

Yarra City Council's holistic approach – A synthesis of recognition and acceptance in the delivery and sustainability of health and wellbeing

With a strong focus on improving the health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal people and communities, City of Yarra's strategic priorities, identified within their *Aboriginal Partnership Plan 2015-2018*, were important for informing the development of the *Yarra City's Council Plan*, which incorporates Council's Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan.

Yarra's Aboriginal Partnerships Officer and proud Wurundjeri Elder, Uncle Colin Hunter, along with Special Projects Officer, Daniel Ducrou, shared the inspiring work that has taken place to better engage Aboriginal communities through reconciliation, self-determination and closing the gap for health and wellbeing.

Colin is profoundly proud of his heritage and represents the local Aboriginal community, sharing his past involvement with government and elaborating on his current role where he has worked with council for the last eight years. Of significance, Colin is the first Wurundjeri Elder to be employed by government on Wurundjeri Country and applauds Yarra City Council's commitment to increasing Aboriginal employment.

The *Yarra Aboriginal Partnership Plan 2015-18* is important for Council's engagement with the Aboriginal community. Its iterative implementation approach, enabling council to respond to emerging community needs and aspirations has been integral to its success. Daniel describes the model as a four year policy, developed through comprehensive consultation with Aboriginal communities, agencies and service providers. The plan consists of five priorities, each supported with an annual action plan. Council is in the early phases of preparing for its fourth Aboriginal Partnership Plan.

Colin described the consultative bodies that guide the plan as crucial to its success. Having Aboriginal community members as part of the Aboriginal Advisory Group ensures a direct connection between Aboriginal communities and Council, who provide support and endorsement for the Plan, 'the voice of the community directing the council' he says.

An internal working group, with Aboriginal leadership and including representation from all relevant areas of Council brings to life actions within the Plan. These areas include Community Planning, Leisure Services, Arts and Cultural Services and Strategic Planning, to name a few. Daniel elaborated on the role these areas play – initiating projects that improve outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous health, and establishing an inclusive and supportive work culture. Examples include providing support for celebratory cultural events such as the Smith Street Dreaming Festival, NAIDOC week and the marker for Stolen Generations. Further initiatives to support community connections include Billabong BBQ, Feed the Mob and sports and recreation activities at Melbourne Aboriginal Youth Sports and Recreation Co-operative.

Learnings

- Using an Aboriginal self-determination approach to developing council policies, programs and services should be guided by the preferences and aspirations of Aboriginal communities about what these policies and programs should deliver.

- Engagement best practice should make use of the formal and informal partnerships that already exist between councils, local Aboriginal organisations and networks and community health organisations.
- Employing Elders in council roles facilitates voice and connection to community, enabling council to work closely with Traditional Owners as well as the local Aboriginal community. Remuneration for knowledge and expertise is essential, as is ensuring such positions are well supported by council.

Yarra City Council contact: Uncle Colin Hunter and Daniel Ducrou