

Healthy Ageing Public Housing Projects



Project overview

This series of projects aimed to reduce social isolation and improve the health and wellbeing of older residents living in public housing. In partnership with Neighbourhood Houses, the initiative focused on empowering residents to run their own events and activities, as well as reaching out to socially isolated residents and assisting with food and essential item delivery during the COVID-19 crisis.

Project description

After a mapping exercise looking at 36 public housing estates in Southern Metropolitan Melbourne, the project found that these estates had community facilities that were not being used to their full potential to create social benefits for older residents and the wider community. Follow-up site visits confirmed many residents were socially isolated and experiencing health and mental health issues. As a result of the mapping and site visits, five sites were chosen to host projects that would focus on social connection and linking residents to community health and social wellbeing programs. Neighbourhood houses became crucial project partners.

Project model

- The project reviewed qualitative and quantitative data from 36 housing estates, as well as Australian and international research.
- It found that social isolation was an issue for older people living in public housing estates, which can have negative effects on health and wellbeing.
- The research also showed that community facilities at these housing estates weren't being used to their full capacity, and could be harnessed to create increased social benefits for public housing residents and the wider community.
- The project chose to partner with Neighbourhood Houses and other services working near five public housing estates in south-east metropolitan Melbourne. The aim was to deliver community development programs and activities in these community facilities that would lead to stronger communities.
- The project sought to support diversity and promote community participation and inclusion, as well as building the capacity of these communities to create their own groups and social networks.
- The types of programs run in the community facilities included gentle exercise classes, arts and crafts classes, guest speakers, monthly bus trips, Saturday night tenant dinners, community BBQs, singing groups, dance groups, computers, and yoga and meditation.
- See the case studies from p. 3 for more information about how the project was implemented at the five sites.

Budget

Funding of between \$5,000–\$10,000 for each of the five areas chosen was obtained from different sources, including the Victorian Government, the Commonwealth Government and local government.



Doveton
Neighbourhood Learning Centre



Health
and Human
Services

Project challenges

The main challenges were around resourcing. Neighbourhood Houses and community organisations do not have the resources to undertake the extensive engagement with public housing residents without access to additional resources, and require additional support, particularly where programs are delivered away from their regular sites.

In addition, public housing residents may not be able to pay fees for programs and activities, and community organisations may not have the capacity to run free programs at public housing sites.

It also takes considerable time to build trust and engage with residents and establish viable programs.

Neighbourhood Houses are well placed to provide programs for public housing residents over 55 years of age, but only receive limited funding to deliver existing programs and initiatives, with limited capacity to commence new initiatives such as engaging with public housing residents.

Project outcomes

Outcomes included empowering and building the capacity of residents to run their own programs, as well as increasing residents' friendship networks and community involvement. This involved support to development of promotional flyers that could be distributed to residents of the estate, providing food from the food bank for use at resident-run BBQs, and ideas and personal support for residents to run activities.

Participants' involvement in health and wellbeing activities also increased since programs were run on residents' own estate, so there was no need to travel and they felt safe and comfortable in their own surroundings.

The programs also provided opportunities for referral to other services such as council services, community transport, bus trips, libraries, My Aged Care, mental health support services, U3A, Friendship Cafes, Food for Chand and Servant Sisters Sacred Heart.

In addition, the groups were able to provide additional support to residents during the COVID-19 crisis. This included Neighbourhood Houses providing food and essential item delivery, exercise and activity packs, phone calls to keep residents socially connected and for welfare checks and referral to support services. One Neighbourhood House provided a support worker two days a week to undertake these tasks. Without the support of Neighbourhood Houses at public housing estates, residents would have had limited support during COVID-19.

Neighbourhood Houses drew on their extensive networks in local government and other services to build new collaborative partnerships to share resources and coordinate services to support older public housing residents.

See the case studies section on the next page for more about the outcomes for individual sites.

Project sustainability

Each of the five sites has implemented sustainability strategies to ensure the work can continue. In addition to empowering residents to run their own programs, this work has included steps to identify future funding opportunities, and in many cases Neighbourhood Houses are running programs for at least another year.

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Case studies from the projects

Bellview Estate – Waygara Street, Eumemmerring

One of the Bellview Estate residents reached out to the Department of Health and Human Services and the Doveton Neighbourhood Learning Centre for support, as the tenant committee had folded, and raised concerns that residents needed support.

The department provided a one-off grant of \$5,000 to Doveton Neighbourhood Learning Centre to engage with residents and establish a project.

As a result, Doveton Neighbourhood Learning Centre held a series of fortnightly morning teas, brunches and BBQs over six weeks.

These events gave residents the chance to come together to find out about the Doveton Neighbourhood Learning Centre and, most importantly, tell staff about their interests, skills and needs. This allowed Doveton Neighbourhood Learning Centre to establish rapport and build trust with residents.

Events were held on different days of the week so that as many people as possible had the opportunity to attend.

The Doveton Neighbourhood Learning Centre is the local neighbourhood centre, people were happy to attend and complete the feedback form with suggestions.

Programs included:

- gentle exercise class
- craft and games morning
- morning teas and guest speakers
- community BBQs
- monthly bus trips
- Saturday night dinners (tenant-run events for 16 people)
- support to promote weekly bingo groups
- some transport to Doveton Neighbourhood Learning Centre for residents to join activities
- COVID-19 food and mask delivery and welfare checks.

The programs have boosted social contact for residents, with one participant going from having not spoken to anyone else during the eight years he had lived in his unit, to now attending weekly dinner events.

This work has attracted funding from local government as well as the department.

Ludstone Street, Hampton

Ludstone Street Hampton was identified as a potential site where residents would benefit from health and wellbeing activities.

The site had a community room that had limited to no use.

Hampton Community Centre were very interested in providing programs at the Ludstone Street public housing estate, as they had not previously had the opportunity to engage with these residents.

Southern Melbourne Primary Care Partnership provided Hampton Community Centre a one-off grant of \$5,000 to engage with residents and establish the project.

Hampton Community Centre held several morning teas to engage with residents to build trust and determine their needs. Hampton Community Centre brought together several partners from the local area who could provide services to residents.

Programs included:

- gardening with morning tea

- gentle exercise
- Baha'i conversation class
- library and afternoon tea
- dance/exercise with Hampton House
- art class with Hampton House
- social prescription trial
- garden working bee with Berendale School
- involvement in the council's intergenerational program
- delivery of Easter cards and eggs with a printed card from a primary aged Bayside child
- pen pal program with residents and children – eight residents participated
- children's choir events
- COVID-19 – weekly vegetable delivery, mask and activity packs, and social support.

As a result, residents have established friendships and increased their involvement in health and wellbeing activities.

There is also an intergenerational theme to the programs, with residents joining in activities with primary–school aged children.

King Street, Prahran

A resident at King Street, Prahran expressed concern that residents had to travel to the City of Port Phillip for activities, as there was nothing for them to do around Prahran.

She also wanted to see the King Street community room used more regularly, so there could be somewhere for residents to socialise and connect.

The Active and Healthy Ageing Adviser brought together key service providers into a network, which received a grant for \$17,000 from Australian Multicultural Community Services to establish a program to increase physical activity for residents.

Programs have had to be cancelled due to COVID-19, but the following are scheduled to commence when it is safe to do so:

- introduction BBQ and information session
- walk, talk and cook
- exercise program
- computers
- information session on My Aged Care
- English classes

The project has led directly to the establishment of a network, partnership and coordination of services between the organisations involved.

Noble and Namur Streets, Noble Park (two sites)

The Active and Healthy Ageing Advisor contacted Springvale Neighbourhood House to see if they were interested in providing programs to public housing residents in Noble Park.

Springvale Neighbourhood House was unaware that these sites existed, and they were very interested in engaging with these residents. The department's Southern Melbourne area provided \$10,000 to engage with residents and establish a project.

Before programs had to be cancelled due to COVID-19, some of the activities included:

- coffee chat mornings
- linking residents with services in the community

- community transport to the Dandenong market
- council-run bus trips
- Servant Sisters of Sacred Hearts weekly community lunch
- friendship café Women's Association South East Melbourne Australia (WAESMA)
- iPad session
- COVID-19 – food, mask and activity pack delivery and welfare checks.

As a result of the project, residents have connected with their neighbours, some for the first time.

Residents have also connected with services and programs in the community that they did not know existed.

Food security has been improved for some residents through access to community transport, and during COVID-19, residents provided food, mask and activity pack delivery, welfare checks and referral to community support organisations.