



**City of
Whittlesea**



Active Whittlesea Strategy 2019–2028

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

The City of Whittlesea recognises the rich Aboriginal heritage of this country and acknowledges the Wurundjeri Willum Clan as the Traditional Owners of this place.

Broader acknowledgements and thanks

The City of Whittlesea would also like to acknowledge the support and assistance provided by:

- The Victorian Government in partnering to develop the *Active Whittlesea Strategy 2019-2028* through a Community Sport Infrastructure Fund grant
- All local residents, clubs, community groups and others that generously contributed their thoughts, opinions and time to the *Active Whittlesea Strategy 2019-2028*
- JKP Consulting and Rapid Impact in helping to prepare the *Active Whittlesea Strategy 2019-2028*.



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Glossary of terms

Aboriginal – referring to Victoria’s original inhabitants and custodians. Elsewhere, the terms ‘Indigenous’ or ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’ may be used to describe Australia’s first people.

Active (Physically) – participating or engaging in physical activity as a means to improve physical and mental health.

Active Whittlesea – refers to the *Active Whittlesea 2019-2028* strategy. May also be referenced as ‘strategy’.

Built Environment – human-made surroundings such as buildings, parks, green space and neighbourhoods that provide the setting in which people live, play and work.

Culture – distinctive patterns of values, beliefs and ways-of-life of a group of people that may share ethnicity, race, gender or other characteristics. It is a dynamic concept that is influenced by environmental, historical, political, geographical, linguistic, spiritual and social factors.

Equity – economic, social and political resources are distributed in ways that are fair and not restricted to some individuals and groups.

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

Inclusive – where no part or section of the community or individual is excluded active involvement or participation as a result of gender, age, ability, sexual identity, race or religious affiliation.

Mental health – is the embodiment of social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. It provides individuals with the vitality necessary for active living, to achieve goals, and to interact with one another in ways that are respectful and fair.

Open Space – refers to public open space which includes, but is not limited to, sports fields, parks and passive spaces used for activity.

Physical Activity – is any body movement produced by muscles that results in energy expenditure.

Physical Literacy – is the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for life-long engagement in physical activities¹.

Recreation – for the purpose of this strategy, recreation is being interpreted in a broad sense, covering competitive and non-competitive sports activities including exercising, walking, bike riding and dance or accessing public parks.

Sedentary – refers to behaviour that requires little energy expenditure such as sitting or lying down (with the exception of sleeping).



Mayor's message



I am delighted to introduce *Active Whittlesea 2019-2028* — an evidence-based strategy and action plan that will guide the planning, provision and promotion of sport, leisure and recreation programs, services and facilities within the City of Whittlesea over the next ten years.

This strategy has been informed by the needs, aspirations and lifestyles of our local communities and placed in the context of leading national and international research focussed on leisure and recreation.

Active Whittlesea addresses some key health and wellbeing concerns in the City of Whittlesea. While some aspects of our health and wellbeing are encouraging, adult obesity rates are increasing and the percentage of people with heart disease, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and osteoporosis are higher than the Victorian averages.

Council is aware that communities are changing the way they define being active. Some of these changes include more participation outside of the traditional clubs and/or recreation structures and the emergence of community driven initiatives.

Within the City of Whittlesea our diversity is one of our greatest strengths, yet many groups (e.g. migrants, women and girls, people with a disability) experience significant barriers to participation — such as cost, transport and awareness. It is anticipated this strategy will make in-roads to addressing these barriers to see more people active more often.

The key directions and actions contained in *Active Whittlesea* address each of these changes and challenges. It also recognises the demographic changes and growth that has, and continues, to shape the City of Whittlesea.

I am looking forward to Council and the community working together to ensure the directions arising from *Active Whittlesea* create safe and non-threatening environments that are inclusive, meaningful and community-driven.

Cr Kris Pavlidis
Mayor
City of Whittlesea



Active Whittlesea at a glance

'I love the social interaction, together with fitness activity, in a safe environment'

(Participant – City of Whittlesea Walking Football Program)

The City of Whittlesea has a commitment to improving the quality of life for all residents. It recognises the valuable contribution that sport, physical activity, open space and recreation make to community health and wellbeing.

Active Whittlesea 2019-2028 ensures Council meets this commitment through a strategy that builds the capacity and opportunities within the municipality for people to become more physically active and live healthier lives.

Communities that are physically active are more likely to be healthier communities, and currently the percentage of people in the City of Whittlesea with heart disease, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and osteoporosis are higher than the Victorian averages. This has significant impacts, as increasing a community's physical activity can substantially increase health outcomes and reduce physical-inactivity-related deaths. It also creates economic growth and community cohesion and connection.

Active Whittlesea acknowledges that there are barriers to people being physically active. These include location, travel times, transport, infrastructure, cost of participation and low levels of physical literacy. It is also recognised that some groups are less likely or able to participate than others (e.g. Aboriginal people /communities, people with a disability and migrant groups).



Active Whittlesea aims to increase the number of residents who are physically active by 10 per cent and will deliver actions that will achieve the overall goal of:

75 per cent of residents participating in one or more hours of physical activity per week by September 2028

To achieve this goal Council will implement three key directions, consistent with community feedback and grounded in evidence-based practice.

Key Direction 1

Communications and Promotion — increasing the physical literacy and community awareness of inclusive participation opportunities



Key Direction 2

Responsive Programs and Partnerships — programs that respond to local needs and partnerships that share skills, knowledge and resources to generate positive community outcomes



Key Direction 3

Open Space / Infrastructure — ensuring local communities have access to places and spaces that are safe, inclusive, accessible and meet their needs



In order to achieve the Strategy's goal, Council will play three distinct roles as a provider, a facilitator and an advocate. Accordingly, *Active Whittlesea* will be fundamental to the broader work the City of Whittlesea undertakes to ensure communities are connected, inclusive, active and healthy.



Context

Active Whittlesea provides the strategic and operational direction for Council to meet its requirement under the Local Government Act (1989) “to improve the overall quality of life of people in the local community” (Section 3C 2c).

The National and State priorities, outlined in the *Australian Sports Commission (ASC) Corporate Plan 2017-2021*, *Active Victoria: A Framework for Sports and Recreation in Victoria 2017-2021*, *VicHealth’s Physical Activity Strategy 2018–23* and *Australia’s Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines* reinforce the need for this strategy and support Council’s commitment to improving the overall quality of life of residents.

Locally, *Active Whittlesea* is driven by the City of Whittlesea’s Active Whittlesea Policy Statement:

The City of Whittlesea will make a positive contribution to community health and wellbeing outcomes by enhancing opportunities for residents to be more physically active, through addressing barriers to active participation across a diverse range of sport and physical recreation activities and environments.

Active Whittlesea is also informed and guided by several other policy frameworks and strategic documents.



About Whittlesea

The City of Whittlesea is located in Melbourne’s northern suburbs, approximately 20 kilometres from the city centre. It is one of Melbourne’s largest municipalities, covering a land area of 489 square kilometres.

The majority of the population live in the urban areas of the municipality. This is split across the major established area precincts of Bundoora, Epping, Lalor, Mill Park and Thomastown, and the current growth area precincts of Mernda, Doreen, South Morang and Epping North. Significant future growth is projected for Wollert and Donnybrook. The rural areas of the municipality are characterised by farming and historic township communities including Whittlesea Township.

The City of Whittlesea is one of Melbourne’s fastest growing Local Government Areas (LGA) with the population expected to grow from 216,438 to 382,896 between 2017 and 2041. While the median age in the LGA is 34 years (compared to 37 for Victoria), the population remains diverse with significant growth in people under working age and of retirement age (35 per cent and 42.7 per cent respectively) expected across the next decadeⁱⁱ.

The Wurundjeri Willum people were the original inhabitants of the area and are the Traditional Owners of this land. According to Census data, the City of Whittlesea has the second largest population of Aboriginal residents by person count in Metropolitan Melbourne, with 1,639 residentsⁱⁱⁱ. Although Council’s Aboriginal and Cultural Diversity unit predict the population is closer to 2,800.

The City of Whittlesea is one of the most culturally diverse municipalities in Victoria with:

- 34%** of residents born overseas (compared to 26 per cent for Victoria)
- 27%** of overseas born residents living in Australia for less than ten years
- 43%** of residents speaking a language other than English at home (compared to 23 per cent for Victoria)

2019 City of Whittlesea health, sport and recreation snapshot

Health



- Increasing rate of adult obesity
- Poor nutrition: High rates of 'take-away' and sugary drink consumption, low rate of vegetable consumption
- Rising rate of heart disease
- Percentage of people with type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and osteoporosis are higher than the Victorian averages
- Above average rate of smoking

Sport



- 25 Sports reserves
- 37 Sports pavilions
- 58 Sports grounds
- 163 Sports clubs
- Over 15,000 regular sports participants
- \$32million invested into building sports infrastructure between 2016 and 2018

Recreation



- 511 Passive open spaces
- 204 Playgrounds
- Over 13,800 weekly leisure centre visitors
- 315km of 'off road' bicycle paths
- 517km of 'on road' bicycle lanes
- 9 recreation programs and events
- 11 outdoor fitness stations
- 32 free to public tennis and basketball courts
- \$26million invested into active recreation infrastructure between 2016 and 2018

About Active Whittlesea

Active Whittlesea aims to build the capacity and create opportunities for people within the municipality to become more physically active and live healthier lives.

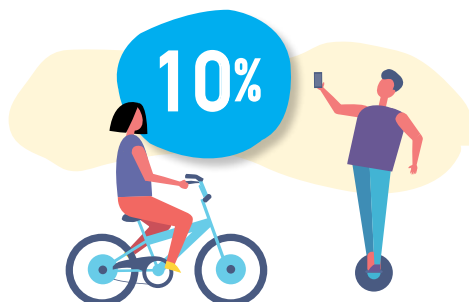
This strategy is grounded in a strong evidence-base and has been informed by research and community engagement and consultation. The benefits, trends and barriers highlighted in the broader research were strongly aligned to feedback received from internal and external stakeholders (including communities) whose perspectives informed the Key Directions and actions.

The Benefits of Active Communities

As *Active Victoria: A Strategic Framework for Sports and Recreation in Victoria 2017-2021* reports, physical activity significantly reduces the burden of disease on any given community. It also creates:

Improved health

Increasing the rate of physical activity by **10 per cent** has been estimated to reduce physical-inactivity-related deaths by **15 per cent** per year and new cases of physical-inactivity-related disease by **13 per cent** per year^{iv}.



Economic growth

Sport and active recreation creates economic growth and jobs in any community. For every **\$1** spent in the sport sector, **\$7** of value is created for Australians^v.



Community cohesion

Sport and active recreation brings people together and connects people to their communities, healthcare, education, training and economic opportunities. For example Participants in Council's 2017 *'Knowing You, Knowing Me'* dance program reported an increased connection to their local community (from **37 per cent** to **60 per cent**), improved levels of wellbeing, fitness, motivation and memory as a result of participation in the program^{vi}.



Active Communities - Trends

Research points to the following key trends:

- Structured sports have declining participation rates as they can be focussed on competition instead of fun, enjoyment and friendship groups – this has led to the popularity of modified versions of traditional sports



- Inflexible scheduling of traditional sports club structures has led to a growing demand for unstructured sport opportunities – especially for those from time-poor communities

- Flourishing fitness and gym industries, a strong cycling culture and the emergence of community initiatives such as parkrun are providing popular alternative opportunities for participation



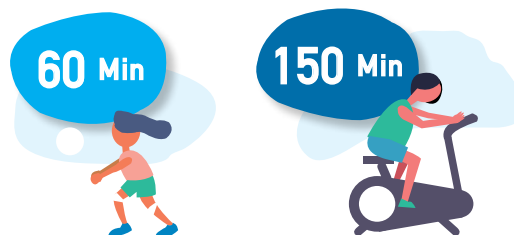
- The impact of technology and social media has seen the emergence of mobile smart technology (e.g. Fitbits), remote access to facilities, sport surface technology improvement, and the rise of virtual reality which enable connection to virtual monitoring, data collection and coaching



- There is a growing expectation on sports clubs to deliver greater social outcomes to the community.



In terms of standards for physical activity, the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends that young people aged 5 to 17 years do at least **60 minutes** of moderately intense physical activity every day and take part in vigorous activities at least three times per week. Adults should aim for a minimum of **150 minutes** of moderately intense activity throughout the week.



Currently, **60 per cent** of Victorians do not meet these guidelines^{vii}. State-wide, female participation in sport and recreation (especially between the ages of 30 and 50 years of age) is greater than male participation. However, if isolating participation statistics for organised sport, female participation is half of that of males^{viii}.

The City of Whittlesea has the second highest percentage of sedentary residents in Victoria^{ix}, demonstrating that local residents are also struggling to meet physical activity and sedentary behaviour guidelines. Currently, **35 per cent** of residents are doing less than one hour of physical activity per week and more than half of residents are not meeting the WHO recommended guidelines for physical activity^x.

Males in the City of Whittlesea are more likely than females to do more than **5 hours** of activity per week and are slightly less likely to do no activity^{xi}. Furthermore, people in Whittlesea are spending less time visiting open spaces compared to the State average (**31.4 per cent** compared with **50.4 per cent**)^{xii}.



About Active Whittlesea

Active Communities – Barriers

Research indicates that groups with lower levels of physical activity include Aboriginal communities, migrants, people with a disability and those living in areas of relative social disadvantage^{xiii}. These groups are known to face a range of barriers to engagement in physical activity. The most prominent being:

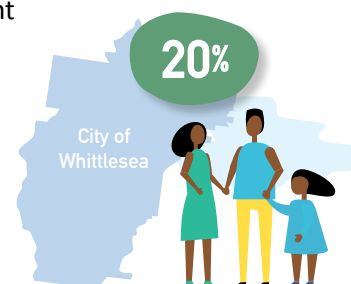
Natural and Built Environment	Infrastructure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent or incomplete active travel networks • Limited access to existing infrastructure and multi purpose facilities • Low perceptions of safety • Lack of trees and shelter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of inclusive and/or purpose-built infrastructure • Need for greater transport options

Economic Environment	Time and Cost
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High cost of participation fees • Cost of equipment and apparel • Low disposable income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long travel times • Conflicting priorities and existing commitments

Social Environment	Awareness and Culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits of physical activity unknown • Limited knowledge of local physical activity opportunities • Language • Low prioritisation of physical activity • Unfamiliar with processes and structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrimination • Gender stereotypes • Social and cultural norms

Addressing these barriers is critical to the development of *Active Whittlesea* and increasing physical activity across the municipality as:

- More than one third of residents spend in excess of **60 minutes** travelling for work each day^{xiv}. This is anticipated to have increased in the last two years due to the addition of more than 12,000 new residents in Mernda, Doreen and Epping, thus further reducing the available time residents have to engage in physical activity.
- Discrepancies in recreation infrastructure provision across the municipality may impact opportunities for physical activity. For example Lalor contains six sports fields, whereas Doreen only has three sports fields, despite having a larger population.
- A change in the approach to planning for open spaces has led to inconsistency in the quality and distribution of open space across the municipality. For example New open spaces — such as those in growth suburbs — are of high quality as they provide opportunities for active transport and passive activity, whereas older open spaces were historically purpose-built for structured sport only.
- The Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) scores across Whittlesea range from 878 to 1059^{xv}, indicating variation in the levels of advantage and disadvantage across the municipality and consequently the amount of disposable income to spend on physical activity.
- More than **70,000** people living in the City of Whittlesea in 2016 were born overseas; **20 per cent** of whom arrived in Australia between 2010 and 2015^{xvi}. Therefore awareness and cultural barriers are more prominent and more likely to impact physical activity in Whittlesea.





Engagement

Consultation with a diverse range of stakeholders was undertaken to confirm the local relevance of the literature findings and inform the development of this strategy.

External stakeholders included State Government agencies, State Sporting Associations, sports clubs, local leisure providers, schools and community networks such as seniors groups, the Multicultural Advisory Group and the Whittlesea Disability Network. Internal stakeholders included Council departments that influence or are impacted by *Active Whittlesea*.

Multiple methods to engage the broader community were also provided. Engagement mechanisms varied utilising both electronic resources (email, online consultation tools and social media) and targeted consultation (interviews, surveys, workshops and print media) to maximise community reach. A community competition was also held.

In addition to the above, the findings from Council's recent community visioning exercise, *Whittlesea 2040*, were referenced to gain insight into the community's long-term priorities and ensure that this strategy aligns to Council's overarching strategy statement.

Key Findings

Community attitudes toward physical activity are positive with parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, sport and active transport all featured as key priorities in the outcomes of the *Whittlesea 2040* consultation.

Qualitative data collected from local residents, visitors and employees also highlighted the value of local recreation assets and the positive health outcomes that resulted from their use:

'....the parks, the trees and nature helps me relieve my stress'



'I really enjoy exercising at [my local] Leisure Centre. It's got a great atmosphere, I enjoy socialising with other members and it has a good feeling of community....'



'(I love) the park close to my home as there is always someone to socialise with, at any time of the day....'



Active Whittlesea consultation reinforced these community priorities and the literature findings, with stakeholders identifying the need for:

- Diverse infrastructure and free-to-public local facilities such as exercise equipment, bike paths and walking trails to reduce time, cost and location barriers 
- Safer environments to be active including more lighting and public toilets in open spaces
- Club development opportunities to ensure sports clubs create a welcoming and inclusive environment for under-represented groups such as women, newly arrived communities and people with a disability 
- Increased transport options and/or decreased burden of travelling to make existing programs and opportunities more accessible; especially in developing suburbs such as Epping, Mernda and Doreen
- Flexible and affordable opportunities for seniors, families, youth and low-income groups to be active, noting Council programming, leisure centres and local play spaces as popular solutions 
- Increased promotion of services and facilities and various communication methods to ensure equitable opportunity across all demographics.

Partnerships and flexibility in facility use and programming were also noted as important factors to increase physical activity across the municipality.

The literature and consultation outcomes indicate a changing trend in participation preferences and community habits toward physical activity.

While some responses specified the need for improved infrastructure to enhance open spaces and participation environments, requests for flexible programming, low-cost opportunities and increased promotion of services suggest community needs are diverse and the barriers to physical activity vary and are in no way generic.

Furthermore, individuals and communities can be faced with multiple and simultaneous barriers to participation. This is further evident through the comparison of the Thomastown and Mernda precincts, where demographic and infrastructure variances result in differing barriers to physical activity:

Thomastown

Snapshot

- Highest amount of inactive residents per week (**28.7%**)
- Highest level of disadvantage (SEIFA: 879)
- High volume and diverse range of recreation infrastructure
- Highest percentage of residents born overseas (**49.9%**) and from a non-English speaking background (**48.0%**)

Likely Barriers

- Culture • Awareness • Cost

Mernda

Snapshot

- **15.8%** of population is inactive per week (7th highest out of 13 suburbs in Whittlesea)
- Low level of disadvantage (SEIFA: 1037)
- Limited provision of recreation infrastructure
- Lower percentage of residents born overseas (**27.1%**) and from a non-English speaking background (**22.6%**)

Likely Barriers

- Time • Transport • Infrastructure

Focus areas

As the literature and consultation suggests, supporting diverse communities to be physically active requires innovative and tailored responses, instead of 'a one size fits all' or segmented approach.

Active Whittlesea draws on the following key success factors to reduce barriers to physical activity and build on the existing services currently available across the municipality:



The Active Whittlesea Strategy and Action Plan will focus on three Key Directions to achieve the overall goal of:

75 per cent of residents participating in one or more hours of physical activity per week by September 2028

The three Key Directions are aligned with the key success factors, consistent with community feedback and are grounded in evidence-based practice.

Key Direction 1

Communications and Promotion — increasing the physical literacy and community awareness of inclusive participation opportunities



Key Direction 2

Responsive Programs and Partnerships — programs that respond to local needs and partnerships that share skills, knowledge and resources to generate positive community outcomes



Key Direction 3

Open Space / Infrastructure — ensuring local communities have access to places and spaces that are safe, inclusive, accessible and meet their needs



While articulated within a local context, all 12 associated priority actions outlined in the *Active Whittlesea Action Plan* are driven by the policy principles outlined in the *Active Whittlesea Policy*.

Active Whittlesea Strategy and Action Plan: 2019-2028

Key Direction 1: Communications and Promotions

Objective:

Local communities have increased physical literacy, increased awareness of the benefits of physical activity and of the local opportunities to be active.

Priority Actions

- 1.1 Promote positive and inclusive messages to increase motivation, confidence and knowledge of the benefits of physical activity
- 1.2 Expand Council's communication methods and use innovative approaches (ie. social media) to increase the reach of active recreation promotion
- 1.3 Enhance communication and promotion of new and existing active recreation opportunities to increase community knowledge of how to become physical activity
- 1.4 Increase internal communications to ensure the delivery of the strategy and its principles are embedded in work practices across all of Council's work



Key Direction 2: Responsive Programs and Partnerships

Objective:

Programs respond to local needs and aim to increase active participation for under-represented groups.

Priority Actions

- 2.1 Support, promote and facilitate club development opportunities to build capacity of existing and new sports clubs and strengthen participation from under-represented groups
- 2.2 Deliver physical activity programs targeting under-represented groups

Objective:

The local community shares in skills, knowledge and resources through mutually beneficial partnerships.

Priority Actions

- 2.3 Foster partnerships with industry stakeholders to advocate for, promote and/or deliver physical activity programs and infrastructure projects



Key Direction 3: Open Space/Infrastructure

Objective:

Local communities have access to active places and spaces that are safe, inclusive, accessible and meet their needs.

Priority Actions

- 3.1 Improve equity, accessibility and safety of community spaces through the development of infrastructure plans and the delivery of inclusively designed new works projects
- 3.2 Invest in the provision of recreation infrastructure that meets local demand by monitoring participation trends and changes in community need
- 3.3 Maximise, diversify and evaluate the use of community recreation facilities via flexible user agreements and consultation with under-represented groups and industry stakeholders
- 3.4 Connect, improve and expand existing travel networks to create built environments that support active travel, incidental exercise and physical activity
- 3.5 Ensure fees and charges for recreation facilities enable equitable access and promote inclusive practices



Implementation and evaluation

Implementation plans will be developed to deliver the objectives and actions outlined in *Active Whittlesea*. Detailing a series of work tasks for each priority action outlined in the strategy, the Implementation Plans will specify the lead and supporting departments responsible for each task.

Project Steering and Project Control Groups monitor the progress of the Implementation Plan. The Project Steering Group meets quarterly and reports to the Project Control Group on a bi-annual basis.

Evaluation of achievements against the overarching key directions will take place in line with the ongoing renewal of the Implementation Plan.

The broader goal, which will result in 30,000 more residents participating in one or more hours of physical activity per week by September 2028, will be measured through *Council's Household Survey* and *Community Indicators* in September 2023 and at strategy completion in September 2028.



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