



**Moreland**  
City Council

# COVID-19 Recovery Plan



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*This Plan was adopted by Moreland City Councillors at the council meeting held on the 14th July 2021*

## Message from the Mayor

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the Moreland community very deeply, in direct and indirect ways, with a disproportionate effect on many vulnerable groups which has magnified existing inequalities.

While this global emergency has required significant response from all Australian jurisdictions, the Moreland community is relying on Council to continue to respond to the needs of our community and local businesses, for services, resources and support as the focus moves into recovery and roll out of the vaccination program.

We don't yet know the longer-term impacts on health, nor the longer term social and economic impacts. Factors such as the removal of federal government income subsidies and changes to state government eviction bans from late March 2021 will impact on many Moreland residents.

Recovery provides an opportunity to support, reactivate and strengthen our community and work towards addressing entrenched issues of social inequality and responding to climate change.

Council is continuing to support residents and businesses and advocating with all levels of government to support Moreland's recovery.

## Executive Summary

In response to the State Government's declaration of a State of Emergency on 16 March 2020, a whole-of-Council response and relief effort was implemented, to protect and support the local economy, community and staff.

The impacts of COVID-19 have had a disproportionate effect on many vulnerable groups and have magnified existing inequalities. Young people, women and people from asylum seeker, refugee and migrant backgrounds and international students were particularly impacted by the collapse of the jobs market. Some impacted community members were ineligible for Federal or State Government support payments leaving them with no income at all.

Social isolation and chronic uncertainty exacerbated the psychological distress and mental health problems among previously healthy people. This was observed especially among those with pre-existing mental health conditions. Children and young people have experienced detrimental impacts due to disruption to education and inability to socialise, amidst overall stress for families.

People with insecure housing or employment have faced significant impacts and people with disability and their carers have experienced additional and unforeseen costs, with some facing extreme financial hardship. Local agencies have assisted these communities by providing food and other emergency relief measures. The ongoing provision of emergency relief will continue to be important as many households are expected to face ongoing financial difficulties.

The pandemic has had a devastating impact on some Moreland businesses and the economy as a whole - 95% of local businesses reported in April 2020 that they suffered adverse impacts, caused by revenue loss, customer loss and forced closures. Other adverse impacts included increased costs, reduced staff and supply chain disruptions.

Key issues emerging through our core services and programs inform our recovery priorities:

- Financial distress: impacts for households
- Mental health and wellbeing: the mental health toll on the Moreland community
- Digital access and inclusion: impact of technological barriers
- Social inequalities and vulnerabilities: isolation, discrimination and family violence. This has damaged social cohesion in some parts of our community
- The significant impacts on local businesses and the economy with lockdowns and social distancing requirements

Additionally, Council is required to continue communication and engagement functions: with the community, businesses, other levels of government, our partner agencies and community groups. All of

whom have a role to play in ensuring Council remains agile and responsive throughout 2021 and into 2022.

Many strategies to support community recovery can be implemented by individual Council business units using existing resources. In some cases, this simply requires modification of or extension of existing programs and services.

A number of strategies and plans are currently being developed in alignment with the Council four-year term, these include the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan and the Children, Young People and Families Plan, both of which will have an enhanced focus on supporting the community in recovery efforts due to COVID-19. Similarly, the planned actions within the Living and Ageing Well Framework have been modified as have several service responses as the needs of older people have changed due to the pandemic.

It is anticipated that Council will have a role in the delivery of the AstraZeneca vaccine to the Moreland community. If required, Council is ready to support this process with the necessary staffing and infrastructure.

While there are positive signs of economic recovery at a national and state level, these improvements are unevenly spread. Additionally, the extent of local economic recovery is not yet known. Council will continue to engage with the business community to ensure our economic development action plan and associated programs reflect the needs of the business community in support of economic recovery.

This document provides an action plan for COVID Recovery activities by Moreland City Council for the period to December 2022, with further background in key issues.

## The role of Council

### Municipal Emergency Management Plan

A whole of Council response to COVID-19 provides an opportunity for Council to coordinate and support local recovery in line with its Municipal Emergency Management Plan obligations.

All local government areas under the Emergency Management Act (1987 and 2013) are required to have Municipal Emergency Management Plans (MEMP). Moreland's Municipal Emergency Management Plan, developed by the multi-agency Moreland Municipal Emergency Management Committee (MEMPC), sets out arrangements for preparing for, responding to and recovering from emergencies at the local level.

The purpose of the Plan is to:

- Identify existing and possible emergency hazards and risks and implement measures to prevent and reduce the causes or effects of emergencies
- Describe arrangements for the utilisation and implementation of municipal resources in response to emergencies
- Describe multi-agency arrangements for emergency Planning, Prevention, Response and Recovery
- Complement other local, regional and state planning arrangements

A Relief and Recovery Subplan has also been developed by the MEMPC to elaborate on the roles and responsibilities specific to the stages after an emergency event. The plan outlines the following roles and responsibilities:

- Recovery operations involve cooperation between all levels of government, non-government organisations, community agencies, the private sector, affected communities and emergency organisations.
- Recovery management is based on the following four environments:
  - Social Environment – the emotional social, spiritual, financial and physical wellbeing of individuals and communities

- Economic Environment – the revitalisation of the economy
- Built Environment – the restoration of essential and community infrastructure
- Natural Environment – the rehabilitation of the environment



Figure 1: Recovery Environments

This recovery management model is based on a community health and wellbeing model. The four environments are interrelated and co-dependent. They should not be considered as functions, but as environments in which to identify needs, coordinate activities and focus recovery activities and not treated independently or managed separately.

The Moreland MEMPC membership includes:

- Moreland City Council representatives: (Municipal Emergency Resource Officer, Deputy Municipal Emergency Resource Officer, Municipal Recovery Manager, Deputy Municipal Recovery Manager, Municipal Fire Prevention Officer, Municipal Emergency Management Officer)
- Municipal Emergency Response Coordinator
- VICSES – Regional Officer Emergency Management
- VICSES – Broadmeadows Unit Controller
- Department of Health and Human Services Emergency Management Coordinator
- Metropolitan Fire Brigade representative
- Red Cross representative
- Victorian Council of Churches representative
- Merri Community Health representative
- VicRoads representative (Correspondence only)

Ongoing role of the Municipal Emergency Management Committee:

- to prepare the MEMP, which documents response and recovery operational arrangements, and to ensure all the subjects listed in the plan outline are investigated and adequately provided for
- review and amend the operational components of the plan
- Endorse the Municipal Emergency Management Plan
- Review the mitigation and management strategies that have been determined by the committee and agreed by participating agencies that they are implemented and accountabilities that have been assigned are accepted

- Conduct monitoring and review activities of the MEMP by participating in exercises that test the plan and post incident operations
- Assist in implementing Community education, awareness and engagement processes
- Contribute information on the structures in place for the response to and recovery from emergencies and coordination arrangements in place for dealing with emergencies in the municipal district
- Report on agency activities through the agency report template

## **Moreland Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017-21**

The immediate and ongoing health dimensions of COVID-19 represent some critical challenges for the community. The two focus areas of the *Moreland Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017-21* (healthy communities and liveable neighbourhoods) have provided overarching guidance in the development of this Recovery Plan. Council is currently developing a new *Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan* and a *Children, Young People and Families Plan*, both of which will have an enhanced focus on supporting the community in recovery efforts due to COVID-19.

The Moreland Health and Wellbeing Profile 2020 provides a comprehensive analysis of data and research on health and wellbeing in Moreland. Insights from this have informed the key priority area of mental health and wellbeing.

## **Economic Development Strategy 2016-2021**

The *Economic Development Strategy 2016-2021* outlines Council's role in facilitating the development of a local economy that is growing and productive, socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable.

The decline in local economic activity was not anticipated in the *Economic Development Strategy 2016-2021* and impact of the pandemic on local businesses has been immense.

The COVID-19 Recovery Plan will address the decline in local economic activity in the context of the overall goal of the *Economic Development Strategy*: to facilitate the growth and diversity of local jobs, while using our resources wisely.

## **Impacts of the pandemic**

The full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Moreland community will not be known for some time. This section focuses on known impacts at the time of writing this Plan.

### **Secondary Impact Assessment**

Council undertook a Secondary Impact Assessment (SIA) as part of its responsibility to coordinate relief and recovery efforts after an emergency and to assist in understanding the full impact of COVID-19 on the community (MCC, 2020a). Conducted by Wallis Market and Social Research in September 2020, the SIA provides key insights into the community's experiences. The SIA will be referred to throughout this Plan as it offers a sound platform for planning a recovery process for the Moreland community. The key findings of the assessment are summarised in this section.

## **Financial**

Of the respondents working either full time or part time 47% had their hours decreased, 28% were temporarily stood down and 10% were permanently stood down.

Culturally and linguistically diverse respondents were more likely to have experienced negative changes to their work hours and reported they were in a worse financial situation as compared to pre-COVID conditions.

34% of the respondents reported heavy stress on their finances from mortgage or rent payments and a further 31% reported moderate stress.

## **Mental health and wellbeing**

Of the respondents the majority (71%) reported a negative impact to their mental health and wellbeing. Those on incomes of less than \$50,000k reported extremely negative impacts more often than those on higher wages.

While most respondents indicated they can cope with the level of stress caused by impacts of COVID-19 females in the sample were more likely to be unable to cope with stress. Respondents on incomes under \$50,000 were also more likely to be unable to cope with the stress.

Younger residents' respondents and CALD respondents reported they are more likely to be unable to get help when needed.

The pandemic created a range of challenges which contributed to a sense of isolation or stress. Not being able to socialise with family and friends was reported by 50% of respondents. Additional challenges cited were the 5kms radius restrictions (38%) and the challenge of accessing shops and services (13%).

## **Positive outcomes**

When questioned about whether there were any positive outcomes, respondents mentioned: more time with family / partner, a sense of community, working from home, more time for gardening/housekeeping and being more health conscious.

When asked about physical activity the majority (85%) of respondents indicated they increased their activity during COVID related restrictions. This however was not uniform across the respondents. Respondents aged 65+ reported not doing more physical activities (49%) and 35% of those from lower incomes reported not doing more physical activities.

## **Access to information**

Residents sourced their information about COVID-19 from a range of sources, and this was heavily segmented according to age ranges. News through TV, radio and newspapers was almost exclusively used by residents aged 65+ (99%), whereas younger respondents (69%) and CALD respondents (68%) relied on social media as their main source. Of note is that Council information as source was higher among females (19%) and that overall Council sources were more likely to be used than other government sources such as DHHS or the COVID-19 app or website.

## **Council facilities**

Respondents indicated they are now more likely to increase their use of some Council services and amenities: sporting grounds; parks, reserves and playgrounds; walking tracks and cycling paths. Respondents indicated that they would use indoor recreation facilities and libraries at the same rate as prior to COVID restrictions.

## **Social inequalities and vulnerabilities**

The SIA found that the pandemic did not impact uniformly across the municipality.

**CALD communities:** CALD respondents were more likely to experience negative changes to their work hours. They were also more likely to be in a worse financial situation as compared to pre-COVID conditions.

**Younger residents (aged 18-34):** Younger residents were more likely to have their financial conditions worsen, and more likely to experience a negative mental health impact.

**Low income:** Those on incomes of less than \$50,000k reported extremely negative impacts on their mental health and wellbeing more often than those on higher wages.

**Women:** Women indicated they were more likely to be unable to cope with the stress of the impact of COVID-19.

## **Vulnerable communities**

*Council acknowledges that some groups are more likely to be excluded from social, economic and political opportunities due to discrimination and other access barriers<sup>1</sup>.*

Several population groups and communities have been identified as being particularly vulnerable to the impacts of the pandemic and therefore will require attention during the recovery phase.

### **People living alone**

There are more than 16,000 people living alone in Moreland. Measures designed to stop the spread of COVID19 such as social distancing and limiting reasons for visiting friends or family has made persons living alone vulnerable to social isolation. There are approximately 5,000 people living alone in Moreland without internet access (MCC, 2020c).

### **Households without internet access**

Lack of internet access has emerged as a critical disadvantage. This is particularly so for children and young people accessing online education and those who do not have family or friends within a short radius of their home. It also means that access to telehealth services or online health information is not uniformly accessible across the municipality.

People living alone without internet access are also particularly vulnerable to social isolation (MCC, 2020b).

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<sup>1</sup> Moreland Social Cohesion Plan 2020-2025



## **People with English language barriers**

There are at least 10,000 people with poor or no spoken English living in Moreland.

People who speak poor or no English are concentrated in the suburbs of Fawkner, Glenroy and Coburg North. The Secondary Impact Assessment (SIA) reported that CALD respondents were more likely to have experienced negative changes to their work hours and reported they were in a worse financial situation as compared to pre-COVID conditions. Access to information in the appropriate language has emerged as a key issue.

## **People experiencing family violence**

Over the past five years on average 1,880 people, including 1,390 women, were affected by family violence in Moreland each year. Multiple agencies have reported an increase in the number of women seeking support throughout the pandemic. The majority of those experiencing family violence are women<sup>2</sup>.

## **People living with a disability**

There are close to 10,000 people living with a disability who need assistance with core activities. A VicHealth Coronavirus Impact Survey (2020) undertaken across Victoria during the early stages of the Pandemic found that 33% of those living with a self-reported disability felt less connected during COVID-19 lockdown restrictions.

## **Older persons**

Older residents have been identified throughout the pandemic as being more susceptible to serious illness if they acquire COVID-19. Additionally, older people living with dementia or experiencing cognitive impairment may find it difficult to follow instructions to reduce the risk of getting COVID-19. Older people in Moreland are less likely to have access to the internet and measures to prevent the spread COVID-19 have exacerbated the possibility of social isolation (MCC, 2020e).

There are approximately 28,000 elderly aged 60 years and older living in Moreland. Coburg, Glenroy and Brunswick are the suburbs with the highest numbers of elderly living in Moreland (MCC, 2020e).

## **Households in financial hardship**

According to 2019 figures, 24.6% of households in Moreland were classified as “low income”, and this equates to approximately 13,600 households (MCC, 2020i). As reported in the SIA households on incomes of less than \$50,000k reported extremely negative impacts on their mental health and wellbeing more often than those on higher wages.

The removal of the JobSeeker COVID supplement and JobKeeper allowance in March 2021; the ending of temporary protections and supports for renters, and the reduction of working hours or job losses experienced by many will impact on households already in financial hardship. International students were unable to access income support and continue to remain vulnerable.

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<sup>2</sup> Crime Statistics Agency, 2020; Morgan A, & Boxall, H. 2020

## **Unemployment**

As of June 2020, there were 6,677 unemployed persons living in Moreland (unemployment rate of 6.1%). This is an increase from June 2019 where the reported rate was 5.5% (MCC, 2020k).

GEN VIC highlights that the unemployment rate for women is often higher for women and that 55% of job losses due to COVID-19 were jobs held by women. Young people are also more likely to experience unemployment<sup>3</sup>.

## **Secondary Impact Assessment in context**

The findings in the Secondary Impact Assessment (SIA) and the above data on community vulnerabilities is affirmed by other sources of data on the pandemic.

## **Relevant Council Reports**

### **Moreland Health and Wellbeing Profile**

The Moreland Health and Wellbeing Profile 2020 released in December 2020 provides a comprehensive analysis of data and research on health and wellbeing in Moreland. The in-depth profile provides a context for some of the findings in the SIA.

- Over one quarter of Moreland adults are diagnosed with anxiety or depression. The Profile notes an increase in mental health impacts since COVID-19.
- There were over 9,500 households with no access to the Internet in 2016, or 16% of households. Glenroy and Coburg were the suburbs with the highest number of households with no access to the Internet.
- Citing a VicHealth Coronavirus Impact Survey (VicHealth, 2020) undertaken across Victoria during the early stages of the Pandemic:
  - Groups that were feeling less connected during Covid-19 lockdown restrictions include those with a self-reported disability (33%), those who were unemployed (36%), those in a lower income bracket (30%), and young people aged 18 to 24 (39%). Those speaking a language other than English at home (39%) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (51%) were also more likely to report difficulties maintaining connections.
  - Young people were the most severely impacted by job loss. Women have experienced a greater rate of unemployment than men during the pandemic and most casual workers unable to access job keeper are women.
  - People from asylum seeker, refugee and migrant backgrounds are also disproportionately impacted, being overrepresented in highly casualised and low-income industries. People on temporary visas have been largely excluded from federal support packages and are disproportionately impacted.

## **Business Impact Survey**

While the SIA survey focussed mainly on the impacts for individuals and households Council undertook a study in April 2020 on the impact of COVID-19 on businesses (MCC, 2020h). The Business Impact COVID-19 Survey Report was based on a survey of 416 businesses, of which 95% reported having been adversely impacted. The main adverse impacts were caused by revenue loss, customer loss and forced closures. Other adverse impacts included increased costs, reduced staff and supply chain disruptions.

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<sup>3</sup> Gender Equity Victoria, 2020a; Australian Council of Social Service 2020

Most business who participated in the survey had 1 to 5 employees though some had over 50 and a small number over 100. Businesses were concentrated in retail trade; the arts and recreation services professionals, scientific and technical services; and accommodation and food services.

At the time of the survey over 54% of the businesses surveyed indicated that they had not accessed any Federal or State assistance programs. When asked what Council actions would be beneficial in supporting local businesses a 'promoting a buy local campaign' was their top choice and a dedicated phone line for business help was their second.

When asked about other supports, 75 businesses requested financial support, and 62 requested relief and leniency with rent and Council rates. Businesses also expressed a preference for more information from Council.

### **Other key reports and information:**

The Gender Equity Victoria (GENVIC) Submission to the 2021-2022 Victorian State Budget Submission refers to the impact of COVID-19 on women and highlights the following:

- The Victorian unemployment rate is higher for women: 8.1% for women compared to 5.9% for men.
- Women's mental health was also severely affected with 30% of women reporting that they felt "nervous" and 22% felt that "everything was an effort." (GenVic, 2020a).

In December of 2020, just over 11,000 Moreland residents were receiving either Job Seeker or New Start Allowance, this is an increase of 6,000 residents since December 2020 (MCC, 2020k).

Residents employed in Accommodation and Food Services industries are likely to have had their employment status impacted the most by COVID-19. In 2016 this industry employed around 6,400 Moreland residents<sup>4</sup>.

There are significant populations of other vulnerable community groups living in Moreland that are likely to be disproportionately impacted by COVID19, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, persons living with a disability, persons with poor or no spoken English, single parent families, low-income households, persons that are unemployed or at high risk of unemployment, and older persons<sup>5</sup>.

Glenroy Headspace (Youth Mental Health Service) has reported increased demand from young people seeking clinical mental health support since the pandemic began and the current waiting time to see a counsellor is approximately four months.

In the year up to June 2020 there were 2,010 incidents of family violence recorded in Moreland, directly affecting 1,452, women, and 123 children (CSA, 2020) and recent research indicates that since COVID-19 many women in Australia have experienced an onset or escalation of violence and abuse (AIC, 2020).

The Understanding the impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable Australians report by Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand found that domestic violence services were utilised at a greater rate. It also found the recently arrived migrants, women, and those on low incomes were more likely to be impacted by changes in the employment market as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> ABS 2016; MCC 2020g

<sup>5</sup> MCC, 2020c; MCC, 2020d, MCC, 2020g

<sup>6</sup> Good Shepard Australia New Zealand, 2020

## Priorities for pandemic recovery

Based on key research and Moreland experience to date, and in line with the Recovery Environments framework, five key issues have emerged. Key issues emerging through research and consultation have informed the proposed recovery priorities:

- Financial distress: impacts for households;
- Mental health and wellbeing: the mental health toll on the Moreland community;
- Digital access and inclusion: impact of technological barriers;
- Social inequalities and vulnerabilities: isolation, discrimination and family violence which has damaged social cohesion within the community; and
- Economic impacts: impacts on local businesses and the economy.

### **Theme for recovery: Respond to financial distress**

#### **Financial distress: impacts for households**

As outlined in the SIA and other reports and data gathered to date, many Moreland households are enduring financial stress due to employment impacts and the consequent reduction in income. Unemployment and under-employment are likely to worsen throughout 2021 and 2022 as short-term job creation schemes wind up and the JobKeeper wage subsidy ends in March 2021. Young people, women and people from asylum seeker, refugee and migrant backgrounds have been particularly impacted by the collapse of the jobs market. People with disability and their carers experienced additional and unforeseen costs, with some facing extreme financial hardship.

For some groups who are not eligible for Federal or State Government support payments, it has meant no income at all. These groups include asylum seekers, refugees and international students. Local agencies have assisted these communities by providing food and other emergency relief measures. The ongoing provision of emergency relief will continue to be an important role as many households are expected to face ongoing financial difficulties.

#### **Challenges for recovery**

- Supporting households facing uncertainty after March 2021 given the uncertain jobs market and indications that economic recovery is likely to be slow.
- Managing the growing demand for food and material aid as many individuals and families are accessing food relief services for the first time and Moreland food relief agencies are reporting they are not able to meet the demand.
- Providing culturally appropriate food relief and ensuring its safe delivery.
- Addressing the gap in Moreland's volunteering infrastructure in terms of both a need for better ways to harness the goodwill of the community and build capacity of organisations to involve volunteers.

### **Theme for recovery: Improve mental health and wellbeing**

#### **Mental health and wellbeing: the mental health toll on the Moreland community**

COVID19 has had a significant impact on mental health and wellbeing of the Moreland community due to the impacts of public health measures: “stay at home orders” and restricted activities leading to widespread social and economic disruption<sup>7</sup>.

Social isolation and chronic uncertainty are exacerbating psychological distress and mental health problems among previously healthy people and especially among those with pre-existing mental health conditions.

Children and young people have experienced detrimental impacts due to disruption to education and inability to socialise and the stresses for families. The inability to enjoy recreation and sports or participate in extracurricular activities has also been a significant factor leading to stress, anxiety, and other mental health concerns.

It is evident that COVID-19 has amplified the structural inequalities that drive poor mental health outcomes for women<sup>8</sup>.

Mental health services in Victoria have reported a significant increase in women presenting with serious mental health issues during COVID19, including severe anxiety and depression.

### **Challenges for recovery**

- While local government plays a key role in supporting the social determinants of health (the foundations for good health), it does not have a direct role in the mental health service system.
- How to promote opportunities for community participation following COVID19 and rebuild the confidence of residents to connect with others and address any mental health issues that may have arisen during this time.
- Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of the community in the context of other impacts of COVID19, including growing inequality, poverty, unemployment, housing and financial stress.
- Ensuring local mental health services and supports are culturally appropriate and able to respond to the level of need in a timely way.
- The JobKeeper wage subsidy was due to end on 28 March 2021, leaving many in the community facing potential financial insecurity and housing stress, both of which are risk factors for mental illness.
- Promote community-led initiatives that support mental health and access to relevant services, for example, through our Community Grants program.

### **Theme for recovery: Enable digital inclusion for recovery**

#### **Digital access and inclusion: impact of technological barriers.**

Digital access has been key to maintaining social connections during the pandemic, and to accessing information, education, employment and critical programs and services, with many of these services operating remotely.

The digital divide has been highlighted during the pandemic, magnifying the disparity of access faced by Moreland’s vulnerable communities. Households without internet access, those who struggle to afford

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<sup>7</sup> Shakespeare-Finch, J. et al., 2020, as cited in INW PC 2020; MCC, 2020a

<sup>8</sup> MCC, 2020a; Moreland Health and Wellbeing Profile 2020

access and others who do not have the skills to be digitally literate were all extremely vulnerable during COVID-19.

Waiting lists for early intervention and allied health professionals have also increased as some families experienced challenges with telehealth appointments due to technological barriers, preference for face-to-face appointments, and at times, disengagement with services.

### **Challenges for recovery**

- Affordability is a significant barrier for low-income earners and households experiencing financial stress.
- How to address digital inclusion across Moreland, particularly for older residents, people with disability, families and newly arrived communities.
- Increasing support for individuals, households and community groups with limited skills, equipment or devices to access data.

## **Theme for recovery: Address social inequalities and vulnerabilities**

### **Social inequalities and vulnerabilities: isolation, discrimination and family violence**

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission reports that enquiries about racism have increased since the pandemic began, and anonymous reports of racism doubled between March and May 2020. The nature of these reports also changed over that period, suggesting experiences of racial discrimination in employment had shifted towards racial abuse, and included reports of unfair treatment on the street, on public transport or online.

Reports of increased family violence have been noted and documented by many agencies across Melbourne (AIC,2020).

### **Challenges for recovery**

- Implications for promoting social cohesion into the future with the increase in racist attitudes, behaviours and experiences during the pandemic which has already caused significant harm to communities.
- Weakened trust people have in others and in public institutions, which may discourage people from connecting with the broader community, from seeking support from essential health and social services, and from engaging in other aspects of community life.

## **Theme for recovery: Support local businesses and job creation**

### **The significant impacts on local businesses and the economy**

COVID19 has had an enormous impact on where people shop, work, meet and relax. Moreland's thriving local activity centres have suffered with many businesses experiencing loss of customers. Opportunities to grow businesses diminished greatly during lockdown measures, and small and large business sought to comply with regulations such as social distancing and lockdowns. Travel restrictions meant a loss of customers who would otherwise travel into the area to experience Moreland's unique mix of retail and international dining options.

### **Challenges for recovery**

- Linking and informing local business about State and Federal initiatives to assist in recovery.
- Council's role in the provision of packages to support local businesses.

- Council's role in providing dynamic marketing opportunities to draw people into Moreland.
- How to maintain tourist activities through the Arts and Festivals in the light of possible snap lockdowns.

# Moreland City Council COVID-19 Recovery Plan - Priority Actions

This section outlines key actions to support to community and economic recovery in Moreland. Council will work closely with community partners and other levels of government to enhance opportunities and services for residents who face barriers to full social and economic engagement.

Theme	Priority actions	Lead Unit, and link to existing plan	Outcome measures
COVID-19 Overview and coordination	<p>Fulfil statutory obligations as outlined in the Municipal Emergency Management Plan and sub-plans.</p> <p>Ongoing coordination of recovery activities in alignment with Federal and State Government initiatives.</p> <p>Ensure Council-wide planning and coordination to understand and respond to COVID impacts, including advocacy to other levels of government.</p> <p>Work in partnership with local groups and organisations to respond to local needs in a coordinated way.</p>	<p>Municipal Emergency Management Plan Committee, MRM and Relief &amp; Recovery Functional Leads (Social, Economic, Built &amp; Natural)</p>	<p>COVID-19 Recovery Coordinator appointed March 2021</p> <p>Federal, State &amp; any regional COVID-19 Recovery Plans are identified &amp; incorporated into local plans</p> <p>Local issues are advocated in available regional &amp; state forums</p> <p>Roles &amp; responsibilities outlined in the MEMP are delivered</p> <p>Using community led and resilience building principles support service provider newsletter and networks; implement food and material relief network; and promote volunteering.</p>



Theme	Priority actions	Lead Unit, and link to existing plan	Outcome measures
	Support DFFH and DH in Outbreak response e.g. establishment of pop-up testing sites, communication and community engagement.	MRM	Actively supporting DH and other agencies in responding to outbreaks
	Co-ordinate Community Connections working groups and joint responses to issues.	Community Development and Social Policy	Maintain working groups as necessary
Support local businesses and job creation	<p>Develop an Economic Development Action Plan which reflects the needs of industry and business and focuses on building business capability and job creation.</p> <p>Continue to engage with and advocate to the State Government in relation to programs and initiatives to support economic recovery.</p> <p>Develop an Investment Attraction Program</p> <p>Integrate recommendations from <i>A Job in Moreland</i> plan into the Economic Development Action plan</p>	<p>Economic Development</p> <p>Economic Development</p>	<p>Effective Economic Development action plan is implemented</p> <p>Implement a responsive investment attraction program.</p> <p>Implement a Jobs in Moreland action plan.</p>

Theme	Priority actions	Lead Unit, and link to existing plan	Outcome measures
	<p>Progress the Brunswick Design District partnership advocacy effort.</p> <p>Continue to increase work experience, traineeships, apprentices and internships for young people across Council.</p>	<p>Economic Development/ Places</p> <p>Economic Development, Places, Arts &amp; Culture – RMIT, Creative Victoria</p> <p>Human Resources</p>	<p>Accelerate the Brunswick Design District partnership and implement a range of activities and programs that promote the district and creative industry opportunities</p> <p>Increase the number of opportunities for young people</p>
	<p>Progress the cluster of Council-led development opportunities in central Coburg to inject millions of dollars into the local economy and create tens of thousands of new jobs.</p>	<p>Property and Place</p>	<p>Numbers of jobs created.</p> <p>Value of new development.</p>
	<p>Roll out Jobs Victoria Jobseeker program, hiring six Jobs Advocates to work across Moreland and Darebin municipalities, supporting jobseekers to find assistance and support.</p>	<p>Cultural Development</p>	<p>Successful implementation of the program (April 2021 - June 2023)</p>

Theme	Priority actions	Lead Unit, and link to existing plan	Outcome measures
	Work with small business /traders/ arts orgs to support business viability, in line with state/federal sources of support	Economic Development, Arts & Culture	Continued support of Trader Associations. Successful promotion of Government programs and initiatives
	Support local businesses to start or continue outdoor dining, waiving applicable fees and charges, and upgrading parklets with decking and lighting.  (Council was successful in bidding for \$350,000 in Round 2 of the State Government's Outdoor Dining program).	Places, Urban Design, Local Laws	Number of local businesses supported through waiving of fees.  Number of parklets installed/upgraded.
	Provision of further Flourish Arts Recovery Grants to be considered by Council in the 21/22 budget process.  Support artists, the creative industries and small businesses by offering paid residency opportunities such as Making Space or Community Creator.	Arts and Culture  Arts and Culture	Grants program administered  Residency programs administered

Theme	Priority actions	Lead Unit, and link to existing plan	Outcome measures
	Opportunity to use Council procurement spend to support local business and social enterprises to achieve local, social and environmental outcomes	Procurement & Economic Development action plan	Connect local suppliers to Council procurement opportunities (Local Supplier list in development)
	Assess the need to run a further Business Impact Survey to understand scale of recovery and current business recovery support needs.	Economic Development Strategy and Research	Link to State Government Business Impact survey or implement an MCC survey in new financial year
Support mental health and wellbeing	Support the provision of the AstraZeneca vaccine to the community (DH will fully fund Council's costs if this is required) Promote community awareness and information about the vaccine to the community	Maternal and Child Health & Immunisation  Communications	Fulfil contractual obligations with DH in relation to roll out of the program  Community awareness campaign
	Provide information about vaccination availability to CALD and vulnerable community members.	Communications	Targeted multi-lingual communications campaign

Theme	Priority actions	Lead Unit, and link to existing plan	Outcome measures
	Include mental health and wellbeing as a key priority in the new Council Plan ensuring actions across lifespans and key priority groups (e.g. youth, older adults, etc; women, LGBTIQ, etc)	Community Wellbeing (Integrated Council Plan + MPHWP 2021 – 2024)	Inclusion as a key priority in the Council Plan and associated action plans for 2021-2024
	Implement a range of social connection initiatives and programs to support older people to access the community in a safe and supported way through the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP)	Aged and Community Support	Delivery of a range of programs to meet the changing needs of older people in the community.
	<p>Maternal and Child Health to support mental health and wellbeing of parents through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased consultation time from 30 minutes to 45 minutes or longer as required to support parents with COVID19 anxiety/experiences.</li> <li>• Enhanced partnership with Relate well to provide outreach counselling to all families where required.</li> <li>• Increased support over longer periods of time for clients of the Enhanced Maternal and Child Health program.</li> </ul>	Maternal and Child Health	Delivery of services flexibly and in response to family need, considering the range of impacts due to COVID-19

Theme	Priority actions	Lead Unit, and link to existing plan	Outcome measures
	<p>\$50k allocated to Headspace Glenroy to provide additional counselling and support to young people.</p> <p>Continue to offer online programming to support access for young people who face barriers in accessing the Oxygen Youth Space.</p> <p>Facilitate a Moreland Mental Health forum or activities in partnership with Rotary</p> <p>Investigate a sustained Community approach to delivering the Youth Mental Health First Aid program in partnership with Rotary, community organisations and schools.</p> <p>Moreland Youth Ambassadors to be trained in facilitation and Mental Health First Aid and engage with local schools and other settings to support young people.</p>	<p>Youth Services</p> <p>Youth Services; Community Wellbeing</p> <p>Youth Services; Community Wellbeing</p> <p>Youth Services</p>	<p>Funding allocated is utilised to provide additional mental health counselling and support</p> <p>Programs provided as needed.</p> <p>Forum conducted with actions</p> <p>A plan is developed in partnership and funding opportunities pursued</p> <p>Engagement with local schools and in other settings to promote mental wellbeing of young people</p>

Theme	Priority actions	Lead Unit, and link to existing plan	Outcome measures
	Encourage safe access to parks, open spaces and walkability to support mental health and wellbeing	Community Wellbeing (Integrated Council + MPHWP)	Promotion of physical activity and safe access to parks open space
	Progress the development of a new Health Precinct in central Coburg, in partnership with developers and/or health providers, including services for both physical and mental health	Property and Place	Number of new health services being delivered locally
Build community resilience and social cohesion	<p>Continue to provide regular updates on restricted activities because of COVID via Moreland Connectors and Social Media and letter drops.</p> <p>Build the Moreland Connectors group as a sustained and valued connection to our broader multicultural groups across Moreland Community Connector Program (The program has seven "Connectors" from non-English speaking backgrounds who assist in communicating essential information to community groups.)</p>	<p>Communications and Community Development and Social Policy</p> <p>Community Development and Social Policy</p>	<p>Ongoing provision of information as required</p> <p>Moreland Connectors group continues to be supported during the COVID recovery phase and beyond</p>

Theme	Priority actions	Lead Unit, and link to existing plan	Outcome measures
	Information on accessing COVID19 testing; where to get help and the range of services and supports available.  Continued facilitation of the Food and Material Relief Network	Community Development and Social Policy	Ongoing provision of information as required  Quarterly meetings held with an increased attendance of current and new members
	Community programs and partnerships to build collaborations through the implementation of the Social Cohesion Plan.	Community Development and Social Policy	Implement relevant actions in the Social Cohesion Plan
	Continue to provide a Service Provider Newsletter on COVID and Vaccination related news as well as Council community service and event updates.	Community Development and Social Policy	Co-ordination and distribution as necessary
	Support current Thrive Grant recipients and monitor outcomes.	Community Development and Social Policy and Grants Officer	Ensure maximum benefit is delivered to community
	Deliver increased digital literacy training and support to vulnerable	Library Services	Number of people supported and trained



Theme	Priority actions	Lead Unit, and link to existing plan	Outcome measures
Enable digital access and inclusion	community members, at the library and in-situ with local partners.  Continue to offer free Wi-Fi and PC use at libraries, loan of iPad's and other devices to communities in need.		
	Continue and expand the digital mentoring program for older people, including loan of iPad's and other devices.	Aged and Community Support	Number of older people supported and trained
	Explore partnership opportunities with community organisations to further develop further digital access and inclusion programs for community	Community Development and Social Policy	Negotiated programs with funding and service agreements with NH's
	Expand opportunities for residents to recycle their e-waste in partnership with Social enterprises (repair and sell back to community at minimum cost or donate to community)  Expand wifi bandwidth within Council community facilities and venues	Waste Services; Community Development and Social Policy  IT services	

Theme	Priority actions	Lead Unit, and link to existing plan	Outcome measures
Respond to financial distress	Emergency relief provision (material aid)	Aged and Community Support Maternal and Child Health	Continue to deliver material aid to community members/ families in financial distress
	Continue to explore opportunities with the Housing Sector in the North West region for ways that Council can contribute to the solutions regarding housing affordability and rough sleeping	Community Wellbeing	Regular attendance at Housing Northern Local Area Service Provider networks
	Monitor and report on the impact of Federal social safety net transition on Moreland residents (i.e. removal of JobKeeper and reduction of Jobseeker payment rates) and impacts of end of State Government rental eviction moratorium.	Community Development / Strategy and Research	Quarterly updates of the Unemployment Population Research Brief and update Financial Hardship Research Brief when 2021 Census data become available  Monitor service use levels of Vincent Care Homelessness Access Point and Homes Victoria housing provision data.
	Implement a range of new initiatives and programs to support older people to access nutritious meals through additional funding from the	Aged and Community Support	Deliver the programs until at least 30th June 2022

Theme	Priority actions	Lead Unit, and link to existing plan	Outcome measures
	Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP)		
	Continue to work towards a broader partnership with the Hume and Moreland Family Services Sector response agencies regarding family violence	Community Development and Social Policy	Facilitate regular network meetings
	Review the Youth Initiative Grant Category within the Community Grants Program and make necessary adjustments to improve uptake and flexibility to support young people and youth initiatives. Review the Youth Initiative Grant Category within the Community Grants Program and make necessary adjustments to improve uptake and flexibility to support young people and youth initiatives.	Youth Services	Administer Community Grants Program

Theme	Priority actions	Lead Unit, and link to existing plan	Outcome measures
	<p>Withhold interest on all COVID Deferrals and Financial Hardship Programs until June 2022</p> <p>We will boost communication of the \$50 rate rebate available for Health Card holders and pro-actively contact rate payers by phone to maximise participation in payment plans and deferrals of interest.</p>	Rates Services	<p>Send reminder letters and encouraging ratepayers who need financial assistance to contact Council for the establishment of rate plans and deferral of interest.</p> <p>Communicate the availability of the \$50 rate rebate for Health Card holders and pro-actively contact rate payers by phone to maximise participation in payment plans and deferrals of interest.</p>

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## **Appendix 1: Moreland City Council response to date**

Since March 2020 Moreland City Council enacted a series of measures to immediately support the community and local businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the pandemic has continued Council's response had been multifaceted and staged according to community need.

### **Overview**

An allocation in the 2020/21 budget of \$6.24 million for a COVID-19 Recovery and Rebuild Package targeted at residents, community organisations, businesses and the arts.

### **Coordination**

- Council performs an emergency management role and has set responsibilities detailed in the Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMP). The coordination role for municipalities is also set out in the Victorian State Emergency Management Plan, including provision of critical emergency management public information.
- Regular liaison with the Department of Health and other departments and implementation of a range of initiatives, including the provision of logistical and other support for COVID-19 testing in priority suburbs.

### **Support for business**

- Surveyed more than 10,000 Moreland businesses to develop a tailored response package.
- Council rates and fee relief for businesses experiencing financial hardship.
- Supporting businesses by waiving food registration renewal fees for the 2020 calendar year and providing refunds for some fees.
- A total of \$550,000 in grants funding was distributed to local businesses as part of the Business & Community COVID-19 Grants Program and the Boost for Business COVID-19 resilience and recovery package. 257 Grants were awarded, and overall hundreds of businesses have benefited from the Boost for Business program measures.
- Love Moreland Buy Local online campaign with an embedded interactive map and promotional blog that encourages the community to support local goods and services and provides business to business opportunities.
- Accelerated social media, radio media programs (RRR).
- Love Moreland Dine Local. State Government outdoor dining funding to support businesses set up or expand their outdoor dining activity. Parklet and parking bays converted into outdoor dining areas. More than 100 businesses assisted.
- MoreSpace Program – activating vacant shopfronts with non-contact e-commerce.
- Love your Shopfront program that improves the attractiveness of shopfronts for customers.
- COVID-19 Food Compliance initiative – compliance products supplied to 36 business
- Small Business mentoring support program helping build business capability.
- Online training, support, workshops and forum schedule.

### **Support for residents**

- COVID-19 financial hardship policy introduced creating an interest-free payment plan for rates and deferring rates without penalties.

### **Employment support**

- 309 temporary employment opportunities of up to six months created across Council as part of the Working for Victoria grants administered by the Victorian State Government.



## **Support for the arts and creative communities**

- Flourish Arts Recovery Grants awarded to local individual artist and arts organisations in recognition of the role the arts play in creating community connectedness.

## **Sports Clubs**

- Sports Clubs fee relief: Provided fee relief to community sporting organisations impacted by COVID-19.

## **Community groups**

- Thrive Community Recovery Grants: Funding for community organisations for one-off project implementation and development that benefits and engages the Moreland community.
- COVID-19 Quick Response Grants to local sports or community groups to cover the extra cost of COVID-19 related equipment such as hand sanitiser, cleaning stations, face masks or other equipment.

## **Partnerships**

- Partnered with local charities and emergency relief providers to assist with immediate needs such as food and other essentials for the most vulnerable in the community.

## **Young people**

- Council events and programs were delivered online, and a range of digital platform used for creative programming and to maintain connections with young people.
- Contacted service users regularly via telephone, text message or video call.
- In recognition of the significant impact the pandemic has had on young people an \$50,000 has been committed to mental health support services as part of the COVID-19 Recovery and Rebuild package.

## **Maternal and Child Health**

- Adjustments to Maternal and Child Health programs. Telehealth for clients and a range of digital platforms for community forums such as Dads of Moreland and new parent groups. Phone support line for those seeking breastfeeding support.
- Online, outreach and “drop off” of resources for playgroups.
- Support to families in financial distress - provision of baby formula, nappies and wipes.

## **Immunisation services**

- Immunisation services modified to ensure safety and continued to run.

## **Libraries**

- Online delivery of Storytime, English language conversation classes and book groups.
- Books to Your Door, a contactless delivery program, and expansion of Home Library Service for older or homebound members.
- Internet enabled iPads for loan to access eBooks and address the digital divide.
- No fines on library books.

## **Services to older residents**

- Services continued for vulnerable older residents with wellbeing checks, delivered meals and home shopping.

- Community Activation and Social Isolation Initiative (CASI). A Department of Health and Human Services funded six-month initiative - a team of four Community Navigators help people affected by Covid-19 maintain connections with family, friends and the community and build new social connections and networks of support. Currently funded until end of April 2021.

## **Legal support for international students**

With financial support from Council, Northern Community Legal Centre (NCLC) is implemented a Legal Clinic for international students to provide advice by telephone on common issues experienced including housing and renting rights, employment, managing debt, and accessing financial support.

## **Home support**

- Home support services, personal support, respite support, delivered meals and community transport continued with some adjustments to services.

## **Information**

- Keeping the community updated through Community Update Newsletters and directing members of CALD communities to appropriate information sources.
- A Community Connector program with a dedicated contact number assisted those feeling vulnerable and isolated with practical or emotional support. Role established to reach non-English speaking and newly arrival communities.

## **Community development**

- Continued engagement with the community and service providers to allow Council to dynamically adapt and tailor its services. 100 community services contacted.

## **Social cohesion**

- Be Kind Moreland Campaign to support community morale and promote positive social behaviours.

## **Internal Council response**

- Staff: In line with State Government COVID-19 directives, most staff worked from home, except for staff delivering essential services. The full range of all services delivered by Council till June 2020 are detailed in the Annual Report 2019/2020.
- Council meetings: Council continued to meet online with livestreaming enabling public engagement.