Volunteering underpins our society, binds us together and contributes to strengthening and sustaining communities.”

OVERVIEW

When we think of volunteering, and look at the majority of recognised volunteers in the Bega Valley Shire, they tend to be people who volunteer their efforts via a volunteer organisation. Preschool management committees, School P&C’s, sporting groups, Surf Life Saving Clubs, Hall Committees, Seniors Citizens, Men’s Sheds, and community groups like Canteen and the Red Cross are all managed by volunteers on committees. These volunteers spend large amounts of their time raising funds for people and resources in the community.

Volunteering strengthens the social connections for people within a community. Volunteering can provide meaning, purpose and satisfaction in the lives of many people. Volunteering can also bring health and wellbeing benefits.
According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2011 Census, the Bega Valley Shire has one of the highest levels of volunteerism in the state with 26.3% of residents reporting they did some form of volunteering through an organisation or a group. This compares to the NSW average of 16.9%. Volunteering tends to be highest amongst middle-aged people, and seems to only decline with incapacity as people get older. In the Bega Valley, the rate of volunteering was highest amongst those aged 55-64 years when 24% volunteered, and the next highest in the 45-54 year and 55-64 year age groups, with 22% and 18% volunteering respectively.3

Although the Bega Valley Shire boasts a large number of people who volunteer their time, there are also a large number of volunteer organisations competing for volunteers. In the Shire there are hundreds of volunteer-reliant organisations including, community service organisations, sporting clubs, social clubs and entertainment groups.

According to the 2011 National Volunteering Strategy:

“volunteering can be regular or episodic, formal or informal, pre-planned or a spontaneous response to emergencies. It can be done through an organisation, the workplace or individually, in person or online. It can involve professional or other work skills, generic or manual labour” 4

Some of the more active organisations operating within the Shire, who rely heavily on volunteers, include the Rural Fire Service (RFS), Volunteer Rescue Association (VRA), Surf Life Saving Clubs (SLSCs), the State Emergency Services (SES), Volunteer Coast Guard, Sports Clubs (including football, cricket, soccer, hockey, netball, fishing, basketball, tennis, bowling and golf), Rotary, Lions, Country Women’s Association (CWA), Meals on Wheels, Community Transport, numerous nursing homes and community care providers, native wildlife rescue services (WIRES & NANNA), the Animal
Welfare League (AWL) and Landcare.

In addition, the Bega Valley Shire Council relies on over 350 volunteers to provide services ranging from the home library service through to maintaining cemeteries, gardens, halls and sportsgrounds. The work undertaken by volunteers is appreciated by Council and contributes to considerable savings.

THE CHANGES

New work health and safety (WHS) laws were introduced in NSW on 1 January 2012. These laws replaced the occupational health and safety (OHS) laws. This new health and safety legislation has resulted in a growing need for support and resources about the new legislation for volunteers and the organisations that support them.

Under the legislation, a volunteer organisation with paid workers is now known as a ‘person conducting a business or undertaking’ (PCBU). This type of volunteer organisation has responsibilities under the WHS Act to provide a duty of care to ensure its volunteers are not exposed to any risk to their health and safety. People who are volunteer workers will also have the same obligation as ‘workers’ to take reasonable care for health and safety.

ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL VOLUNTEERING STRATEGY:

“The volunteering landscape is changing..... While traditional forms of volunteering are still popular, new forms are emerging.”

6
THE SOCIAL ISSUES

Ageing Population

The Bega Valley has a very high proportion of older people compared to the NSW average. Therefore, the ageing population has been identified as a significant issue for volunteering. With an ageing population, many of the organisations that have been at the forefront of volunteerism are under threat.

The key drivers of many volunteer organisations are now moving beyond their active lifetime and there is a need for some form of succession planning. In some organisations, people who have been volunteers are now becoming the clients of the agencies that they previously provided a volunteer service to.

The Australian Government is encouraging older Australians to include volunteering in their retirement planning. There are also opportunities to increase volunteering through Centrelink arrangements. Older people on unemployment benefits are currently able to contribute 15 hours per week to volunteering in lieu of paid work.

Volunteer work undertaken through arrangements with Centrelink must take place in approved not-for-profit organisations. Guidelines are available from the Department of Human Services website. The program is beneficial to the Bega Valley as it encourages older people to volunteer their time and skills for the benefit of the wider community.

Engaging the Community

Attracting young people (18-30) to volunteering today is necessary for volunteering in the future. Young people need to be able to enter a volunteer organisation and be encouraged to develop and discuss innovative ideas. Developing mechanisms for older people to provide mentoring and skills training to young people would be beneficial.

Furthermore, supporting young people to share their skills and knowledge with older more experienced volunteers would also be advantageous to the sector.

The Council would like young people to be involved in all aspects of local life including civic leadership, business, education and volunteering. Young people are interested in volunteering, however they have different interests and will often look for alternative causes for their volunteer experience than older people. Many schools encourage volunteering, however it is understood that this avenue for volunteering usually extends to a limited number of organisations.

STRENGTHS IN THE BEGA VALLEY

The Bega Valley Shire has a long history of volunteerism and an established network of volunteer organisations. The ABS statistics have shown that the Shire has a high level of volunteerism when compared to the NSW average.

The Bega Valley is a relatively isolated part of NSW. Nevertheless, residents of the Shire have a strong community focus and this is an asset. Volunteering is an element that can further assist in strengthening the Bega Valley communities’ well being and social capital.

With an ageing population, the Bega Valley is well placed for an increased number of skilled older people exiting the workforce and looking for volunteering opportunities. The Shire has a significant number of retirees migrating to the area and it is expected that many early retirees are seeking volunteer work.

THE CONSTRAINTS

According to the NSW Volunteering Strategy, “in some areas the demand for services is increasing just as volunteer numbers are declining.”
The Australian Government is encouraging older Australians to include volunteering in their retirement planning.

The Strategy also points out that many volunteers feel that their efforts are not fully appreciated. Volunteer organisations are able to access resources from Volunteering Australia, such as national standards for managing volunteers. Volunteers need to be recognised for their efforts and there are a range of mechanisms, both locally and nationally, to show volunteers their contributions are valued. In the Bega Valley Shire, community organisations are diligent in acknowledging the efforts of their volunteers. However, it is understood that different volunteers value recognition of their efforts in different ways. Developing new initiatives to recognise the efforts of volunteers is required.

Some people may find it difficult to identify and connect with organisations that offer volunteer roles that appeal to them. This may be a barrier for some people in their quest to service the community through volunteering.

Changes in work and family circumstances over the past few decades have seen an increase in double income families. Busy lifestyles mean that families and professional people may have difficulty finding the time for volunteering. There are also growing demands for volunteers from a range of social activity based groups, such as sporting groups, social clubs and organisations surrounding the arts.
Prospective volunteers are also deterred from volunteering due to the bureaucratic ‘red tape’ that often hinders their will to ‘serve their community’. Some organisations require a very high standard of volunteer training in order to meet their contractual obligations. This level of training can often deter volunteers from providing their services to these organisations. Streamlining and rationalising the bureaucratic burdens on volunteers may assist in maintaining and growing the volunteer base.

Volunteering is an important part of our society and according to the Productivity Commission, the value of this unpaid labour in Australia is over $14 billion.\textsuperscript{13} Although volunteers’ time is unpaid, there are often personal expenses to support their volunteering, such as the costs of transport. Not-for-profit organisations also bear significant costs for training and managing volunteers and arranging insurances and police checks.

There are an increasing number of volunteers who choose to volunteer on a short-term or project based arrangement. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many volunteers over the age of 55 would prefer to volunteer in their social activity based groups than community service organisations.

Episodic volunteering increases the costs and time required for organisations to manage volunteers. Every time a new volunteer enters an organisation, regulations require that they undertake a range of activities, including a police check.

THE OPPORTUNITIES

The Bega Valley Shire Council has identified an opportunity to facilitate the development of a Volunteer Resource Centre (VRC) in partnership with key volunteer groups in the Shire. VRCs are currently operating in many localities around the country. A funded and operational VRC in the Bega Valley would provide community organisations and volunteers with information, support networks and other services in various aspects of volunteering.

A central location that coordinates information for volunteers and organisations has cost and time saving opportunities. A VRC could develop a database of available volunteers that includes information on their skills, training and experience. The development of such a data base would improve data sharing between organisations.

Episodic volunteering results in volunteers providing their services to more than one organisation. It is understood that often people would be interested in providing small amounts of their time to volunteering in multiple organisations, rather than committing to one organisation. There are opportunities through a VRC to ensure this group of volunteers’ time is used as effectively as possible.

There is an opportunity to increase the number of volunteers through the ‘grey
The Bega Valley is a tourist destination for people who have retired and are now travelling around Australia. Many grey nomads are looking for volunteer opportunities on their travels and there are currently some grey nomad websites that post volunteer opportunities. There is an opportunity for the Bega Valley to tap into this resource base of volunteers.

The volunteering sector recognises the value and potential of gaining volunteers through work-based programs. It is suggested that partnerships could be developed between volunteer organisations and workplaces to develop options for work-sponsored volunteering in the Shire.

Encouraging more young people to volunteer may result in an increase in the number of volunteer services and organisations. For example, there is a growing need for computer and internet based volunteering and many volunteer groups are not skilled in these areas. There is an opportunity to engage young people to volunteer their time and skills in these areas to support existing organisations.

People may be attracted to volunteering as a pathway to employment. Volunteering may be an opportunity for people who are unemployed, under-employed or a recent school leaver to improve their skills and knowledge to enhance their employment opportunities. This arrangement must be undertaken with caution as it is understood there have been instances where volunteers have been used as replacements for paid staff.
References


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ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

OVERVIEW

People of the Monaro and Yuin nations are the original inhabitants and custodians of the land and waterways of southern New South Wales from Cape Howe to the Shoalhaven River. The groups of Yuin communities living in coastal areas are known as the Katungul, from the word ‘Katung’ which means the sea.2

The area we now know as the Bega (Biggah) Valley Shire is the traditional country of a number of Aboriginal communities with distinct cultures and language groups including, the Bidawal, the Thaua, Ngarigo and the Djiringanj.

“Sites throughout the Shire demonstrate occupation by these rich cultures to be in excess of 6,000 years. These people nurtured an organised and active culture many thousands of years older than the creators of the great pyramids of Giza did or the medieval monuments of Stonehenge did. Some of the oldest physical records of human occupation

ACCORDING TO AN ABORIGINAL PROVERB:

“We are all visitors to this time, this place. We are just passing through. Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love... and then we return home.” 1
and activity to be found anywhere in the world are located beneath our noses here in the Bega Valley Shire.”  

Aboriginal people see their culture and heritage as an important part of their modern day life in having that connection to the land and its people. Culture and heritage provides a tangible link and evidence for Aboriginal people’s existence in today’s modern society. Being able to sustain the existing Aboriginal culture and heritage keeps Aboriginal history alive and in existence for future generations.

A TROUBLED PAST

It is important to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the Bega Valley Shire. Furthermore, it is also necessary to remember that the policies of colonisation during the last two centuries included the forced removal of many Aboriginal people from their lands and families onto missions or stations.

The largest Aboriginal Protection Board Station on the far south coast was located at Wallaga Lake to the north of the Bega Valley Shire. Many Aboriginal families were forcibly removed to the reserve at Wallaga Lake from other areas. Other families moved to the area because of the availability of work. This means that many Aboriginal people from the Monaro, other parts of Southern New South Wales, Victoria and beyond, now call the Bega Valley Shire home.

The impact of colonisation and the disruption this caused to Aboriginal culture and communities still affect the lives of Aboriginal people today. There has been a troubled relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in the Shire since white settlement. Segregation and racism has long been a feature of the treatment of local Aboriginal people:

“Many Aboriginal children excluded from schools on the Far South Coast simply went without schooling. Segregation in schooling was complemented by segregation in..."
**hanging and entertainment. No Aborigines lived within the township of Bega and those who were not at Wallaga Lake or on farm properties camped on the river bank.** Aborigines were not allowed inside hotels. At the picture show, they sat in a cordoned off section of the front stalls…”

However we also know that Aboriginal people played an essential role in the establishment of early industries such as whaling and fishing in Eden. In Bega the agriculture industry grew from the labour of Aboriginal people in the bean fields planted along river flats surrounding the town. Employment for Aboriginal people, however, was always in jobs white people did not want. It was predominantly seasonal, poorly paid and difficult manual labour.

Many Aboriginal families in the Shire have also been affected by the forced removal of children. Now known as the ‘Stolen Generations’, the State endorsed removal of Aboriginal children from their families into institutions and orphanages or fostered out into non-Aboriginal families has caused further dislocation of Aboriginal culture and enormous distress and sorrow for Aboriginal communities. The dispossession experienced by Aboriginal people is clearly evident in the disadvantage and poverty they still face, the social problems present within communities and the poor living conditions many Aboriginal families still endure.

On 13 February 2008 the Federal Government gave the Apology to Australia’s Indigenous peoples and said sorry for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.

**IN THE BEGA VALLEY**

On Census night, 9 August 2011, Bega Valley Shire’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population was counted as 905 people, of whom 874 were Aboriginal and 17 were Torres Strait Islanders, 14 identified as both. Bega Valley’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population made up 2.8 per cent of its residents. Across NSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people made up 2.5 per cent of the population.

Closing the Gap is a Federal Government strategy aimed at reducing Indigenous disadvantage in a range of areas, including life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, educational achievement and employment outcomes.

The Census conducted in 2011 also highlights some of the inequities that still exist between local Aboriginal people and the non-Aboriginal people in the Shire.

These figures reflect the situation in other areas of Australia. Aboriginal people in the Bega Valley Shire are more likely to be unemployed, less likely to live in their own homes, will not live as long and will have less access to education.

**THE SOCIAL ISSUES**

**Health**

The health of Aboriginal people in the Bega Valley Shire continues to reflect disturbing national trends. When comparing the ages of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the Shire it is clear that life expectancy for Aboriginal people is much lower than for non-Aboriginal people. Only 4.8% of the Shire’s Aboriginal population are aged over 65 years, while 21.7% of non-Aboriginal people are aged over 65 years.

Such a small proportion of the Aboriginal population aged over 65 years is an indication of continuing earlier death rates for Aboriginal people due to poorer health outcomes and lifelong disadvantage.

Smoking is the primary cause of chronic disease among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In 2003 smoking was responsible for one-fifth of deaths and accounted for 12 per cent of the total burden of disease among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
Supporting Aboriginal Families

The impacts of family breakdown and welfare dependency disproportionately affect Aboriginal families in the Bega Valley Shire and Aboriginal family support remains an area of unmet need. There is a growing need for more services to work actively and efficiently with Aboriginal families. The introduction of a number of early intervention services in the Shire have been a positive move and have made some inroads into the issues. However, feedback from these services suggests that more resources are required to make lasting improvements.

The NSW Government has recently introduced the Keep Them Safe initiative. One of the aims of this project is to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people in the child protection and juvenile justice systems. Local initiatives include the Brighter Futures Program and Family Case Management.

Housing

Housing related stress is a significant issue for Aboriginal communities. This stress is caused by discrimination, inappropriate housing stock, poverty, over-crowding, and poor housing infrastructure and amenity. Many Aboriginal families experience over-crowding due to the mismatch in housing allocation to the needs of families and their responsibilities to extended family.

In relation to housing, the biggest difference between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous households in the Bega Valley is that approximately 36% more Indigenous households were rented and 27% fewer were fully owned, while nine percent fewer Indigenous households were being purchased. Overall, approximately 29% of Aboriginal households in the Bega Valley lived in social housing, compared with only 3.4% of the broader community living in social housing.

There is a need to expand the amount of social housing stock for Aboriginal communities. This housing could be provided through a range of management arrangements such as community housing, public housing and Aboriginal controlled housing. Public and community housing providers need to work closely with Aboriginal communities to ensure appropriate housing and management is provided. Aboriginal communities need to be sufficiently resourced to enable them to appropriately manage and maintain their own housing.

Drug and Alcohol/Gambling

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience a disproportionate amount of harm from alcohol, tobacco and other drug use. Drug-related problems play a significant role in disparities in health and life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

The results of the 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey highlight the disproportionate rates of substance use
and harm among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the country.

More than one in five Aboriginal people drank at levels that put them at high risk of alcohol-related harm in the long term. Two in five drank at levels that put them at high risk of alcohol-related harm in the short term. Illicit drug use among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is also significantly higher than for other Australians.11

Drug and alcohol abuse remains a significant problem for Aboriginal people in the Bega Valley, consultation with local services suggest the national experience is reflected in the local area. Substance misuse causes serious harm to physical health, and it can be argued, possibly even more harm to the social health of individuals and the fabric of communities.12

Problem gambling was also raised during consultation as an issue for the local community. Research indicates that high rates of economic disadvantage, unemployment, lack of alternative recreational activities and high levels of drug or alcohol problems within the communities are all predictive of social gambling having the potential to become problematic gambling.13 These conditions all exist for the local Aboriginal community.

In addressing issues of drug and alcohol abuse and gambling it is imperative that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are centrally involved in planning, development and implementation of strategies.

**Employment, Education & Training**

On average, Indigenous people tend to leave school earlier and consequently, fewer gain tertiary qualifications. Two indicators of educational inequity are the average number of years of schooling, and the proportion with tertiary qualifications.

In 2011, 19.4% of Bega Valley’s Indigenous residents aged 15 or over had completed Year 12, compared with 37.8% of non-Indigenous residents.14 This represents an increase from the previous census however it is still well below the figures for the broader community.

Higher labour force participation means more income earners, so this is an important indicator of well-being and supports the broader local economy. Of the local Indigenous labour force, approximately 35% were unemployed, giving an unemployment rate of 17%. This rate was much higher than the 7% rate among non-Indigenous residents.

New initiatives such as the Community Training Partnerships (CTP) are developing pathways for young people to access education, training and employment in the local area. There is a strong focus in the Aboriginal community on this program.

There are also a number of land based projects developing employment opportunities for Aboriginal people across the Bega Valley Shire. One of these projects is the Bundian Way, a traditional walking track once used by Aboriginal people, connecting the Snowy Mountains to the ocean around Eden. In time this will create employment opportunities in the area of cultural tourism for the Aboriginal community.

**STRENGTHS IN THE BEGA VALLEY**

There are strong and vibrant Aboriginal communities across the Bega Valley. There are a significant amount of respected Elders across the Shire who are strong leaders for their communities. More and more young Aboriginal people are completing year 12 and demonstrating that the future is positive.

Merrimans, Bega and Eden are the three Local Aboriginal Lands Councils covering the Shire. NSW Aboriginal Lands Councils aim to protect the interests and ensure a better future for the Aboriginal community.15

The Monaroo Bobberrer Gudu Keeping Place (Jigamy Farm) is a cultural centre
located outside Eden. It is situated on over 150 acres and offers group cultural experiences with outdoor recreation facilities, learning spaces and a walking trail. The Aboriginal community is also developing a youth camp at Jigamy Farm.

Located just to the north of the Bega Valley Shire is the Umbarra cultural centre near Wallaga Lake. While this is not currently operating as a cultural centre it presents a great opportunity for the Aboriginal community into the future.

The Aunty Jean’s program is a successful health model for many Aboriginal elders in the Bega Valley. It was built around the consideration that better results would be seen if the community could work together for better health outcomes, with the Elders leading the way.

The Healthy for Life program is another strength in the Bega Valley, which incorporates Aboriginal health workers and nurses working with local GPs and other primary care practitioners to improve the health of Aboriginal people, the focus is on child and maternal health as well as prevention and management of chronic disease.

There are also a growing number of Aboriginal specific services operating in the Bega Valley Shire addressing such issues as health and wellbeing, drug and alcohol and other programs targeting children and families. Katungul Aboriginal Community Corporation and Medical Centre and Wandarma Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Service are two Aboriginal specific services operating in the Shire.

Along with Aboriginal specific services there are a large number of Aboriginal specific positions and skilled workers throughout the community sector. The Koori Interagency Network (KiN) is an interagency for workers across the Shire that is working with members of the Aboriginal community. The Network provides a forum for the sharing of information and ideas and supports the individual Aboriginal workers in their roles.

THE CONSTRAINTS

The Aboriginal community still faces significant disadvantage compared to the broader community. This suggests that there are still systemic issues preventing Aboriginal people from accessing basic human rights such as health, housing, education and employment.

Aboriginal people are still subject to racism and prejudice in many areas including housing and employment. There are a number of innovative programs operating in the Bega Valley Shire to address this level of inequality. However, it is critical that all levels of Government work harder to address the inequities between the Aboriginal people and the broader community.

THE OPPORTUNITIES

There are a number of key areas, based on consultation with the Aboriginal community, which would begin to address the social inequality that exists in the Bega Valley Shire.

Greater opportunities for economic development growth around projects managed and delivered by Aboriginal people and organisations can deliver positive outcomes for employment and self esteem amongst the community. There is also potential to foster partnerships, with government and non-government agencies, that support the Aboriginal community to develop lands that they own (eg. Bundian Way).

There is a need to further develop employment and training pathways for young Aboriginal people to keep them engaged with their community. This is particularly significant in the retail and tourism industries where employment of Aboriginal people is relatively low.
Aboriginal culture, heritage and having a connection to the land and its people are essential for Aboriginal people.

Amongst the community there is a growing recognition of the importance of Aboriginal culture to the whole community.

It is evident that there are an increasing number of organisations incorporating cultural awareness into their corporate training calendars. Furthermore, numerous organisations are now also including a Welcome to Country at important events and openings.
Reference


“Families do not exist in isolation. They need community supports and, in turn, they are the foundation of strong communities. Together, they advance a fair, cohesive and resilient nation. Resilience requires support from within and beyond families, tailored to the needs of individual, family and community circumstances.”

OVERVIEW

Children and their families are an integral part of the community. Families come in all forms, from the traditional two parent household, to sole parent families, blended families, extended family groups and gay and lesbian parented families. This paper looks at the needs of families in recognition of their important role in shaping our community values, aspirations and ongoing long term economic and social sustainability.

Provision of access to opportunities for education and participation provide key conditions for family members to develop their capabilities, to live satisfying and fulfilled lives, remain in the local community and to manage in times of need. Again, these underpin the resilience that enables families to stick together.

Raising children is complex and many issues arise along the way. This Social Issues Paper aims to highlight what children are saying in the Bega Valley, the changes relevant to children and opportunities locally to improve circumstances for children and families now and in the future.
IN THE BEGA VALLEY

According to the 2011 Census the Bega Valley had 6949 children residing in the Shire. 1686 were aged 0-4yrs, 2593 were 5-11 yrs and 2670 were 12-17yrs, approximately 21.8% of the Bega Valley Shire’s population were children 0-17yrs old.

8,874 family households are living in the Bega Valley, 22.6% of total families were couple families with child(ren), and 9.7% were one-parent families, compared with 26.7% and 11.3% respectively for Regional NSW.

Indigenous families in the Bega Valley Shire experience relatively more disadvantage compared to other families, due to less opportunity for social and community participation, resources, access and equity issues, health conditions and geographical isolation.

Bega Valley Shire scores 976.9 on the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). The SEIFA measures socio-economic disadvantage and this score indicates that the Bega Valley Shire is more disadvantaged than the national average. This score has an impact on the health and wellbeing of children and families in the area and shows that a number of children are growing up in socially and economically disadvantaged households in the Bega Valley.

BEGA VALLEY KIDS SAY……

In the development of this Social Issues Paper consultation was undertaken with 91 children aged between 2.5 years and 12 years from across the Shire. The children provided feedback about what they most enjoy about living in the Bega Valley and who are the important people in their lives.

47% of these children identified family as being most important.

Family features strongly in children’s stories, as do friends. Children talk about family that extends beyond brothers, sisters and mum or dad to grandparents, cousins, aunts and family pets.

However, children also talked about how family is at times separated by distance. In these cases, their stories of fun and enjoyment centre on times when families can connect and the spaces in which families can spend time together.

‘Mummy, my brother in Queensland. We went there. Granny, my auntie too.’
(Age 4, EDEN)

‘I went to see my grandpa. We went to a park in his car. It was too far to walk and the sun came up like that. Grandpa is his bikie name and he lives in Hastings in Melbourne.’ (AGE 4, BEGA)

In Bega Valley Shire, 23% of households are made up of couples with children compared with 27% in Regional NSW.
Transport, road and air travel is important to connecting families who live in the Bega Valley Shire with others who are important to them. Strategies that support family connections into and out of the Bega Valley are valued by children. Transport needs to be affordable and accessible, particularly for ageing members of families or young children. Continued lobbying for competitive road and air travel should be considered. Transport is not just simply useful in children’s lives. It also threads through children’s stories of excitement and pleasure with adults.

‘My best day is Sunday. I go driving on Sunday in the car with my dad. It’s his 4 wheel drive and we go through water.’
(4 YEARS, EDEN)

‘I would like a bike track all around town and a place to ride bikes and motor bikes. Also a swimming pool where we could go underwater would be good.’
(4 YEARS, BERMAGUI)

Safe roads for riding, footpaths, bike paths, skate parks are all strongly featured in children’s stories.

41% of children named public parks as important to them. 31% identified commercial/retail and recreational/entertainment venues as important.

Families within the Bega Valley Shire are often separated by family circumstance. For example, single parent families may involve an estranged second parent. Children in out of home care may have supervised access with their parents. Often public or commercial venues like a park or Magic Mountain create a safe and neutral space for children to share time with family.

Access to parents and other good adult role models is essential to children. They talk about how public spaces make these
19% of all children identified the importance of the natural environment.

‘I like jumping over the waves at the beach’  (3 - 4 YEARS, MERIMBULA)

‘We need trees on the beach, yeah … shady spots on the beach would be good’ (4 YEARS, TATHRA)

‘I love the beach and playing in the sand with my brother. I bury my dad.’  (3 - 4 YEARS, MERIMBULA)

‘I would like lots of trees to climb’  (7 YEARS, BERMAGUI)

‘The ocean’  (8 YEARS, BEGA)

A balance of commercial, natural and public spaces are important to children’s lives and the ways that they can connect with friends and family. Bega Valley Shire Council’s continued focus on sharing the provision of these spaces, services and facilities with the community and other government sectors is important.

The ongoing review of retail and commercial service provision within the Bega Valley Shire may support ongoing local employment strategies that reduce the need for family separation and keep spending within the Shire. Additional infrastructure and education opportunities linked to the use of technology may also reduce the draw of families from the Bega Valley Shire to larger business or employment centres.

9% of all children sought out spaces for artistic and creative activities.

The Bega Valley children also identified artistic and creative spaces as being important to them. This was often about their own pleasure rather than shared pleasure.

‘I would be playing drums and with Barbies and mermaids’  (3 YEARS, BERMAGUI)

‘I would be playing guitar and rock and roll. Also I would like a magician

forms of access pleasurable and something to look forward to. Their descriptions suggest they carry these times as a happy memory when their parent is not with them.

It is not only children, who are experiencing formal separations within their family, who celebrate the opportunities to connect with family.

Children recognise that parents’ commitments also limit some of the available time for family to connect. Again public and commercial spaces offer the opportunities for families and friends to connect and celebrate.

‘When it’s raining we go to Top Fun with my mum and dad and sister and me.’  (3 - 4 YEARS, MERIMBULA)

‘I go to Magic Mountain and nanny and pa and mum and my brother were there. Dad came too because he didn’t have to work.’  (4 YEARS, EDEN)

‘A park’  (5 YEARS, BEGA)
29% of all children linked their best day with venues that are part of the community infrastructure and services.

Children identified community services that enable them to make connections to family and friends. These included education services such as preschool, child care, after school care services and schools. Additionally the local church provided a regular meeting place.

‘I like to go to Preschool. Play on slide in sandpit in boat’ (4 YEARS, EDEN)

‘I would have a rollercoaster for the end of year excursion at a theme park.’ (9 YEARS, BEGA)

‘I was at the slides with my friend. The ones up there and the ones down here at preschool.’ (4 YEARS, Bega)

‘I play with my friends at school.’ (8 YEARS EDEN)

‘I go to church with my mummy and daddy.’ (3 YEARS, BERMAGUI)

25% of children identified housing as an important part of their life

However private spaces, including housing, that mean family could continue to be together featured strongly. These were spaces in which children had a sense of ownership and could bring toys, pets and friends together.

‘Staying at home and playing in the kid’s room. There’s toys. My brother and my sister – because it’s so fun’ (4 YEARS, EDEN)

‘I would be playing with my dog Harvey outside’ (3 YEARS, BERMAGUI)

‘My best day is Tura Beach because I love it and I live there.’ (3-4 YEARS, MERIMBULA)

Children in their middle childhood years and young teens living in the Bega Valley are looking to be more independent from their parents and family. However, due to the spread of townships in the Bega Valley Shire, children often rely on their parents for transport to visit friends or undertake various activities.

Children of this age are generally developing confidence in all areas of life, such as through friends, schoolwork, sports, music and creative arts. These older children place importance on friendships and are becoming more aware of their own bodies and the world around them. Physical activity, music, local shops, parks, skate parks, computer gaming, relationships with their parents and the opportunity to participate are all high priorities.

THE CHANGES

“On 1 January 2012, the National Quality Framework was established and will apply to most long day care, family day care, preschool (or kindergarten) and outside schools hours care services.”

The National Framework integrates national law, regulations, curriculum and quality standards.

In the Bega Valley Shire these changes will impact on a number of children’s services, including preschools, long day care centers and family day care.

“The National Quality Framework is an important reform, which will deliver a higher standard of care for children in the critical areas of education, health and safety. The framework will provide clearer and comprehensive information for families so they can choose the best services for their child.”

While the push for improved service delivery and outcomes is welcomed across the sector, the changes bring with it some
challenges. Increased child/staff ratios and staff qualifications have resource implications. Long day care services are required to progressively increase the number of staff working with children under 3 years and ensure a mix of Certificate, Diploma and Degree qualified educators. Family day care, for example, will move from a ratio of 1:5 to 1:4 by 2014.

Closing the Gap is another Federal Government strategy that local education providers are working towards. One of its aims is to reduce Indigenous disadvantage with respect to accessing early childhood education.5

As part of the National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health, the NSW government has announced the implementation of new initiatives. The Healthy Children Initiative promotes healthy weight, healthy eating and physical activity. Similarly, the Healthy Worker Initiative aims to modify lifestyle factors, such as inactivity, nutrition, smoking and alcohol.

A recent report to the Australian Government has advised that the cost of violence against women and their children in 2009 was around $13.6 billion. Without appropriate action this is estimated to rise by another $2 billion in the next ten years.6

The National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children 2010-2022, was the first plan from the Government to coordinate action across jurisdictions and the first to focus strongly on prevention. It is the first initiative that looks at the long term, building respectful relationships and working to increase gender equality to prevent violence from occurring in the first place. It holds perpetrators accountable and encourages behaviour change. However, currently there are no behaviour change programs or risk assessment processes for perpetrators of violence in the Bega Valley Shire.

The Family Law Legislation Amendment (Family Violence and Other Measures) Act 2011 is relatively new and part of the Government’s agenda to improve the family law system’s response to family violence and abuse. This Bill aims to put the safety of children front and centre in family law matters, without compromising a child’s right to a meaningful relationship with both parents where it is safe to do so.7

THE SOCIAL ISSUES

Infrastructure and Accessibility

Sustainable access to work, shopping precincts, education and play are on the agendas for many families. Minimising the use of cars provides healthier lifestyles and improved community connections.

Equity is fundamental for families and supports social cohesion. Access to all aspects of community, including open space, health, safety, education, transport and economic development is fair to all residents in the Bega Valley Shire regardless of socioeconomic status, cultural background, sex, age or ability.

Consultation with families prioritised a playground and open space as the most important need, where families and young children can unite with others in the community.

Each town in the Bega Valley would benefit from a park and open space area that included BBQ facilities and well lit accessible toilets with baby change tables. Families were looking to interact with community and play with their children without driving long distances. There is also a call for an accessible playground for children with disabilities.

Parents and grandparents identified the need to slow traffic in several places such as Tathra (Andy Poole Drive shops), Tura (outside Woolworths), Merimbula and Bega (Cnr Parker and Carp St).
Access to Information and Services

Additional, affordable and regular access to early intervention services was identified throughout the consultations with families and service providers in the Bega Valley. Services like Brighter Futures, South East Women and Children’s Services (SEWACS), Family Support and Playability, support numerous families and are much needed services. However, specialists such as paediatricians and child psychologists are less accessible for children and families in the area.

Achieving a connected accessible pedestrian network of pathways for pram use is important for families. This would enable families to move around buildings and streets safely, participate in community life and develop improved healthier lifestyles.

There is currently inadequate pram access into several public buildings and services, creating barriers for families with a child who has a disability.

Caregivers stated through consultations that there was a growing need for more childcare, in particular after school care and vacation care. However the current federally funded vacation care model in Bega was expensive for families with two or more children.

There was an increased need for more 0-2 year old places in childcare so mothers can return to work and keep their jobs. Additionally, childcare needs to be more flexible to support shift workers and accommodate the time it takes to travel to work.

There was also a need for family day care providers in Candelo and Bega, furthermore several preschools in the Bega Valley Shire have waiting lists.

Housing

Strategies for improving and making housing more affordable are supporting children and families. In NSW, efforts in developing affordable housing mainly target low to moderate income households.

Providing families with greater residential stability through affordable housing reduces stress and related health issues on families and consequently children. It enables families to establish better commitments to children’s activities and education as well as parental learning and employment. Bega Valley has a moderate housing need compared to other areas.

Affordable, safe and long term housing enables children and families to establish community connections in their neighbourhood that are ongoing. Permanent housing, for homeless women and children, due to domestic violence is a concern in the Bega Valley. In particular, affordable and available
housing for single women, older women and women on low incomes is an issue.

**Vulnerable Families**

Children may be at risk when problems in their family impact on the ability of their parents to properly care for them. Children are greatly affected by parental problems such as mental illness, drug and alcohol misuse, family violence, homelessness and intellectual disability.8

The consequences for the victims of domestic violence, including children witnessing violence, are complex and wide-ranging. It can have a negative impact on the victim’s psychological, emotional and physical health.9

Women are commonly the victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. However, the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research has identified that 18% of perpetrators are also women and 28.9% of victims are men.10

Domestic violence harms the well-being of families. Children need to grow up in a secure and nurturing environment for ideal development.11

**STRENGTHS IN THE BEGA VALLEY**

The natural environment in the Bega Valley is a brilliant opportunity for children and families. The bush, beach, country and mountains provide plenty of opportunity to participate in structured and unstructured play and family time. Sandcastles on the beach in winter or summer, fishing, swimming, bike riding, bushwalking, playing in creeks and bushland, walking on farms, the list is endless.

No matter where people live in the Bega Valley they are reasonably close to accessing the natural environment.

Young adults who grew up in the Bega Valley come ‘home’ from spending time away, for the beauty of the Bega Valley and their family. ‘Seachange and Treechange’ families move to the Bega Valley for the beautiful environment, lack of urban development and relaxed country/coastal lifestyle to raise families.

The Bega Valley population in general, is a small community with energy to support community groups, events, activities, art, music, education and local produce.

These resilient groups of people in our community often support families and children informally and regularly throughout life. There is a strong connection to family in the Bega Valley and a history of progressive groups of people supporting community life and social cohesion.

**THE CONSTRAINTS**

The Bega Valley Shire is a relatively isolated rural community, with a large geographical spread of small towns. It is situated 6.5 hours from Sydney, 3 hours from Canberra and 7 hours from Melbourne. There is limited choice for families with employment, accommodation, care options, childcare, transport and health due to the geographically dispersed population.

The distance to travel to town is a constraint for people living on rural properties or outside the main towns. Smaller rural towns are more affordable for families living in rural areas. This may increase social isolation and cause some challenges for education, care, health and transport issues.

**THE OPPORTUNITIES**

The opportunity to develop and expand services for children and families in the Bega Valley is welcomed by both service providers and parents. The child centred approach programs are holistic and the commitment from earlier educators and early intervention organisations is high.

Social connections for children and families are important, children benefit from regular interaction with their peers.
Furthermore, friendship in primary school is associated with self-esteem. Vulnerable children may not have opportunities to form these social connections or have access to positive role models. Support and services such as youth groups, after school programs, school holiday programs, mentoring and recreational activities are important for families.

There is an opportunity to reduce the barriers to social inclusion through providing ongoing opportunities to participate in community life, such as attending preschool and school activities. Whilst endeavouring to increase opportunities for social inclusion, issues around transport and financial constraints for families need to be addressed.

Regular connection with other people in the community enables the development of friendships and provides support to children and parents under stress. In neighbourhoods where adults report positive social ties, children demonstrated fewer behavioural problems.12

Improving the quality of life, recreation, education, work and social interaction of our community must be a priority. Urban planning and development can play an important role in ensuring that new and existing community members have equal access to a range of facilities and service. Equal access to health promoting features of urban development include open space, safe pedestrian and cycling environments, gathering places and natural areas.13
References


This document is part of a broader Social Issues Paper produced by the Bega Valley Shire Council. To read the document in its' entirety go to www.begavalley.nsw.gov.au

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THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT’S SETTLEMENT POLICY STATES:

“Participation in the social and cultural life of Australia helps migrants and humanitarian entrants feel part of their local community. Social participation activities foster cross cultural respect, understanding and belonging. This sense of belonging is often cited by new arrivals as critical to feeling settled in Australia.”

OVERVIEW

People from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds is a term which includes those whose first language is one other than English, or whose family background involves migration from a non-English speaking country. It can refer to new arrivals to Australia as immigrants or refugees from non-English speaking countries as well as the children of migrant parents.

People from CALD backgrounds have a range of issues and needs that require addressing. There are significant immediate issues such as accessing language and settlement services. Furthermore there are issues around living in a homogenous community where cultural difference stand out. Some people experience racism or harassment at work or whilst studying and some CALD children also have difficulty trying to fit in at school.
IN THE BEGA VALLEY

The Shire has a long history of multiculturalism. In contrast to the myth of the ‘white’ colonial Australia, people from CALD backgrounds have always been part of our community. From the nineteenth century the Shire was a mix of Anglo-Celtic, European and Asian migrants. The early beginnings of our agriculture industries were founded on the labour and enterprise of Chinese market gardeners who were some of the first people to establish bean and corn crops following the end of the gold rush in the 1800s.

The 2011 Census showed that 17% of the Bega Valley Shire population were born overseas. The most common overseas country of birth in the Shire is England (4.6%). The most prevalent non-English speaking countries of birth were Germany (0.8%) and the Netherlands (0.7%). In the Shire, over 93% of people speak English at home. The other common languages spoken in homes in the Shire include German (0.6%), Dutch (0.3%), Italian (0.2%), French (0.2%), and Greek (0.1%).

THE CHANGES

Until recently there have not been any migrant and refugee services located in the Shire to service the broader migrant community. In 2011 Council secured funding from the State and Federal governments to work with the migrant and multicultural community in the Bega Valley (The Bega Valley Migrant & Multicultural Support Service).

New and emerging communities in the area include people from African countries such as Congo and Sierra Leone, as well as Asian countries such as Thailand and the Philippines. Most recently with the development of the Sapphire Marketplace (shopping centre) there has been a visible increase in migrants moving to the area to work at the centre.

THE SOCIAL ISSUES

Support & Services

People from CALD backgrounds can experience social and cultural barriers in accessing local services and facilities. A need has been identified in the Shire to provide supportive assistance.
Australia’s Multicultural Policy States:

"Australia’s multicultural composition is at the heart of our national identity and is intrinsic to our history and character."  

with information and navigation of services, such as health, education, employment and government services. There is an opportunity to develop a Local Resource Guide for newly arrived migrants and refugees.

Language

Language barriers can be a major problem for people from CALD backgrounds. Not being able to communicate with people can make people feel isolated from their communities, as well as affecting employment opportunities.

One of the principles of multiculturalism in NSW is that individuals and organisations need to make provisions for the culture, language and religion of others. However, consultations and anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a lack of localised translated information. Furthermore, there is a lack of awareness of national interpreting services available to the CALD community in the Bega Valley.

Transport

The lack of affordable transport is a concern for the broader community but is magnified for some in the CALD community due to language barriers, lack of driving experience and financial constraints. Insufficient transportation can increase an individual’s feeling of social isolation. People can become more isolated in the Bega Valley community than other communities due to the spread of townships. There is a need to have access to a car or public transport to enable people to be actively engaged in the community. However, bus routes and timetable are limited and often not affordable options for daily use.

Accessing shops and services in the Shire is difficult for people who do not live in close proximity to the major towns in the Shire. A need has been identified to support the CALD community with the cost of driving lessons. Opportunities for migrants and refugees to get driving experience is a priority for people to be able to obtain their Australian driving licence and in turn gain greater independence.

Employment, Education & Training

Consultations have identified that there needs to be increased opportunities in the areas of employment, education, career pathways, apprenticeships, traineeships and work experience.
**STRENGTHS IN THE BEGA VALLEY**

A diverse community brings many social benefits to our Shire. Evidence suggests that migrants to Australia have made significant contributions to Australia’s social capital. Migration has brought new skills, business and investment into the broader community and assists in developing relationships with other countries.

A small number of services have been established to work with migrants and refugees in the Bega Valley. The Bega Valley Migrant & Multicultural Support Service was established to work with and support new arrivals.

Sanctuary Australia Foundation is an organisation that provides a range of support services for refugees. Locally, Sanctuary is looking at providing support to migrants as well as refugees, in recognition of the larger number of migrants compared to refugees in the Shire. Currently TAFE NSW runs an ESL (English as a second language) class at Bega for migrants.

The need for culturally appropriate social interaction was identified during consultations as a key aspect of feeling a sense of place in the community. In response the Bega Valley Migrant Social (BVMS) group was formed in early 2011.

The BVMS group offers support for migrants and refugees living in the Shire and an opportunity to celebrate cultural diversity, meet new people, organise activities and events and get involved in the community.

**Diverse Foods & Ingredients**

Accessing a diverse range of foods in the Bega Valley is difficult for people from CALD backgrounds. There is a lack of Halal butchers and international grocery stores in the area. Sourcing and accessing a diverse range of foods and ingredients for traditional cooking is problematic for people from CALD backgrounds.

**THE CONSTRAINTS**

Living in the Bega Valley Shire can be an isolating experience for some migrants and refugees. There is a broad range of cultural groups in the Shire, however there are very few members in each cultural group.

Cultural isolation can become problematic when there are limited opportunities to speak with other people with similar backgrounds.
backgrounds, cultural and religious beliefs. While the numbers of migrants and refugees in the Bega Valley Shire are relatively small this doesn’t diminish the impact of limited access to support services for people from CALD backgrounds.

**THE OPPORTUNITIES**

There are opportunities for organisations working with people from CALD backgrounds to investigate options for an increased availability of culturally specific produce. For example, discussions could commence with local business around options for increasing local availability of culturally specific foods and ingredients. Another opportunity is to facilitate shopping trips to Canberra to access specialty foods. People from CALD backgrounds also tend to have limited access to, and ownership of land and animals. There is an opportunity to develop partnerships between established community gardens across the Shire and the multicultural community. This would provide an opportunity to grow a diverse range of fresh fruit and vegetables.

There are opportunities to address issues around social inclusion by undertaking a range of other activities. For example, trips to Canberra to source food could be combined to include visits to religious and cultural activities and events for people who are isolated from their communities. Likewise, becoming involved in community gardens could help promote social interaction with the broader community.

There is an opportunity to develop a type of language bank, which would act as a repository of information. The language bank would include a list of people and the languages they speak. New arrivals in the Shire would be able to access the language bank and connect with local people who speak the same language.
Consultations have identified that migrant and refugees require assistance in developing small business opportunities. There is an opportunity for organisations working with people from CALD backgrounds, to identify and use their existing skills to start up small businesses. Partnerships could also be developed with existing organisations, businesses, schools and the CALD community.

Further opportunities include working with the local community college to run courses based on a profession or cultural expertise. For example, Thai cuisine cooking classes, language classes or traditional crafts.

Reference


PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

AUSTRALIA INCORPORATED (PWD) HAVE A VISION OF:

“a socially just, accessible and inclusive community, in which the human rights, citizenship, contribution, potential and diversity of all people with disability are respected and celebrated.”

OVERVIEW

“People with a disability” is a term that includes many people in our community who live with a wide range of disability types, including physical, sensory and intellectual.

People with disabilities have a desire for the same opportunities as most people, which is to regularly participate in community life. This includes having access to meaningful health care, recreation, housing, education for life and stimulating employment opportunities. Furthermore people with disabilities have strong connections with their families and carers.

People with disabilities may find it harder to undertake day to day activities. In events such as the Paralympics and Special Olympics some people with disabilities can demonstrate that through determination and commitment they reach their personal best, become elite athletes and inspire many Australians.
An inclusive community is vital for people with disabilities to function as valuable members of society.

IN THE BEGA VALLEY

Bega Valley Shire’s disability statistics relate directly to need for assistance due to a severe or profound disability. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Bega Valley Community Profile.

1,816 people or 5.7% of the population in Bega Valley Shire report needing help in their day-to-day lives due to disability.²

These disability statistics help in understanding the prevalence of people who need support in the community, and along with information on unpaid care to a person with a disability, how that support is provided. It should be noted that many people living with a disability may not indicate a need for assistance and as such may not be captured in these figures.

Analysis of the need for assistance of persons in Bega Valley Shire compared to regional NSW shows that there was a similar proportion of persons who reported needing assistance with core activities.

Overall, 5.7% of the population reported needing assistance with core activities, compared with 5.8% for regional NSW. However, for the 65 and over age group, the need for assistance is greater in the Bega Valley than regional NSW as a whole. This is consistent with our ageing population. There was also an increase in the need for assistance for people under the age of 65 from the last census.

In Bega Valley Shire there are 3,403 carers providing unpaid assistance to a person with a disability, long term illness or old age.³

The proportion of carers providing unpaid care for older people and people with disabilities can be an important indicator of the level of demand for care services.
and facilities. An increasing proportion of carers among the population may indicate inadequate care provision or the need for in-home support, or support for themselves.

THE CHANGES

The National Standards for Disability Services are being revised during a period of significant reform for disability services in Australia.

In the 2011 report to the Australian Government, the Productivity Commission found that the current disability system is underfunded, unfair, fragmented and inefficient. The report recommended the establishment of a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

The implementation of the NDIS will significantly change the way that people with a disability access supports and services in Australia. It aims for people to have the opportunity to participate actively in their communities by providing targeted supports aligned to individual need.4

As part of the National Health Reforms in 2011, Governments divided the responsibility for aged and disability program funding and operations. From July 2012 the State Government funds services for people with a disability and the Federal Government fund services for people over 65 years.

The Person Centred approach underpins these reforms and according to the NSW Government (Family and Community Services) is focused on enabling people with a disability to identify and realise their goals and aspirations. It is not designed around the specialist disability supports and services that the government funds.

The focus is about first connecting people with supports offered in their community – through their informal networks (family and friends), the mainstream service system (education, public transport and health) and by other providers (such as, family support services).5

Many local community organisations receive funding to deliver Home and Community Care (HACC) programs that assist people with disabilities and older people to live independently in the community. Whilst supported in principle, these changes have created a level of uncertainty within the community sector. The introduction of individualised funding may have implications for service delivery in the Bega Valley.
A number of families, services and children with disabilities have requested an accessible inclusive playground in the Bega Valley. This would be an opportunity to address social inclusion, physical activity and social connection for children with a disability and their families.

**Access to Information and Services**

People with disabilities have indicated difficulties navigating their way through the service system to access services such as health, education and employment.

Access to specialist support services, such as paediatricians, speech pathologists, occupational therapist and clinical psychologists is limited. The practice of visiting medical specialists, such as paediatricians, makes it difficult for people to access these types of services at short notice.

Transport is a major barrier. Accessing specialists in Canberra can be stressful, expensive and disjointed for the family and child with additional needs. Similar difficulties are experienced within the Bega Valley Shire for families located in outlying areas.

Disability service providers in the Bega Valley have highlighted a number of gaps in service provision. More respite is needed for people caring for younger children and family members with a disability or mental health issues.

According to local service providers, isolated older men with intellectual disabilities are currently in need of additional social support and independent living skills to improve their quality of life in the Bega Valley Shire.

A need for an Interagency for additional networking, support, information and collaboration within service provision has also been identified.

**THE SOCIAL ISSUES**

**Infrastructure and Accessibility**

Consultations undertaken with the community indicated there was a need to improve the physical access to the built environment. This includes streetscapes, Council facilities and public access buildings across the Bega Valley Shire.

The importance of achieving a connected path of travel or pedestrian network to improve the accessibility in the Bega Valley Shire is critical for people with disabilities. This promotes participation and independence and therefore equality.

Many pathways are difficult to negotiate as they are either too steep, have no kerb ramps or are unsuitable for wheelchairs and people with vision impairments.

There is limited or no use of Tactile Ground Surface Indicators and Braille signage throughout the Bega Valley. This presents barriers for people with vision impairments to live independently with safety.

It has been identified that there is also a need to address equity in the playground.
Employment & Education

People with disabilities also value increased meaningful opportunities in education and employment, for example, in career pathways, apprenticeships, and traineeships.

Research shows that in December 2005 there were 499,000 disability support pensioners (DSP) in Australia and by 2007 this grew to 723,424. Just over 2% (16,894 people) were able to find paid employment and move from government pensions.⁶

There are a wide range of barriers for people with physical disabilities and those with mental illnesses to gain and maintain employment. A lack of transport options, availability of carers, lack of accessible workplaces and employer attitudes are some of those barriers.

Transport

Consultations with people with disabilities and their carers have identified that transport is still an issue in the area. The dispersed pattern of settlement and distances between towns creates difficulties for people with a disability who do not have a driving license, or who are unable to drive. The local bus companies have increased their accessible fleet over the last few years however, the timetables for these buses are limited. Accessible taxis provide service within school hours, on evenings and weekends, however cost and distances needed to be travelled at times are an issue.

Community Transport provides an important service to its target group, particularly for medical appointments. However limited resources and the reliance on volunteers restricts its capacity to meet the needs of the community for after hours and weekend transport.

Lack of transport increases social isolation for people located outside of major townships.

Community Housing

There is a need for independent and shared accessible housing for people with disabilities to actively participate in community life. Several disability services provide supported accommodation options. However, consultations suggest there is a lack of flexibility and identified funding to adequately meet the needs of people with disabilities and their carers.

Health

“These findings indicate the need to better understand and address the impact of social and economic factors on the health of people with disabilities. The prevalence of physical long-term health conditions was higher for people with both mental health problems and severe or profound disability than for those with mental health problems but no disability.” ⁷

Disability service providers have indicated over the last five years there has been an increase in people presenting with mental health issues across the Bega Valley. This is further compounded by the prevalence of drug and alcohol use...
problems. People with mental health issues have a higher rate of alcohol and drug use than the general community.

Women with disabilities are more vulnerable to violence and often have fewer pathways to appropriate support or options to escape violence particularly when perpetrated by partners and/or carers.8

STRENGTHS IN THE BEGA VALLEY

There is a general acceptance for people with disabilities to be socially included in the Bega Valley. Most people have a connection to someone with a disability due to the nature of our small community. This environment has encouraged several services, preschools, schools and businesses to develop a commitment to social inclusion and equal opportunity.

There is a network of disability service providers across the Bega Valley working in the areas of accommodation support, employment/training, respite, early intervention, advocacy and community access. These organisations in the Bega Valley are strong advocates and have a commitment to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities and their families.

There is also a history of innovative programs for people with a disability, such as International Day of People with a Disability celebrations and the Art in the Garage Project, which demonstrates the value people with disabilities bring to the broader community. The Art in the Garage Project provides a safe and supportive environment for artists with a disability to foster unique creative artwork with the support of talented artists.

In 2011 the Community Connections Program within Workability was enhanced and has increased social inclusion and independent living options for people with disability. This program funding aimed to address the long term gap in local service delivery.
THE CONSTRAINTS

ACCORDING TO SHUT OUT: THE EXPERIENCE OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES IN AUSTRALIA:

“Many people with disabilities said they face a constant struggle to obtain what the rest of the community would consider to be an ordinary life. They do not want special treatment—they just want the barriers removed so they can get on with living.”

In the Bega Valley Shire there is limited choice for people with disabilities and their families for employment, care options, respite, transport and health services.

It is a relatively isolated rural community, with a large geographical spread of small towns. Small rural towns are often more affordable and therefore people with disabilities and their families choose to live in these areas. The distance to travel to town is a constraint if people live on a rural property. This may increase social isolation and cause some challenges for care and transport.

There are physical barriers accessing some essential services such as banks, newsagencies, shops and doctor’s surgeries in all the major towns. This lack of access into public buildings reduces participation and independence for people with disabilities and their families.

Limiting access or placing unnecessary barriers within the community can create or reinforce this social isolation.

THE OPPORTUNITIES

The major reforms outlined earlier aim to provide people with a disability, their families and carers, with greater choice and control over their support and service arrangements.

This provides an opportunity to enhance services in the area and to gain financial support targeted at best practice models that work for people with disabilities and their families.

This enabling approach allows more flexibility for people with a disability to work collaboratively with people in the community to make these goals a reality. Consequently this will build personal confidence, self esteem and social connections in the community.

From July 2011 children with certain disabilities have access to funding and new Medicare items under the new Better Start for Children with Disability initiative provided by the Federal Government. Families of children with disabilities can access additional funding for early intervention services.

The Regional Hospital in Bega is an excellent opportunity coming to the Bega Valley for many residents in 2016. It is expected that this will improve access to health services for people with disabilities and their families in the future.
References

The NSW Men’s Health Plan 2009–2012 states that:

“Not only do men (and women) experience life differently, but they think, perceive, react, respond, and communicate differently about their life, and their health.”

OVERVIEW

The roles and expectations of men have been changing over the last 50 years. They are certainly more aware of their role in the family unit and are becoming more aware of their own health and wellbeing. However, men generally are less confident expressing their emotions and still less likely than women to discuss and care for their physical and mental health.

Over time there has been a growing recognition that men as a group have their own way of dealing with life’s challenges and as such require a different approach to addressing the social issues that men as a group face.

The wellbeing of men is impacted by all aspects of life, including their family, social, work, income and living circumstances.
IN THE BEGA VALLEY

Men are 49.1% of the population in the Bega Valley, this means that there are approximately 15,684 men in the local government area. 21% of the male population in the Shire are men aged 65 years and over. Men also make up 50.9% of the Bega Valley workforce.

In the Bega Valley family breakdown has been identified as a key issue for men. 14.9% of families in the Shire are single parent families and men account for only 21% of these single parent households.

THE CHANGES

In 2010 the Federal Government released the first Australian National Male Health Policy. The policy recognises that men have unique health needs and should be given health information in a way that they can relate to. One of the priority areas of the policy is to ensure that health care and wellbeing services are tailored to the needs of men.

There are growing expectations that men will play a larger role in the family unit and while this has been welcomed by many men it brings its own set of pressures. Pro-active services may be able to support men in their role within the family.

The Australian Men’s Shed Association has been a significant initiative for men across Australia. The Men’s Shed movement offers an environment that promotes social inclusion by providing a place where men can work on meaningful projects.

There are now 650 sheds around Australia with an involvement of around 125,000 people and employing seven full time staff. Men’s Sheds in the Bega Valley have gathered momentum across the Shire over the past five years, with new Sheds in Bega, Bermagui, Eden and Merimbula. Men’s Sheds have proven to be a great resource, particularly for older men. Their capacity to address issues of isolation and provide education on a range of issues is of great benefit to men across the Shire. It is understood that some Men’s Sheds have also been involved in mentoring young people.

THE SOCIAL ISSUES

Mental Health

Mental health is a significant issue for men in the Shire. A recent NSW Health Survey has indicated that 11% of men in the Southern NSW Local Health District were experiencing high or very high psychological distress.

Suicide remains a major issue for young men in our community. Nationally, male suicides continue to outnumber female suicides. In 2010 male suicide accounted for over three-quarters of all suicide deaths in Australia.

In many cases unemployment and family breakdown results in stress and depression. While mental health and counselling services do exist, they are often not tailored to the needs of men and men tend not to readily access them.
Family Breakdown

It is understood that cultural stereotypes about the roles of parents can make it even harder for men to access flexible work conditions. Many men feel pressure that they are expected to be the primary breadwinner, and like women, find balancing work and family responsibilities difficult. Men also believe that long work hours prevent them from spending time with their families.8

A lack of appropriate support services has meant that many men have been left to cope alone with the impacts of separation and divorce. Specialist counselling services for men experiencing family breakdown has been identified as a need in the Shire.

It was felt that specialist intervention was needed for men experiencing family breakdown, possibly including issues around domestic violence. This counselling was seen as being especially critical in the first 48 hours of family breakdown. Furthermore there is a lack of crisis accommodation for men in the Shire, the closest being Canberra or Nowra. This can lead to homelessness, which some men experience after leaving the family home, and further exacerbate feelings of isolation.

Domestic Violence

The research indicates that men are overwhelmingly identified as the perpetrators of domestic violence. The incidence of domestic and sexual violence is unlikely to be eradicated without well-resource programs that attempt to change the behaviour of men who commit these crimes.

Services for men must be part of a holistic approach to ending violence against women. Working with perpetrators to end their violent behaviour as well as ensuring the safety and support of victims is required.

However, there are currently no programs aimed at behaviour modification available in the Shire. This limits the sentencing and treatment options for those who commit or threaten acts of violence.

As Aboriginal women and children are over-represented as victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, responses developed must include specific strategies which ensure cultural relevance and inclusiveness for Aboriginal men.

The perpetrators of domestic violence and sexual assault are often men. However, the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research has identified that 18% of perpetrators are women and 28.9% of victims are men.9 Appropriate resources are needed to address domestic violence where the victims are men.

HEALTH

THE NSW GOVERNMENT, THROUGH THE NSW MEN’S HEALTH PLAN: “recognises that in order to improve the health of the community generally, it is important to improve the health of men (and boys)……. Health services need to find more positive and effective ways to reach and engage with men, especially those with the poorest health, so that all men and boys have the best opportunity to reach and maintain optimal health.” 10

Factors such as isolation, age, work and socio-economic status, along with other facets of an individual’s social identity, have a powerful influence on men’s capacity to achieve and maintain good health.

Men, as a group, experience poorer health and have shorter average life expectancies than do women. Men have higher rates of mortality and morbidity in mental health, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, injuries and cancer. Men access health services at a lower rate than women, and have fewer visits to hospital. However, their stays in hospital are longer and interventions are more intensive and costly.11

All community and health services need to consider the particular needs of specific groups of men and boys in planning the delivery of community and health services. Targeted
interventions for those groups of males most at risk of poor health may be required.\textsuperscript{12}

**Target groups would include:**

- Aboriginal males
- Older men (particularly those with cancer, cardio-vascular disease or chronic diseases)
- Men from low socio-economic backgrounds
- Men experiencing family breakdown and social isolation
- Young men
- Refugees and males from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds

It is understood that men living outside of major cities are more likely to smoke and engage in high-risk alcohol use. Head and neck cancers and lip cancers are two groups of cancers that have a higher incidence outside of major cities. These cancers are associated with increased smoking and alcohol consumption.\textsuperscript{13}

A concerning statistic from the NSW Population Health Survey is that 15.4\% of men in the Southern NSW LHD (compared to 8.3\% of men in NSW) have been told by a doctor or hospital that they have diabetes or high blood glucose levels.\textsuperscript{14}

**Isolation**

Social, geographic and financial isolation have been raised as significant issues for men in the Bega Valley. Isolation is a considerable factor in discussions about depression, suicide, health, and family issues. Social isolation often leads people to seek company and as there are little alternatives for men in the Shire they often end up at the hotels and clubs. This can lead to other problems such as alcohol and gambling abuse.

There is a need to engage young men within the Shire in appropriate community groups. Anecdotal evidence suggests that younger men may be at risk of becoming isolated, in part due to a lack of employment opportunities for some young men in the Shire.

**ACCORDING TO THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF HEALTH AND WELFARE (AIHW):**

“There is increasing awareness that males and females have distinct health needs and concerns related to their gender and biological sex. This is illustrated by different rates of injury, illness and mortality; different attitudes towards health and other risks; and the way each group uses, or does not use, health services. In many (but not all) areas of health, Australia’s males have poorer outcomes than their female counterparts.” \textsuperscript{15}
A specific problem that has been identified in the Shire is in relation to the particular problems facing older farming men and male retirees. Support for older men has been identified as a need in the Shire, in particular assistance with housekeeping after a fall or illness or after the death of spouse.

**Sexuality**

There are a number of gay men that reside in the Bega Valley community. At a local level the lack of access to specific services, homophobia and the extraordinary pressures on young men coming out in a rural area are the significant issues.

Whilst sexuality is a defining factor for many gay men they also face similar issues as other men, parents, people with disabilities and young people.

**STRENGTHS IN THE BEGA VALLEY**

The growth of the Men’s Shed movement in the Bega Valley has been a positive development in the Shire. Men’s Sheds offer a supportive environment for men to undertake a range of activities and at the same time they hope to improve the wellbeing and health of their members.\(^\text{16}\)

It is beneficial to expand the capacity and number of Men’s Sheds across the Shire. Continuing to support the Men’s Shed program and promoting participation in the program may be beneficial in addressing a range of social issues. Organisations may be able to work in collaboration with Men’s Sheds to address issues around isolation and family breakdown, as well as providing health promotion and education programs.

“Men don’t talk face to face they talk shoulder to shoulder.” \(^\text{17}\)

**THE CONSTRAINTS**

Whilst the Men’s Shed movement is an effective social opportunity for older men, it is not the preferred option for younger men in the Shire. There is a significant gap for men in the 30 to 50 year age group and they are at particular risk of social isolation. At present Men’s Sheds are about the only support service for men in the Shire.

Mental health, family breakdown and domestic violence have all been identified as social issues for men in the Shire. However, targeted services for men are limited and a need has been identified for additional mental health services in the area. In particular, more experienced and qualified mental health professionals, including psychologists and social workers are needed.

Men in regional and remote areas of Australia may have health benefits because
they do not live in the major cities. However, they may also face other health issues because of their location, work, lifestyle and lack of access to support services.

Many occupations in rural and remote Australia involve using heavy machinery and working with chemicals. There are often long shifts, lone workers and more risks involved with their commute to work because of longer distances to travel and higher speed limits.¹⁸

THE OPPORTUNITIES

The development of a resource centre for men in the Bega Valley is seen as an opportunity. Such a resource centre could provide support, information and referral services. Support services for men and their families is an area that requires further development and is presently an area of unmet need. A resource centre for men has been discussed during consultations as a positive way of supporting men and their families.

Consideration could also be given to finding avenues for promoting and encouraging positive images of men. Men have an influential and valuable role in our community as fathers, partners, sons, community members and mates.

There is an opportunity to establish a forum for the various organisations and community groups that are involved in men’s issues. Developing and participating in networks that address issues for men is important and has been raised as a need during consultations. The role of the forum would be to provide an avenue for organisations to get together, discuss and collectively take action to address issues affecting men.

Organisations involved in providing health and community services for men in the Shire could benefit from continuing to develop partnerships with State and Federal Governments where possible. This is seen as an opportunity to build the capacity of the health and community sector in the Shire to respond in a meaningful way to the needs of men.

There is an opportunity to engage in a dialogue with the Southern NSW Local Health District around men’s health issues. Health services that are flexible and targeted specifically at men, including after hours services for men in full time employment are required. There is an opportunity to establish a men’s health service that operates out of normal working hours, to specifically address the health needs of men. Providing health services in settings such as workplaces, social and sporting clubs and recreational venues may be an effective way of engaging men.¹⁹

The continued support of the Cancer Support Network to promote better cancer awareness, early detection and intervention for men is seen as an important opportunity.
References


17. Professor Barry Golding, 2nd National Men’s Shed Conference 2007 Professor Barry Golding, www.mensshed.org


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SOCIAL ISSUES PAPERS
This document is part of a broader Social Issues Paper produced by the Bega Valley Shire Council. To read the document in its’ entirety go to www.begavalley.nsw.gov.au

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OVERVIEW

ACCORING TO THE MINISTER FOR AGEING:
“Australia’s population is ageing. This presents both challenges and opportunities that will lead to changes for individuals and communities. The significant demographic shift will affect the way we deliver services, design our homes, cities and towns, plan our transport and develop our workforce.”

In almost every country the proportion of people over 60 is growing faster than any other age group, as a result of both longer life expectancy and declining fertility rates. Successful public health programs around the world and socio economic development have been contributing factors, which support improved health, independence and social participation.

Active ageing is the process of optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age.
For COTA (Council of the Ageing) ‘active’ ageing means participating in the full range of social, economic, cultural, spiritual and civic affairs, as well as being physically active.

Youth is a wonderful thing. What a crime to waste it on children.
~ George Bernard Shaw

IN THE BEGA VALLEY

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2011 Census and the Bega Valley Community Profile, the Shire has a high proportion of older people compared to the NSW average. 29.9% of people are 60 years and over, compared with 23.6% and 24.5% respectively for regional NSW.

Bega Valley is ranked 29 amongst the 152 local government areas in NSW in terms of its proportion of people aged 65+. It is ranked 67 in terms of its proportion of people aged 85+.

There are 5617 people aged between 50-59 yrs, 4889 between 60-69 yrs, 3874 between 70-84 yrs and 797 frail older people living in the Bega Valley Shire.

The most significant changes between 2006 and 2011 has been in the Empty nesters and retirees age group (60-69yrs) there was an increase of 929 persons, Older workers & pre-retirees (50-59) increased by 644 persons and Seniors (70-84) by 514 persons.

There has been an overall increase in residents of the Bega Valley Shire aged 55+ to 12,351. This is associated with the re-location to the Bega Valley of large numbers of retired people, particularly from Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra and other parts of NSW.

The population of older people is dispersed throughout the Bega Valley Shire. Over 16% of those aged 55+ live in Bega, about 49% live in the coastal towns of Eden, Merimbula, Pambula, Tura Beach and Bermagui, and over 34% live in the small towns, rural areas and other locations in the Shire. This pattern of settlement creates challenges for the delivery of services to older people.

The proportion of older people is particularly high in some of the coastal towns. For instance 49% of the population of Tura Beach is aged 55+, followed by Bermagui (43%) and Merimbula (nearly 41%).

There are 103 Indigenous residents aged 55+, representing just 11% of the Aboriginal population. These people experience particular disadvantage in accessing health, housing and aged care services.

Other groups with special needs include the small number of older residents from non-English speaking backgrounds (primarily Germany and the Netherlands), and older people living permanently in caravans and cabins. In 2006, 40.8% of people aged 75 and over in the Bega Valley reported that they required assistance with activities of daily life, compared to 43.3% in NSW as a whole.
Both the number and proportion of older people are likely to increase markedly in the Bega Valley over the next two decades. By 2026, numbers of people aged 55+ within the Bega Valley Shire are expected to increase to 17,696. As a proportion of the total population of the Bega Valley Shire, this age group will grow to 45.7% in 2026. Over the 20 year period to 2026, those aged 75+ will more than double from 2,559 to 5,150 people. Those aged 85+ will also more than double from 602 to 1305 people.

THE CHANGES

As part of the National Health Reforms in 2011, the NSW Government agreed to a divide in the responsibility for aged and disability program funding and operations. From July 2012 the State Government fund services for people with a disability and the Commonwealth Government fund services for people over 65 years.

The introduction of self directed funded packages might have implications for service delivery in the Bega Valley.

Many local community organisations receive funding to deliver Home and Community Care (HACC) programs that assist people with disabilities and older people to live independently in the community. Following these recent changes there appears to be a level of uncertainty within the community sector.

In April 2012, the Federal Government presented reforms to the aged care system. The Living Longer Living Better aged care reform package provided $3.7 billion over five years. The commencement of the 10-year reform program aims to create a flexible system that provides older Australians with more choice, control and easier access to a full range of services.

In 2011, there were an estimated 298,000 Australians with dementia. This number is expected to increase markedly over time, with projections suggesting it will reach around 400,000 by 2020 and 900,000 by 2050. Dementia is a leading cause of death,
accounting for 6% of all deaths in 2010. Total direct health and aged care services expenditure on people with dementia was at least $4.9 billion in 2009-10.5

THE SOCIAL ISSUES

Consultations were held in 2011 with older people and relevant service providers to develop the Bega Valley Shire Council’s Ageing Strategy. The following information has been identified from this Ageing Strategy.

Access to Health and Home Support Services

Resources for health and aged care services are allocated by State and Federal Government programs through population needs based formulae. This means that funding for services should increase in proportion to increases in the number of older people living in the Bega Valley Shire.

However, this is dependent on the total pool of funding available for health and aged care increasing as the total population increases. To date, Government funding has not always kept pace with population growth and demographic change.

Moreover, there is commonly a time lag between population increases, funding increases to a given area, and the delivery of services on the ground.

The progress of the new regional hospital is a welcome one, it has now moved into the development application stage with a view to be operational in 2016. There is still a level of concern from parts of the community about the future of the Pambula Hospital and at what level it will operate once the regional hospital is completed.

A key concern of older residents was their access to health and community services. Older people want access to support services which promote their independence and well-being and which enable them to continue to live in their own home in the community for as long as possible.

There is also a lack of awareness and information about what is available. Many older people are not aware of the opportunities that exist and do not know where to seek such information.

A range of HACC type services, including transport, home care and case management are operating across the Bega Valley to help people stay in their homes longer. However, these services are unable to meet the demands of older residents. Lack of appropriate resources that reflect the ageing population have resulted in many organisations limiting the services they provide or imposing lengthy waiting lists.

Older people require access to residential care services if they can no longer remain at home. The aged care sector has a number of facilities operating across the Bega Valley Shire for high and low care clients. There are also a number of self care facilities available.

The need for palliative care and a transitional care facility within the Bega Valley for older people returning from major surgery in Canberra or Sydney was identified during the consultations.

There is a need to expand the range of community care packages available, such as Community Aged Care Packages (CACP), Extended Aged Care at Home (EACH) and EACH Dementia packages. Transitional Restorative Aged Care Packages are also provided by Community Health for over 65yr olds.

The 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.

There is also unmet need for allied health care amongst older people for services such as podiatry and dentistry. Furthermore, the need for more preventive health/healthy ageing programs has also been identified by the community. Innovative programs, such as the University of Canberra’s Mobile Student Led Clinic is
Older people attracted to the retirement lifestyle of the Bega Valley Shire often find that access to health and support services is more constrained than they have experienced in the city.

There is a need for information for older people moving to the Bega Valley Shire to enable them to develop more realistic expectations about their likely access to services. This is especially the case if they choose to live in rural and more remote parts of the Shire which cannot be readily reached by community care services.

Isolation

Social isolation can be a problem for older people living outside the towns and in the more remote parts of the Bega Valley Shire. The dispersed pattern of settlement and distances between towns creates difficulties for older people. In particular, accessing activities and programs is difficult for those without a car, who do not have a driving license or who cease to drive as they get older. There are no scheduled public bus services to many parts of the Bega Valley Shire.

Public transport services are limited throughout the Bega Valley Shire, constraining access to services and facilities for many older people. Lack of public transport can be a key barrier for older people wanting to lead active and independent lives. Community buses are very popular, but limited both in their reach and frequency due to resources and volunteer capacity. There is a need for Community Transport to operate more frequently on weekends for older people in the Bega Valley.

The Built Environment and Infrastructure

The physical environment of neighbourhoods and town centres is important in supporting older people to remain living at home and to continue to participate in their communities. As well as appropriate housing, older people require an environment which is safe, secure and provides easy access to services, facilities and transport. This is important so that older people can get out and about, remain full and active members of the community and live independently.

Creating Built Environments that are Age-Friendly and Which Support Active Ageing Involves Providing:

- environments that encourage physical activity and an active lifestyle, by making it safe, attractive and enjoyable for people to walk around their area using a continuous accessible path of travel
- easy access to shops, services and facilities
- ready access to public transport services
- convenient parking for older people
- public facilities such as public toilets that are well maintained and provide universal access for all abilities
- public spaces that are accessible, safe and encourage social interaction, for instance through seating
- safe pedestrian and driving environments
The topography and layout of many communities and lack of footpaths are not conducive to walking with easy pedestrian access to shops and services.

Much of the public infrastructure in the Bega Valley Shire is ageing and does not provide appropriate access for older people. Accessible public toilets, appropriate seating in public spaces and convenient parking, especially in peak holiday times, are particular issues for older people.

**Employment, Volunteering and Participation in Community Life**

Positive ageing requires that older people feel that the knowledge, skills and wisdom that they have acquired are recognised and utilised and that they are valued and respected members of the community. This requires consideration of social attitudes towards older people and the opportunities available to them to participate in, and contribute to the life of the community.

Participation in learning, employment, volunteer activities and community events provides opportunities to be involved in meaningful activity and productive social roles in the community. This is important in enabling older people to maintain a sense of purpose, identity, self-worth and to contribute and feel valued for their skills and experience.

**Housing**

Within the Bega Valley Shire in 2011, 82.9% of dwellings were separate houses, 6.8% were semis or townhouses, 8.3% were flats or apartments and 1.9% were other dwellings, including caravans.⁶

An ageing population requires a greater diversity of housing types. It is important to provide greater choice to older people and ensure that their housing needs can be met within the communities where they live, with familiar shops and services and established social networks.

The lack of smaller, medium density forms of housing in the Bega Valley Shire, located with ready access to shops, services and public transport, will become a key issue. This may be more problematic as the number of older people living in the Shire increases and as older people can no longer manage farms and larger lifestyle blocks.

There is a need to encourage the provision of more accessible and adaptable housing suited to the needs of older residents, including needs for reduced house and garden maintenance.

Safety in and around the home is a further issue of concern for older people. Removing hazards that may cause accidents, implementing falls prevention programs and ensuring homes are fitted with smoke detectors or personal alarm systems are ways in which the safety of older people in their homes can be enhanced.

Rates of home ownership amongst older people in Bega Valley are high, providing them with a substantial asset which can be
used to buy into a retirement village or aged care facilities if desired. Home ownership also means low housing costs for people on limited incomes, many of whom can be described as “asset rich but income poor”.

In contrast, the small proportion of older people who are renters experience high housing costs, low incomes and lack choices to move as their accommodation needs change.

**STRENGTHS IN THE BEGA VALLEY**

The nature of small communities’ means that the level of neighbour support, sense of belonging and social interaction tends to be high. This reduces problems associated with social isolation for those people living in the major townships.

Council and many community organisations play a key role in creating supportive communities for older people. Programs operating in the Bega Valley Shire include Ricky’s Place, Meals on Wheels social support groups, the shopping bus service, Alzheimer Australia mobile respite team, community health social groups and many more.

The Country Women’s Association, Probus, U3A, Seniors Citizen Clubs, View Clubs, Men’s Shed, Bowling Clubs, Garden Clubs, Rotary and Lions are also engaging older people in the Bega Valley Shire with interesting activities and friendships.

Participation in social, cultural, leisure and recreational activities in the Bega Valley have been identified as a critical ingredient in healthy ageing. These activities promote physical activity, social contact, mental stimulation and quality of life.

As life expectancy increases and people remain healthy and active for longer, it is important to ensure that adequate and appropriate opportunities for meaningful activity are available. Activities need to reflect the diversity of interests, circumstances and abilities of older people.

Within the Bega Valley there is an excellent provision of social, cultural, sporting and recreational facilities for older people. Most of these are mainstream facilities provided for the whole community, and include spaces for performing and visual arts, libraries, community centres and halls, swimming pools, parks and sporting facilities.

The Bega Valley Shire does not have significant crime statistics and older people can feel reasonably secure as they move about. In most crime categories, Shire averages are lower than State averages, and statistics show that older people are much less likely to be victims of crime than younger people.

**THE CONSTRAINTS**

The Bega Valley Shire is a relatively isolated rural community, with a large geographical spread of small towns. It is situated 6.5 hours from Sydney, 3 hours from Canberra and 7 hours from Melbourne. There is limited choice for older people with accommodation, care options, shopping, transport and health services due to the geographically dispersed population.

The inability to drive long distances to travel into town is a constraint for older people living on rural properties or outside the main towns. This may increase social isolation and cause some challenges for education, care, health and transport issues.

Meeting the diverse expectations of older people can be an issue for retirees in the Bega Valley Shire, particularly those who have moved away from larger towns or cities. Older people must consider planning to build accessible or adaptable housing for their retirement, this would enable older people to stay in their homes longer.

**THE OPPORTUNITIES**

There are a wide range of opportunities to participate in varied social, leisure, recreational and cultural activities for older people within the Bega Valley Shire. Recreation opportunities associated
with the Shire’s beaches, lakes, national parks and other open space support an active lifestyle (at little or no cost).

Balancing the needs of older people with other groups within the community is essential. Similarly important is the need to respond to increasing demands for appropriate services and facilities to support older people to remain healthy, active and independent.

The airport and associated air links to Sydney and Melbourne are highly valued. This enables older people to stay in touch with families and friends in the cities however, these services are too expensive for many to use.

Partnerships involving all levels of government, community and the private sector may ensure the Bega Valley provides a supportive community for quality ageing. This collaborative approach can play a key role in enabling older people to remain living at home in the community and to

In a dream you are never eighty.
~Anne Sexton

age in place, rather than having to move to institutional care or leave the Bega Valley Shire as their needs change.
References


3. World Health Organisation, Ageing 2012 www.who.int/topics/ageing


Further Reading

“Rural women make a very valuable contribution to the social and economic fabric of communities across the nation. They run businesses and farms, take on leadership roles, drive sustainability and innovation across primary industry sectors, ensure the wellbeing of families and communities, build strong networks and take part in everything from disaster response to volunteer work”.

OVERVIEW

Women continue to influence and shape society, their roles have evolved and changed in the past 40 years and their contribution to the success of Australia have been prominent. Women’s rights and gender equality has enabled many women to reach their potential.

The Bega Valley Shire has a strong network of women working in small business and other leadership positions. Women are also undertaking professional roles in areas such as the arts, health and education. Furthermore, as a result of the 2012 Local Government election, the Bega Valley Shire Council now has 44% female representation.

However, there are still poor social justice outcomes. Lack of choices in health, education, employment and housing still limits many women from reaching their potential. Women still face unequal access to the economic resources in the community. There is a need to recognise the ongoing disadvantage many women face today.
According to the Bega Valley Community Profile, women represent 50.9% of the population. Approximately 16,266 women live in the Bega Valley Shire and they are 49.1% of the workers in the area.\(^2\)

In 2006, around 37% of NSW women lived in inner or outer regional areas, while less than 1% lived in remote or very remote areas of the state.\(^3\)

The incomes of female residents in the Bega Valley Shire remain consistently lower than men’s, resulting in a higher percentage of women living in poverty. These are factors that can contribute to mental health issues for women.

The lower income levels of women can be attributed to many factors. Women often continue in their traditional family role as the primary caregiver to children and other family members. Women tend to be over-represented in lower paying jobs and under-represented in higher paying jobs. Women are also more likely than men to be employed on a part-time or casual basis.

The female population of NSW in 2011 was 3.68 million or 50.4% of the State’s population. Aboriginal women make up 2.1% of the female population. Over a third of women 65 years and over live alone. Nearly half the women in NSW (48%) are overweight or obese.\(^5\)

Statistical data relating to Australian women in the national context shows that women in the Bega Valley Shire are more likely to be employed in retail, clerical, health care, education and community service roles.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) women in the Bega Valley Shire are likely to undertake a larger proportion of the family caring roles, and their families’ domestic work, in addition to their roles in the paid workforce. 1340 families in the Bega Valley Shire are single parent families and women account for 78% or 1045 of these single parent households.

Bega Valley Shire scores 976.9 on the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). The SEIFA measures socio-economic disadvantage and this score indicates that the Bega Valley Shire is generally more disadvantaged than the state average of 1000. This score has implications for women and their children in the Bega Valley Shire.

**IN THE BEGA VALLEY**

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The incomes of female residents in the Bega Valley Shire remain consistently lower than men’s, resulting in a higher percentage of women living in poverty. These are factors that can contribute to mental health issues for women.

The lower income levels of women can be attributed to many factors. Women often continue in their traditional family role as the primary caregiver to children and other family members. Women tend to be over-represented in lower paying jobs and under-represented in higher paying jobs. Women are also more likely than men to be employed on a part-time or casual basis.

The female population of NSW in 2011 was 3.68 million or 50.4% of the State’s population. Aboriginal women make up 2.1% of the female population. Over a third of women 65 years and over live alone. Nearly half the women in NSW (48%) are overweight or obese.\(^5\)

Statistical data relating to Australian women in the national context shows that women in the Bega Valley Shire are more likely to be employed in retail, clerical, health care, education and community service roles.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) women in the Bega Valley Shire are likely to undertake a larger proportion of the family caring roles, and their families’ domestic work, in addition to their roles in the paid workforce. 1340 families in the Bega Valley Shire are single parent families and women account for 78% or 1045 of these single parent households.

Bega Valley Shire scores 976.9 on the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). The SEIFA measures socio-economic disadvantage and this score indicates that the Bega Valley Shire is generally more disadvantaged than the state average of 1000. This score has implications for women and their children in the Bega Valley Shire.

**ACCORDING TO THE WOMEN IN NSW 2012 REPORT:**

“Women continue to volunteer in the community more than men and are still doing the bulk of the housework.” \(^4\)
THE CHANGES

The National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children 2010-2022 was the first plan from the Federal Government to coordinate action across jurisdictions and to focus strongly on prevention. This initiative looks at the long term, building respectful relationships and working to increase gender equality to prevent violence from occurring in the first place. It holds perpetrators accountable and encourages behaviour change.

A recent report to the Australian Government has advised that the cost of violence against women and their children in 2009 was around $13.6 billion. Without appropriate action this is estimated to rise by another $2 billion in the next ten years.6

A noteworthy change in Australia over the last 30 years has been in relation to women’s participation in the workforce. In particular there has been a significant increase in the proportion of women with dependent children in the workforce from 41% to 63% over the last 30 years.7

Although the rates of smoking have declined over recent years, it still remains a significant health issue. Furthermore, there are a high number of women who smoke during pregnancy. It is significantly higher for pregnant teenagers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.8

THE SOCIAL ISSUES

ACCORDING TO THE WOMEN IN NSW 2012 REPORT:

“Social customs and expectations shape the roles and attitudes of each sex, and this is reflected in the burden of disease each experiences, as well as the health-related behaviours they engage in. Women and men’s pattern of time use, their employment and working patterns, education and leisure activities, even their eating patterns, are different.”9
Isolation

In the course of the consultations held in 2012, several discussions highlighted a continuing concern of social, geographic and financial isolation for women in the Bega Valley Shire.

Social and financial isolation for women and children can be exacerbated by a lack of public transport and affordable private vehicle options. Public transport in the Bega Valley Shire is limited and expensive.

Transport options such as car-pooling are not always advisable for women and children for a number of reasons. Car-pooling can often result in women accepting rides with people who are more or less strangers, therefore increasing the potential for women and children to find themselves in vulnerable situations.

In NSW, 31% of women 65 years and over live alone and it increases to 42% for the 80-84 age group. These figures are more than double the numbers for men in the same age groups. Recent research has highlighted significant issues for isolated older women in the community.

There are a large number of active retirees moving to the Bega Valley as part of the sea/tree change phenomenon. Feedback from consultations suggests that many older women were left socially and financially isolated following the death of, or separation from their partner. It is also understood that many women out-live their husbands. The problems of isolation for older women in the Bega Valley Shire are compounded by the increase in older women as the victims of domestic violence and the lack of affordable housing suited to older/single women.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a significant issue for women and girls who remain to be the primary victims of domestic and family violence and sexual assault. Research undertaken in 2006 indicated that NSW Aboriginal women were nearly six times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to be victims of domestic violence-related assault. Furthermore, Aboriginal women were ten times more likely to be the victims of homicide than the general female population.

According to the ABS, one in three Australian women have experienced physical violence since the age of 15, and almost one in five have experienced sexual violence. In 2005, over 350,000 women experienced physical violence and over 125,000 women experienced sexual violence.

Indigenous women and girls are 35 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence related assaults than other Australian women and girls. However since 2003 there has been a decline in the rate of Aboriginal women who were victims of domestic violence.

According to the Time for Action Report:
‘Every year an unacceptable number of Australian women and children have their lives and housing circumstances disrupted because of domestic and family violence. This is an intolerable situation with significant impacts on all involved, especially children. Women in this situation are, and remain, the ‘hidden’ homeless.’

Rural communities experience higher rates of domestic and family violence.

According to the Women in NSW 2012 Report:
“The majority of violence against women and girls occurs in their homes.”
than metropolitan areas. Violence against women has increased 1.2% in the past 12 months in regional areas.\textsuperscript{16} This is a considerable increase and remains to be one of the most significant social problems facing women in rural areas.

Domestic and family violence in rural and remote areas is often more life threatening, less likely to be detected or prosecuted and more difficult to escape or end. There is a disproportionately high level of domestic homicides in rural and remote areas.

The causes of domestic violence are complex and there are a range of factors involved, including social, psychological and economical. The consequences for the victims, including children witnessing violence, are also complex and wide-ranging. It can have a negative impact on the victim's psychological, emotional and physical health.\textsuperscript{17}

In rural areas, women and children escaping domestic and family violence face increased vulnerability. This can be due to isolation, the common involvement of firearms, a shortage of legal or support services and a lack of housing options.

Health

Specific health issues that have been identified for women are compounded by a lack of services and choices. In the Bega Valley there is a lack of women’s health services and specialists, as a consequence there are minimal options for women to obtain a second opinion regarding their health concerns.

SIGNIFICANT HEALTH ISSUES THAT HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED FOR WOMEN IN AUSTRALIA INCLUDE: \textsuperscript{18}

- Anxiety and depression
- Ischaemic heart disease
- Stroke
- Type 2 Diabetes
- Dementia
- Breast Cancer

Accessing bulk billing services is difficult, as many Doctors in the Bega Valley Shire do not bulk bill. As a consequence a number of women struggle to afford the cost of basic medical services.

Improving dental services for women has been identified in consultations undertaken by Council. Many disadvantaged women have missing teeth and this is a factor in lowered self-esteem.

The rate of young women smoking is higher in the Bega Valley than the NSW average. There are also a growing number of women who are at risk of developing chronic diseases due to poor diet and little or no physical activity.

Mental Health

Mental Health issues affect many women living in the Bega Valley Shire. A recent report
indicated that 11% of women in the Southern NSW Local Health District are suffering from high and very high psychological distress.\textsuperscript{19}

The leading cause of burden of disease and injury for women in Australia is anxiety and depression.\textsuperscript{20} Positive social relationships and networks can be an effective factor in combating mental health problems.\textsuperscript{21} A significant time of vulnerability for women is during pregnancy and the postnatal period. However, the highest prevalence of mental health issues for women is during mid-life.\textsuperscript{22}

There are a range of barriers to women accessing mental health services, particularly for women who face discrimination or disadvantage. Furthermore, in rural areas there is often less direct access to specialists and services.\textsuperscript{23}

High rates of anxiety and depression are influenced by a range of social issues. The following have been identified as the main factors influencing mental health in women, most of which have been identified as significant social issues in the Bega Valley: \textsuperscript{24}

- higher levels of socioeconomic disadvantage and poverty
- lower income and lower participation in the paid workforce
- higher exposure to discrimination and harassment
- intimate partner and sexual violence
- the burden of caring responsibilities.

Education and Employment

Employment opportunities for women in the Bega Valley may be impacted by a number of issues, these include:

- lack of training opportunities
- access and equity
- limited transport options
- availability of childcare (including after school care)
- unsuitability of the required hours of work on offer
- the location of the place of work

When women undertake education and/or employment a number of factors need to be considered. In particular, access to suitable childcare arrangements is crucial. After school hours and school holiday care in the Bega Valley Shire is often challenging to access and unaffordable for some women.

“The NSW government recognises the need to increase gender equality in the workforce.”\textsuperscript{25}

Other barriers to participation and employment for women are transport and the vast distances between major centres in the Bega Valley Shire. On the whole, women in the Bega Valley Shire are less able than men to commute long distances for work.

Consultations in the Bega Valley Shire have identified a need to offer bridging courses for women. This would encourage women back to employment and/or education and at the same time help develop women’s self-confidence. Some women in the Bega Valley Shire have reported a need for support in keeping their children at school and interested in learning.

Housing

A lack of affordable and appropriate housing has been raised during consultations as a particular concern for women, either living on their own or with children. There are large distances between the various towns within the Bega Valley Shire and minimal access to affordable housing in the main centres is a significant issue. Homelessness as a result of domestic violence is a problem for many women and their children, it also seriously affects older women in the community.
Sexuality

There are a number of women in same sex relationships in the Bega Valley Shire and several of these women are parenting children. The biggest challenge these women face in Australia is the lack of marriage equality and legal recognition of same sex relationships. At a local level the lack of access to specific services, homophobia and the extraordinary pressures on young women coming out in a rural area are key issues.

Whilst sexuality is a defining factor for many lesbians they also face similar issues as other women, parents, people with disabilities and young people. It is recognised that the local area offers limited specialised support services for lesbians.

STRENGTHS IN THE BEGA VALLEY

The Bega Valley has a strong network of women working in small business and other leadership positions. The promotion of women in these types of roles across the Bega Valley Shire is vital and can be a valuable mechanism in addressing some of the barriers to participation.

There are several community groups focussed on the strengths, emotional resilience and progress of women in the Bega Valley Shire, such as the VIEW Clubs, Probus and CWA. Most surf clubs, exercise groups, art/music groups, craft events, gardening and church groups are generously supported by women who value community connections and social relationships. According to Volunteering Australia, of all the volunteer hours given by the people surveyed, 60% were given by women.26

There is a strong network of services in the Bega Valley Shire for those who have experienced domestic/family violence. Council has a leadership role in the Bega Valley community and works with local organisations to reduce violence against women and children. The Bega Valley was one of the first communities to pilot the Staying Home Leaving Violence (SHLV) service, which is auspice by the South East Women and Children’s Services. Some women accessing SHLV have recently participated in a study to assess their experiences of the service and their feedback has been positive.27 A further 22 SHLV Programs have now been rolled out across NSW.

THE CONSTRAINTS

As outlined in this paper, there are a limited number and variety of health and community services in the Bega Valley. Consultations undertaken by Council have identified the need for an expansion of information and education services and programs for women.
It is recognised that many of the existing services for women and children are under resourced, as most of these positions are only funded for two to three days per week and funding for programs is limited.

Supervised access services are often a part of access arrangements for vulnerable women who have left violent partners. This type of service is needed in the Bega Valley to enable a safe changeover of children from one parent to another. Public venues are currently being utilised, however these are not always appropriate and are unlikely to provide a supportive environment for women on an ongoing basis.

It is essential for women to have a voice in regional NSW to shape policy responses that affect them, and to promote women’s participation in decision making and leadership which is a key to change. However, the evidence indicates that leadership roles are more likely to be undertaken by men.

- “51% of local government employees are women;”
- yet only 20% of senior managers are women;
- only 7% of chief executives or general managers are women; and
- 30% of elected representatives in local government are women.”

THE OPPORTUNITIES

There is an opportunity for an innovative approach to service delivery to assist in enabling a range of community and health services to be offered in the Bega Valley Shire. An option worth consideration is the development of a large community services centre that would allow services to co-locate, therefore enabling shared resources. This model is similar to how some services are operating in Cooma and the Eurobodalla.

The co-location of services in a multi service model would provide an opportunity to share resources and allow women a single point of access. Most of the services in the Bega Valley Shire operate as standalone services and while cooperation exists it is difficult for people to navigate the system.

Programs that break down the walls of silence around domestic violence have been implemented and this type of community education and awareness should be increased. Options to build on the networks and services currently operating in the Bega Valley Shire, that address issues around domestic violence should be considered.

There are strong links between employment, economic development and lifelong learning programs. Development of a range of strategies towards improving and enhancing women’s access to employment opportunities in the Bega Valley Shire is required.

Strategies include education, training and return to work programs, as well as better access to, and availability of transport. In particular, the expansion of after school hours care and vacation care opportunities are viewed as a critical ingredient to a successful return to work.
References

26. Volunteering Australia, Do we need to understand more about women’s contribution to volunteering?, http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/html/so2_article/article_view.asp?id=2797

Version 2: February 2013
“The health and wellbeing of young people not only affects their immediate quality of life and productivity but also shapes the future health of the whole population and, in a broader social sense, the health of society.”

OVERVIEW

The term ‘young people’ in this Social Issues Paper describes people aged 12 to 24 years. This age range includes the three main stages of adolescence - early, middle and late. This a time when physical, intellectual, emotional and social changes are taking place.

THE STATE OF AUSTRALIA’S YOUNG PEOPLE REPORT STATES:

“Young people’s social participation plays a key part of their lives. Their interactions with family and friends impact on their social and emotional well-being. And young people spend considerable time socialising with friends and undertaking leisure activities like sport. They also spend their free time taking part in community activities, including volunteering. The extent to which young people become civically engaged varies, as does their commitment to certain causes, including religion.”
Similar to other regional areas, the 18-24 youth cohort is declining as a proportion of the resident population of the Bega Valley. It is acknowledged many will leave the area in pursuit of life experience, higher education or employment opportunities.

Almost all young people in Bega Valley Shire come from English-speaking backgrounds, but there is also a relatively large, and growing, number of Indigenous young people in the Shire.5

IN THE BEGA VALLEY

According to 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data there are 4,464 young people in the Bega Valley Shire, representing 14% of the population.4 The proportion of young people to the Shire’s population is significantly less than the NSW average.

There is a significant decrease in numbers in the 20–24 year age group once young people reach school leaving age. This exodus of young people was raised as an issue during consultations for this Social Issues Paper.

THE CHANGES

There have been many changes in Australia and overseas in the last 10-20 years. These social, economic, environmental and technological changes can make the transition into adulthood a complex time for young people.6

Cyber bullying is a recent phenomenon causing many problems for young people and their families. Cyber buling occurs when new technologies such as computers and mobile phones are used to harass or bully somebody. The perpetrators often use SMS, e-mail, chat rooms and Facebook to spread their message.
THE SOCIAL ISSUES

Transport

Young people are more isolated in the Bega Valley community than other communities due to the spread of townships. The need to have access to a car or public transport is important for young people in the Shire to enable them to be actively engaged in the community. Unfortunately, car ownership is too expensive for some young people. Furthermore, public transport in the Shire is very limited and not available after hours.

It is acknowledged that further work needs to be undertaken to investigate more transport and/or access solutions to reduce barriers to young people accessing education, employment and recreational opportunities within the Shire.

Education and Employment

It is understood that young people in rural and remote areas are at an educational disadvantage in terms of attainment, performance and participation when compared to young people in urban areas. It is widely known that significantly less numbers of young people reach year 12 in the Bega Valley. Both the TAFE and University offer some options to study locally, however there are limited choices for those young people who wish to continue their study in the Shire. The need to travel long distances to complete TAFE studies, particularly for trades is an issue.

Innovative programs such as the Community Training Partnerships (CTP) have emerged in the past few years developing collaborative partnerships with local industry creating and developing jobs, education and vocational training for young people. Trade training centres such as the one opened recently at Eden High School is another example of steps being taken to address this issue.

The unemployment rate for young people in the Shire is 11.9%. There is an increasing awareness of the need to improve training and employment opportunities for young people within the Bega Valley. A special focus needs to be given to supporting Indigenous young people to undertake training and employment.

Youth Housing

The lack of locally based crisis accommodation options remains to be a significant issue for young people. Some young people are forced to leave home because of conflict, violence, abuse, neglect or sexual assault within their families.

Due to a lack of youth housing options, many young people resort to ‘couch surfing’ or other temporary shelter. This is a difficult situation, in particular for young students who are unable to stay at home to study.

The NSW Government’s Regional Homelessness Action Plan 2010-2014 cited Census 2006 figures which showed 208 homeless households in the Bega Valley. Furthermore, the Bega Valley Shire has the highest rate of homelessness in South East NSW. Counting the Homeless 2006 also showed that 21% of the total number of homeless people were teenagers aged 12 to 18 (mainly on their own) and 10% were young adults aged 19 to 24.

Youth Health, Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Consultations have identified a need for more information and support around youth mental health issues in the Shire. Council recognises that youth are future civic leaders and business people, and will

ACCORDING TO THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF HEALTH AND WELFARE (AIHW)::

“Many young people experiment with substances that can cause immediate and long-term health and social problems.” 11
assist the development of youth through facilitating mental health and substance abuse intervention and support programs.\textsuperscript{12}

The National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing showed that 13\% of Australia’s young people aged 16-24 had a substance use disorder.\textsuperscript{13} Alcohol use was the found to be the most common concern, followed by marijuana and stimulants.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{THE SURVEY DEFINES SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS AS INVOLVING:}

\textit{“the harmful use and/or dependence on alcohol and/or drugs…..Harmful Use is the pattern of use of alcohol or drugs that is responsible for (or substantially contributes to) physical or psychological harm, including impaired judgement or dysfunctional behaviour.”}\textsuperscript{15}

Alcohol use amongst young people is one of the most widespread social issues. More than half of all 15-17 year olds and almost all 18-24 year olds have drunk alcohol.\textsuperscript{16} Consultations have suggested that more information and access to services relating to drug and alcohol abuse is required in the Bega Valley.

A recent AIHW report showed that the leading cause of death and hospitalisation among young people in Australia is from injury and poisoning. It is reported that land transport accidents and suicide accounted for two thirds of these deaths. The report suggested that many injuries are preventable through public health interventions.\textsuperscript{17}

In the Bega Valley there are limited bulk billing medical practices that are ‘youth friendly’ and support young people. Supporting the health needs of our young people is important.

\textbf{Entertainment and Social Activity}

The State of Australia’s Young People report states that social participation is a very important component of young people’s lives.\textsuperscript{18} This is well known and a lack of entertainment, particularly in the evenings, has been repeatedly raised in consultations as a problem for young people in the Shire.

Consultations have suggested that older children 12-17 years have particular needs that are not being addressed. A need has been identified for regular activities for older children, such as YMCA activities or camps in the natural environment. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that there are inadequate school holiday programs for children 12-16 years old.

Particular needs have been identified during consultations, such as the need for youth spaces and well placed skate parks throughout the Shire. Participants of consultations expressed a desire to have the planned youth space in Bega to be staffed so it is a place to hang out after school and on weekends. Another specific identified need is for the development of a skate park in Bermagui.
Cyber bullying

There is a clear connection between cyber bullying and school life. A survey conducted in 2004 showed that more than a quarter of Year 8 students knew somebody who was experiencing cyber bullying.19

Cyber bullying usually takes place at the home of the offender and it is understood that parents generally underestimated their own children’s bullying behaviour. It is also widely known that cyber bullying has a detrimental effect on the victims’ physical and emotional well-being.20

Sexuality

There are a number of young gay men and women that reside in the Bega Valley community. At a local level the lack of access to specific services, homophobia and the extraordinary pressures on young men and women coming out in a rural area are significant issues.

Whilst sexuality is a defining factor for many young people they also face similar issues as other young people. These issues are highlighted in this and other Social Issues Papers.

STRENGTHS IN THE BEGA VALLEY

The young people of the Shire are perhaps the greatest strength here. In a Shire with a relatively small population, there is significant achievement amongst young people across the Bega Valley in the areas of arts, music, sport and education.

There are a number of education facilities in the Shire, four high schools, TAFE and the Wollongong University campus. Universities such as the Australian National University and University of Canberra are developing local pathways. A wide range of sporting opportunities and leisure pursuits can also be accessed. However, there appears to be fewer options for young people to be involved in the arts.

There is a strong network of Youth Services across the Shire that provides an opportunity for collaboration and the exchange of ideas and to increase the capacity of the community to address youth issues. Organisations working with young people are encouraged to look for opportunities to support and further develop the Youth Services Network.

THE CONSTRAINTS

The settlement patterns of smaller coastal towns and growing new estates in the Shire have little or no transport options. This has been identified as a high priority issue and has a negative impact on young people. This can lead to social isolation, loss of self esteem and barriers to access facilities, programs, training and employment.

Moving away is an important part of the transition to adulthood, however for young people in the Bega Valley Shire most do not have a choice about staying or leaving. The youth exodus is fuelled by a number of factors such as limited education and employment opportunities. There are community perceptions that young people who want to ‘make something’ of themselves need to do so out of the area.

THE OPPORTUNITIES

Council recognises that all levels of government as well as non-government, private and community organisations all play vital roles in improving health, well-being and quality of life for young people. Furthermore, young people in the Shire have an opportunity to express their views through the Bega Valley Youth Council.

Encouraging a greater range of social activities, entertainment opportunities and recreational spaces for young people 12-18 years is a need that has been identified through consultations. There is an opportunity for community groups to work together to provide young people with places to hang out, such as youth spaces or well placed community skate parks.
There are opportunities for organisations to develop partnerships to investigate youth crisis accommodation issues. Currently the closest Youth Refuge is in Cooma or Moruya. Furthermore, when discussing youth housing needs, consideration needs to be given to the location of housing to ensure there is access to services and employment/training opportunities.

There needs to be an increased awareness of the need to improve training and employment opportunities for young people within the Bega Valley. This is becoming particularly important with the NSW Government raising the school leaving age to 17 years, and also recently announced funding cuts to Education. A specific focus is required around supporting Indigenous young people to undertake and achieve in training and employment opportunities.

Consultations have suggested that strategies should be investigated to address youth health issues. There are opportunities for organisations to form partnerships with the Southern NSW Local Health District and other organisations such as the Bega Valley Suicide Action Prevention Network (SPAN). Furthermore, the Federal Government has recently announced that the Headspace School Support Program will be made available for grieving school communities dealing with suicide.
Reference


Further Reading

