

# HEALTHY LIBRARY, HEALTHY LIFE



**L**ibraries play a significant role in the health and wellbeing of their patrons. Cory Greenwood explains how a new strategic framework has been developed in Victoria to help libraries engage with and better support the health of the communities they serve.

State Library Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria have collaborated extensively with various public library managers and staff from across the state to develop a strategic framework believed to be the first of its kind for public libraries globally. A dedicated working group was formed to consult with community groups, health organisations and the broader library sector through surveys and focus groups.

*Libraries for Health and Wellbeing: A strategic framework for Victorian public libraries towards 2024* outlines the role and priorities for Victoria's public libraries in supporting community health and wellbeing. It helps to provide solutions for how libraries can contribute to better health and wellbeing outcomes through programs, services and partnerships under three impact areas: social connection, mental wellbeing and physical health.

With an ageing population and increasing rates of mental illness and chronic disease, the need for this framework has never been greater. Research indicates being lonely and socially isolated can pose a bigger risk for premature death than smoking, and that one in six Australians are currently experiencing depression,

anxiety or both, with one in eight currently experiencing high or very high psychological distress. Since the pandemic began, Victorian public library managers have reported significant increases in requests for support services from community members in distress.

Libraries can play a critical role in improving some of the determinants of health (for example, employment, education, housing, socioeconomic status and access to technology) through programs and services that equip communities with the necessary skills, information and confidence needed to manage their own health and wellbeing. This is a core component of preventing injury and illness.

Accompanying the *Libraries for Health and Wellbeing* framework is a toolkit that supports libraries to reach out and develop quality partnerships with organisations from within the health and wellbeing sector. The toolkit seeks to address an identified skills gap around building partnerships and provides an overview of key health and wellbeing trends, a summary of identified opportunities for library–health partnerships, a list of key stakeholders, and a tool to support the process of developing impact-focused partnerships.

Libraries can help health and wellbeing organisations to contact, engage with, listen to and support community members from many different walks of life, including hard-to-reach or hardly reached populations. With this framework they are better positioned to support the development of healthy minds, healthy bodies and healthy communities, with a focus on prevention over cure, connection over isolation and collaborations that break down silos and amplify results.

To encourage libraries to utilise the framework, seventeen grants have been provided to Victorian public libraries to develop and deliver innovative health and wellbeing partnership programs addressing the three impact areas: social connection, mental wellbeing and physical health.

A copy of the strategic framework is available on the [State Library Victoria website](#). For more information or for a copy of the toolkit, please contact Cory Greenwood. ✉

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A food relief and vaccination information pop-up delivered by Yarra Libraries in Melbourne