



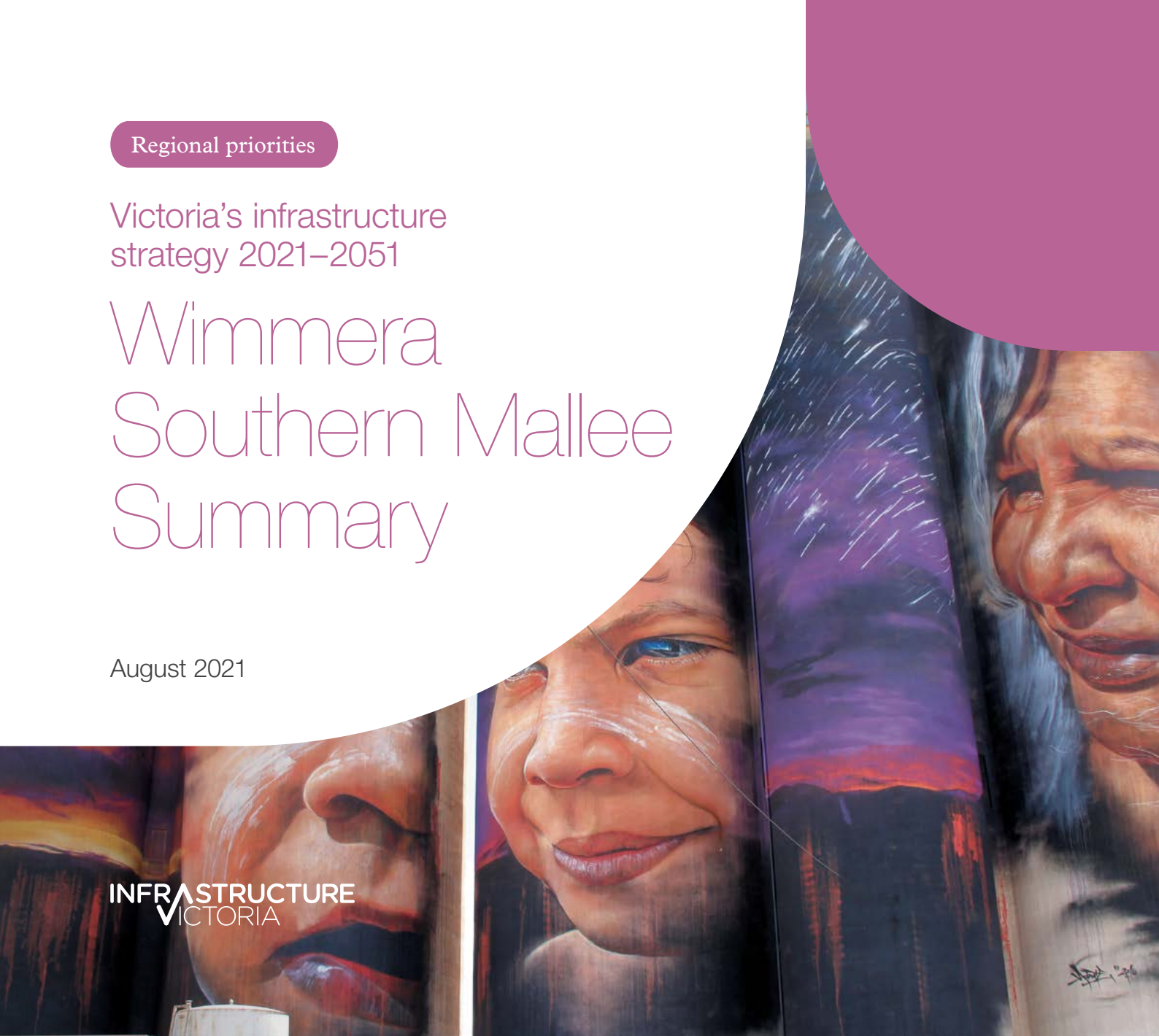
Regional priorities

Victoria's infrastructure
strategy 2021–2051

Wimmera Southern Mallee Summary

August 2021

INFRASTRUCTURE
VICTORIA



Victoria's infrastructure strategy 2021–2051

In 2016, Infrastructure Victoria developed Victoria's first ever 30-year infrastructure strategy. The 2016 strategy was evidence-based, covered all types of infrastructure, and we consulted widely with stakeholders and the community. To stay relevant and reflect Victoria's evolving infrastructure needs, we update the strategy every three to five years.

Victoria's infrastructure strategy 2021–2051 builds on the 2016 strategy, revising many of our original recommendations and adding others in response to Victoria's changing circumstances. But we retain a long-term view of Victoria's infrastructure needs over the next 30 years, remembering that infrastructure lasts many decades, and must meet both immediate needs and those in the future. The strategy can be downloaded from our website at infrastructurevictoria.com.au

Aboriginal acknowledgment

Infrastructure Victoria acknowledges the traditional owners of country in Victoria and pays respect to their elders past and present, as well as elders of other Aboriginal communities. We acknowledge the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagalk peoples and sections of the land of the Dja Dja Wurrung people, Taungurung people and the Yorta Yorta people, whose traditional lands are in the Wimmera Southern Mallee region. We recognise that the state's infrastructure is built on land that has been managed by Aboriginal people for millennia.

Infrastructure Victoria listened to regional Victorians

Over the last four years, we built a deeper understanding of infrastructure needs, industry composition, and social disadvantage, in our *Regional infrastructure needs* and *Infrastructure priorities for the regions projects*. We have consulted with the Wimmera Southern Mallee communities, industries and local government to build our regional knowledge, and examined the unique opportunities and challenges that face each of Victoria's regions.

This work produced a *Wimmera Southern Mallee regional profile*, a *Wimmera Southern Mallee regional industry profile*, and a *Factsheet on Wimmera Southern Mallee regional disadvantage*, all available on our website. We used this evidence to develop strategy recommendations that can apply to the Wimmera Southern Mallee region.

Engagement timeline



During the consultation period for Wimmera Southern Mallee, we provided more opportunities for communities and stakeholders to offer feedback on our draft recommendations, including through surveys, submissions, and hosting a Wimmera Southern Mallee regional roundtable discussion.

Combined, this comprehensive process of consultation and engagement guided the development of this Wimmera Southern Mallee regional summary and its recommendations. It focusses on infrastructure-related opportunities to build on the Wimmera Southern Mallee's economic and industry advantages, and to strengthen local communities by improving health, education, and social inclusion outcomes, while reducing disadvantage.

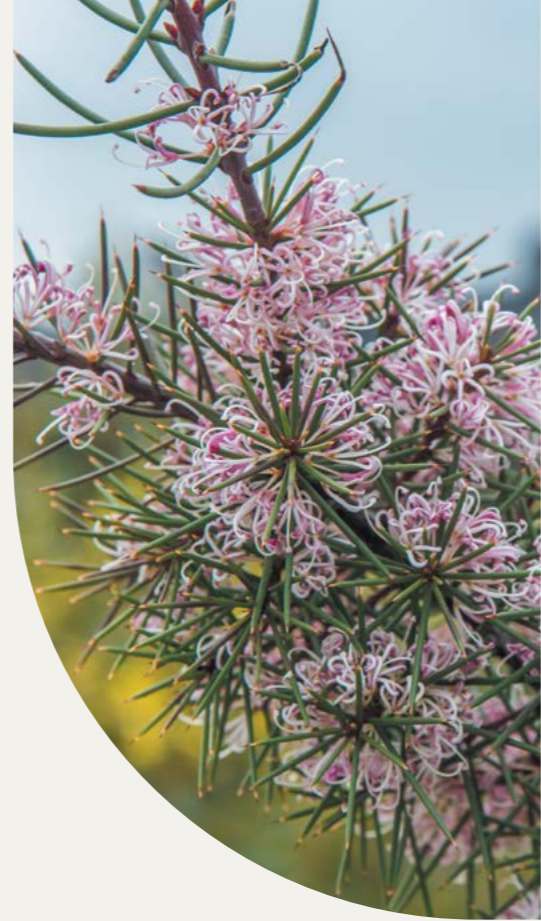
This document provides a summary of selected recommendations from Victoria's infrastructure strategy which respond to the needs and opportunities we identified in Wimmera Southern Mallee.

Overview

The Wimmera Southern Mallee region is an agricultural economy based on dryland farming, especially grain, a major export for the region. Health services and manufacturing make up the next largest sectors of the economy with several major health facilities located in Horsham, Wimmera Southern Mallee's largest regional centre.

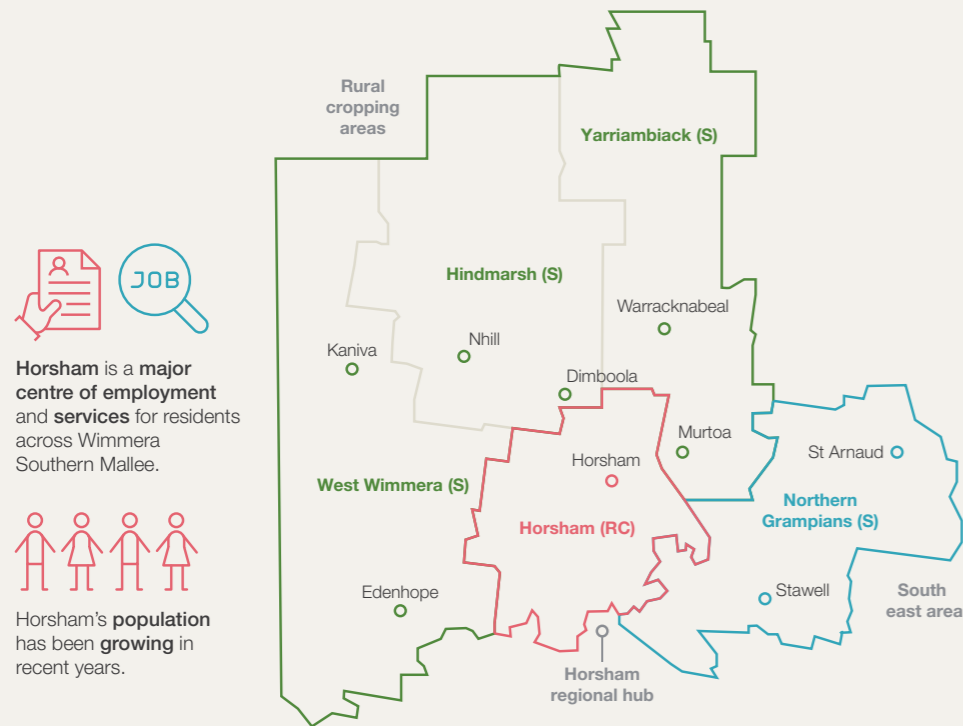
The Wimmera Southern Mallee region includes the traditional lands of the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagalk peoples and sections of the land of the Dja Dja Warrung people, Taungurung people and the Yorta Yorta people. The region is home to some of Victoria's iconic natural attractions, including the Grampians National Park and the Wimmera River.

Horsham and Stawell are service centres for the wider region. Horsham in particular is a major centre of employment and services for residents across Wimmera Southern Mallee. Horsham's population has been growing in recent years, in contrast to the region's smaller towns and rural areas. The region contains some of Victoria's more remote areas, bordering South Australia.



Sheep at Dusk, Wimmera Mallee Tourism

The regions of Wimmera Southern Mallee



Horsham is a major centre of employment and services for residents across Wimmera Southern Mallee.

Horsham's population has been growing in recent years.



An agricultural economy based on dryland farming.



Health services and manufacturing make up the next largest sectors of the economy.



The region includes the traditional lands of the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagalk peoples and sections of the land of the Dja Dja Wurrung people, Taungurung people and the Yorta Yorta people.

Enhance market access and regional economic growth

Improve freight networks

Wimmera Southern Mallee's rail freight network, which links grain producers and processors with Victoria's ports and export markets, is a regional strength. Despite this, many businesses remain reliant on heavy vehicle transport. Wimmera Southern Mallee stakeholders highlighted many freight and transport issues and opportunities that affect road safety and limit economic growth for the region. These include:

- Disappointment that the scope of the Murray Basin Rail Project does not include connections to the Port of Portland
- The low use of the Port of Portland in the nearby Great South Coast region
- Potential expansion of the Wimmera intermodal freight terminal
- Increasing heavy vehicle transport on main roads, and
- Poor condition of roads in the region.

They emphasised that the growth of mineral sands mining and processing may increase employment in the region. But it may need to be supported by expansion of the Wimmera intermodal freight terminal and improved access to the Port of Portland.

Wimmera Southern Mallee stakeholders were concerned that more heavy vehicles using narrow sealed main roads posed a safety risk. They estimate that about \$50 million would be required to address the highest priority of the 960 kilometres of main roads with a narrow seal (c-class). They also believed an alternative route for freight movement around Horsham was needed, and that the Western Highway should be duplicated (initially to Stawell).

Stakeholders also highlighted the challenges with road maintenance around Horsham. The geology around Horsham leads to much faster deterioration of road conditions compared to other areas in Victoria. They consider funding is required for local research into road construction strategies to prevent road deterioration.

Recommendations to better connect Wimmera Southern Mallee businesses with processors and markets

Upgrades and improvements to the current road infrastructure can help manage increasing volumes of freight travelling between the region's primary producers, processors and markets.

This includes the region's agriculture industry and the emerging mining and renewable energy industries. Safer and more reliable country roads can help better connect tourist locations and visitor accommodation. Sustained investment in road and rail maintenance and upgrades can enable efficient supply chains and provide certainty to local businesses and investors.

More funding certainty for road and rail maintenance and upgrade programs can leverage Wimmera Southern Mallee's road and rail freight networks to better support the needs of the region's businesses. Ongoing freight rail development can consider the excluded elements of the Murray Basin Rail project.

Our recommendations build on short-term Victorian Government funding for road and rail maintenance; to plan, upgrade and maintain rural and regional roads; and to deliver improvements in the way roads are maintained and managed across 11 small rural shire councils.

Recommendation 78

Deliver long-term funding certainty for regional road maintenance and upgrades

Within two years, specify clear levels of service for each type of regional road and bridge. Following this, dedicate a 10-year funding program to sustainably fund Victorian Government regional road and bridge maintenance and upgrades to meet these service levels. Funding should be prioritised based on improving safety, decreasing vehicle emissions, and lifting productivity.

Recommendation 79

Fund and plan for ongoing regional rail freight network development and maintenance

In the next year, fund a 30-year periodic regional freight rail maintenance program, informed by a publicly available network development and asset management plan. Using the plan, thoroughly determine the feasibility of the next major regional freight upgrade within five years.

Unlock industry growth opportunities

Renewable energy, particularly wind generation, is an emerging opportunity for the region. However, inadequacies in the region's transmission infrastructure is constraining future development. Good transmission network connections can help Wimmera Southern Mallee to realise the potential benefits associated with wind and solar energy generation.

Access to reliable, modern utilities services, including energy, has been identified as a potential development constraint in the region. Farms powered through outdated single wire earth return power lines can constrain adopting changing industry practices and more energy intensive farming equipment.

This limits production and stops farms from expanding. While the region already produces wind and solar energy, there are opportunities to further expand renewable energy with the progressive expansion of the existing network capacity and infrastructure.

Wimmera Southern Mallee stakeholders highlighted the region's energy challenges, such as inconsistent and insufficient supply to deliver potable water to some locations. The Wimmera Southern Mallee stakeholders told us there are renewable energy opportunities, including at a micro grid or community level, that would support new industry investment. *The Grampians renewable energy roadmap* also outlines further opportunities for renewable energy in the region.

Wimmera Southern Mallee stakeholders also suggested that the capacity of the Western Victoria Transmission Network Project should be doubled, as once complete it will be at capacity and unable to meet the growth in renewable energy. Stakeholders are calling for infrastructure and the network to be upgraded to allow the region to improve the consistency of their power supply as well as generate energy back into the grid.

Recommendations to unlock industry growth opportunities

Removing constraints to future industry development can leverage potential renewable energy opportunities in Wimmera Southern Mallee. Infrastructure Victoria supports the Australian Energy Market Operator's proposed transmission extension, Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West (VNI West), which will better connect Victoria with New South Wales and unlock the potential of significant renewable energy resources – including wind and solar resources in the Western Victoria Renewable Energy Zone, partly within Wimmera Southern Mallee.

Co-funding power supply upgrades can remove constraints associated with outdated power supply infrastructure and allows new investment opportunities for regional businesses. Where upgrades are shown to deliver benefits to existing users and unlock potential future investment, upgrade costs can be shared between the Victorian Government, power distribution companies and local businesses.

Recommendation 03

Augment electricity transmission for renewable energy and resilience

Support augmentation of critical electricity transmission infrastructure by 2027–28 to accommodate new renewable energy generation and improve network resilience and reliability through interconnection with other states.

Recommendation 04

Identify and coordinate Renewable Energy Zones

In the next year, identify Renewable Energy Zones, especially in the state's north-west, and continue to coordinate their development over the next 10 years.

Recommendation 04

Upgrade power supply for agriculture and regional industry

In the next five years, contribute toward strategic power supply infrastructure upgrades for agriculture and regional industry, where an independent assessment demonstrates significant potential for increased productivity, competitiveness and growth.



Please refer to *Victoria's infrastructure strategy 2021–2051* (section 1.1) for additional recommendations on navigating the energy transition.

Enhance water security and industry resilience

Wimmera Southern Mallee is an established region of agricultural production. Grains, sheep meat and wool are the region's main agricultural commodities, and the region produces 26% of Victoria's total grains.

Extensive periods of drought and unfavourable conditions have affected the region's grain production. The region has high exposure to changing climatic conditions, which are predicted to become more variable. By the 2030s, Wimmera Southern Mallee's average maximum temperatures could increase by up to 1.8°C, while average annual rainfall is projected to decrease by 10%. By the 2050s, Wimmera Southern Mallee could have twice as many days over 38°C and up to 48% more very high fire danger days.

The Wimmera Mallee pipeline provides water security for the region, enabling farmers to supplement cropping operations with livestock, managing variability in seasonal conditions and commodity prices. Coupled with world-class research, development and extension facilities at the Horsham Grains Innovation Park, these strengths will help the agricultural industries manage the increased incidence of droughts, extreme weather events and expected reduction in average rainfall. A continued focus on water supply and drought-proof water infrastructure can help ensure future water security.

Stakeholders highlighted that providing potable water and sewerage to more townships in the region has health and environmental benefits. They indicated that only one in seven townships have reticulated water and just two in seven have access to reticulated sewerage.

Wimmera Southern Mallee stakeholders also express a need for larger tanks to be installed at key locations on the perimeter of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline area to facilitate firefighting in these areas, which should be funded through the fire services levy.

Recommendations to improve water security for the Wimmera Southern Mallee's agriculture industry

Further strengthening water security in Wimmera Southern Mallee can be achieved by using all sources of water supply, continuing to modernise irrigation systems, and upgrading Victoria's emergency water supply network so farmers can get water as rainfalls decline.

Our recommendations will benefit Wimmera Southern Mallee's agriculture and related businesses, helping to support continued industry growth.

Recommendation 13

Consider all water supply sources

Consider all water sources for supply augmentation, including identifying and addressing barriers to purified recycled drinking water within the next 10 years. When planning for future water supply, investigate all options including, but not limited to, recycled water, seawater desalination, stormwater harvesting and better use of the water grid.

Recommendation 16

Strengthen agricultural water security by modernising irrigation

In the next 30 years, contribute funding toward planning and delivery of water infrastructure and irrigation modernisation projects across Victoria.

Recommendation 17

Upgrade Victoria's emergency water network

In the next year, assess the condition, capacity and security of Victoria's emergency water supply point network, and upgrade or replace inadequate supply points. Clarify ongoing responsibility for monitoring, maintenance and funding to secure a resilient network.

By the 2030s



Average **maximum temperatures could increase** by up to 1.8°C



Average **annual rainfall is projected to decrease** by 10%

By the 2050s



Could have **twice as many days** over 38°C



Could have up to 48% more **very high fire danger days**



Please refer to *Victoria's infrastructure strategy 2021–2051* (section 1.2) for additional recommendations on water and responding to climate change.



Pink Lake — salt lake near Dimboola

Foster tourism in Wimmera Southern Mallee

The Grampians National Park is heritage-listed for its animal and plant life, Aboriginal heritage and stunning natural beauty. Other attractions in Wimmera Southern Mallee include the Silo Art Trail, the Wimmera River and agritourism events such as the Grampians Grape Escape.

The region has a rich Aboriginal heritage. Aboriginal people have had an association with the Grampians, or Gariwerd, for more than 30,000 years. The land is at the centre of creation stories for many of the Aboriginal communities in south-western Victoria. Brambuk: The National Park and Cultural Centre in Halls Gap celebrates and shares the Aboriginal cultural heritage of Gariwerd. Other important sites on the land of the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagalk people occur along the Wimmera River.

Along with other tourist regions across Victoria, the Grampians has experienced a tourism decline due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many jobs in the area rely on the visitor economy. As restrictions ease, opportunities exist to further develop tourism in Wimmera Southern Mallee, focussing on the region's natural assets and Aboriginal cultural heritage.

The visitor experience can be improved with better tourism infrastructure, particularly in the north and west of the region. The Wimmera River would benefit from enabling infrastructure such as cycling and walking trails. Rest areas and tourist facilities are also needed to further develop nature-based tourism experiences in the region's national parks.

Recommendations to support a recovery in regional tourism

Nature-based and Aboriginal tourism opportunities can support sustainable tourism industry growth in the region. A nature-based tourism strategy to guide future investment in the region's tourist infrastructure can help ensure that tourism experiences, and supporting facilities and infrastructure, meet visitor expectations, and protected and enhance the region's natural assets.

Nature-based tourism sites, such as national parks, require basic amenities and infrastructure to encourage investment in experiences, food and accommodation services. Removing barriers to investment in national parks' tourist facilities and services can further add to the diversity of Wimmera Southern Mallee's tourist offering.

A Victorian Aboriginal tourist strategy, co-developed with Traditional Owners, can further drive sustainable economic activity in Wimmera Southern Mallee, helping to preserve and promote the region's Aboriginal cultural histories and heritage sites and create job opportunities for Aboriginal communities. Collectively, our recommendations can build on investments in Wimmera Southern Mallee's tourism infrastructure, including funding towards the Grampians Peak Trail, the Brambuk Cultural Centre and visitor upgrades at MacKenzie Falls and support for Victoria's tourism sector to drive visitation and jobs growth.

Recommendation 81

Plan for and facilitate regional nature-based tourism investments

In the next two years, develop a Victorian nature-based tourism strategy to guide industry development and prioritise further investments. During the next 15 years, support regional tourism investment by allowing more site-specific leases for up to 49 years for infrastructure proposals that meet strict criteria and complement environmental and cultural values.

Recommendation 82

Develop a Victorian Aboriginal tourism strategy with Aboriginal communities

Support and partner with Aboriginal communities in the next two years to guide future investments in Aboriginal tourism and cultural heritage, including through Joint Management Plans.

Better connect the regions

Improve access to public transport

A lack of public transport in Wimmera Southern Mallee acts as a barrier to jobs and services for those who do not have their own means of transport. Access to public transport across the region is low, with 55% of Horsham residents living within ready access of public transport compared with the Victorian average of 74%. Access to public transport falls to just 8% in Yarriambiack Shire.

Horsham, the regional hub, is the main centre for work, education and services. The public transport catchment outside of Horsham is very limited and, where public transport does exist, connections are infrequent or poorly timetabled. Many of the region's settlements and smaller towns have no transport options to access education or work opportunities. Less than 1% of Wimmera Southern Mallee workers travel to work by public transport.

Better cross-region transport services, including regular services between smaller towns and regional hubs, would ensure that those without a car are able to access the services they need.

Wimmera Southern Mallee stakeholders highlighted a range of public transport issues within the region, affecting residents' ability to access work, health care, and other services. They highlighted the need for better public transport, including rail, to improve access to health care services in Melbourne and Ballarat and access for those who work in Melbourne.

Stakeholders also outlined that improved inter-regional connectivity between Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo would open access to key gateways, such as Avalon Airport, and the Spirit of Tasmania.

Recommendations to improve public transport outcomes across the Wimmera Southern Mallee region

Reforming public transport can improve transport options within the Wimmera Southern Mallee region and will build on Victorian Government investment for operating and maintenance works on regional public transport assets. New solutions can integrate traditional public transport with more innovative, flexible transport options to deliver services which respond to community needs, such as community transport, on-demand services and the school bus network.

Ongoing funding for regional transport helps provide long-term certainty to local communities and ensure that Wimmera Southern Mallee residents can access education, health and other services which are increasingly centralised in Horsham and other regional centres.

Recommendation 83

Redesign regional public transport to meet local needs

In the next five years, redesign existing regional transport services so they are integrated, based on regional needs assessments, and sustainably funded. Use significant technological and reform opportunities to deliver innovative service models that meet local needs.



Please refer to *Victoria's infrastructure strategy 2021–2051* (section 3.1) for additional recommendations on shaping the transport network for better access.

Improve digital connectivity and telecommunications infrastructure in Wimmera Southern Mallee

Household internet access rates are low across Wimmera Southern Mallee, due to inequity in digital infrastructure, service quality, cost and digital literacy. One in four Wimmera Southern Mallee households do not have internet access compared with a Victorian average of one in seven.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased demand for internet access and connectivity. A virtual roundtable hosted by Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Partnership highlighted that families and young people without internet at home have experienced barriers to remote learning during the pandemic. Low digital literacy and connectivity have made it difficult for some to connect with services and support, and increased social isolation particularly among the region's elderly and more vulnerable residents.

The *Wimmera Southern Mallee digital plan* highlights a persistent divide in the quality of mobile services available to regional users compared to Melbourne, with mobile users registering 219 black spots across the region. Poor mobile quality and coverage have implications for public safety, affecting the ability of residents to access critical information in times of emergency. Building the digital capability and literacy of Wimmera Southern Mallee residents can also help them access online services when they need them.

Wimmera Southern Mallee stakeholders highlighted better mobile and internet coverage can help support access to jobs, health and education in the region. They highlighted that lower population densities across the region and a lack of competition between suppliers is creating a need for bespoke solutions, which have service and cost implications - but are necessary in case of an emergency. They also supported helping libraries continue to innovate and provide places for people to meet, build skills and stay connected.

The *Wimmera Southern Mallee digital plan* documents that regional business can benefit from adequate, affordable business-grade telecommunications and digital connectivity services, along with better mobile coverage and take-up of Internet of Things (IoT) applications. IoT helps farmers make more informed decisions by collecting information and monitoring data, using devices embedded with sensors connected using the internet.

The Victorian Government's On-Farm IoT trial in Birchip, to the north of Wimmera Southern Mallee, supports broadacre grain farms to be digitally connected, enabling collection and management of detailed location and plant-specific data across large areas to help mitigate risk. Building on this program, the Victorian Government launched a Digital Agriculture Investment Scheme, as part of the Enabling the Digital Agriculture Revolution Program.

Better mobile and digital connectivity can enhance productivity and business competitiveness. The Victorian Government's Digital Future Now initiative aims to remove constraints by funding faster broadband for regional towns and eradicating mobile black spots in populated areas of regional Victoria, in partnership with the Australian Government.

Recommendations to improve Wimmera Southern Mallee's digital divide

Improving telecommunications infrastructure resilience, across fixed, mobile and Wi-Fi networks, can help ensure Wimmera Southern Mallee residents remain connected in times of emergency. The Victorian Government can leverage existing infrastructure, expertise and support available within Wimmera Southern Mallee's library network to improve access for those without internet access at home. The expertise available within the library network can enable those with lower levels of digital literacy and capability to access services which are increasingly available online.

Better fixed broadband and mobile services can work towards addressing regional Victoria's digital connectivity gaps in the long term. Better connectivity can ensure that more of Wimmera Southern Mallee's businesses can take advantage of digital technology opportunities. Reliable and high-speed internet connections can help businesses to operate and compete from any region, placing businesses in a stronger position to withstand future crises, and take advantage of potential opportunities created by any longer-term shift to remote working.

Recommendation 84

Address regional Victoria's digital connectivity gaps

In the next five years, continue delivering regional digital connectivity improvements, and monitor and review the need for further government investment following the roll-out of the Digital Future Now initiative.

Recommendation 85

Improve regional telecommunications infrastructure resilience

In the next five years, develop more resilient regional telecommunications infrastructure so communities can stay safe during emergencies, including better mobile coverage, back-up systems and power supply, and emergency mobile roaming.

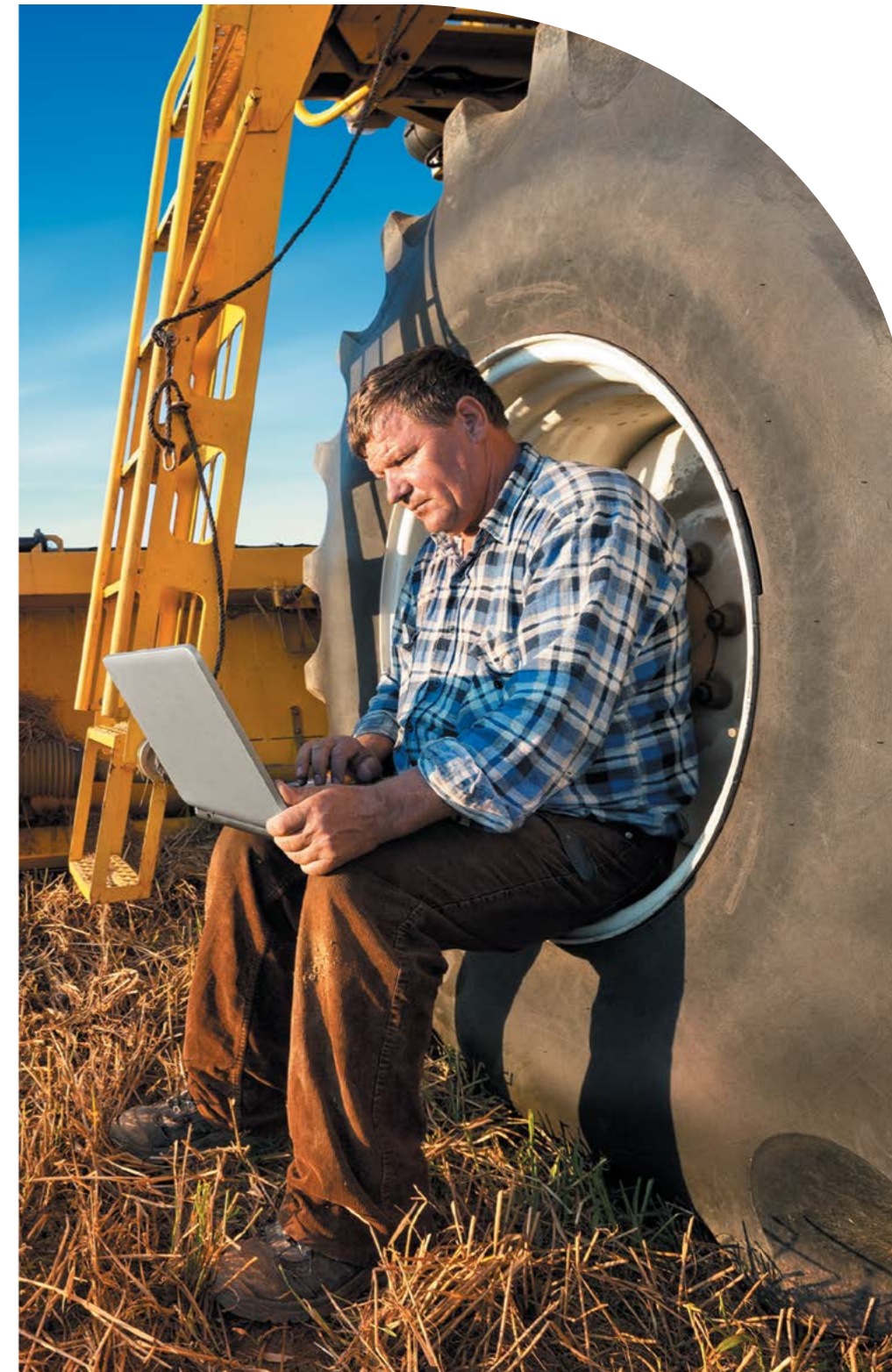
Recommendation 86

Fund regional libraries to provide better internet access

In the next year, start a five-year funding program for libraries in regional towns and rural areas to improve community access to fast, free internet services, leveraging existing library infrastructure.



Please refer to *Victoria's infrastructure strategy 2021–2051* (section 4.2) for additional recommendations on better connecting the regions.



Foster regional Victorians' health, wellbeing, and inclusion

Improve access to health care

People living in the Wimmera Southern Mallee region show poorer outcomes on health and wellbeing indicators, potentially associated with a lack of access to health and support services. For example, life expectancy is below the Victorian average in many areas. Preventable hospitalisation rates are high and are almost double the state average in Hindmarsh Shire.

Stakeholders report that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated difficulties accessing health services, and that social isolation has also increased during the pandemic, impacting on mental health. Parts of the region have above average numbers of mental health clients, as well as those receiving treatment for drug and alcohol addiction – particularly Northern Grampians and Horsham councils. However, access to local support services is limited. The region has no residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation facilities, for example, and many people need to leave the area to access the services they need.

The region demonstrates relatively poor results for early childhood development. One in four children in Wimmera Southern Mallee are developmentally vulnerable, rising to one in three in Yarriambiack Shire. This compares with a Victorian average of one in five. The Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Partnership Early Years Project highlighted concerns about access to specialist paediatric services, primary health care and allied health services for children across the region. The Victorian Government has committed to support transition of the project to an early years innovation hub.

Wimmera Southern Mallee stakeholders highlighted the current pressures on the health system, the opportunity for an expanded health sector to grow employment and the challenges and gaps with the sector. These include:

- ↳ the need for new and upgraded health facilities in Horsham, as a regional centre, and to consider these as part of the overall health care system.
- ↳ the need to think more holistically about health service planning and include staff housing to improve the ability to attract and retain staff in the more rural locations.
- ↳ the gap in regionally based alcohol and drug rehabilitation facilities.

Stakeholders highlighted that there is a growing level of education disengagement, which will be a challenge for the region's future workforce.

Recommendations to access health care

Our recommendations build on the Victorian Government's recent funding commitments and aim collectively to improve access to health services for Wimmera Southern Mallee residents. The Victorian Government is investing to provide people living in rural and regional areas, including Horsham, better access to clinical outreach services. It is also investing to deliver new Youth Prevention and Recovery Care units, including in the Grampians. An Aboriginal family violence refuge has been funded in Horsham to provide accessible and culturally appropriate support services for survivors of family violence.

Using innovation in health care delivery can help expand the use of technology in service provision, and better connect regional communities with specialist health services. We recommend leveraging existing school infrastructure to support delivery of paediatric and allied telehealth services to improve health and development outcomes for children and young people in the region. This builds on the Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Partnership's efforts to streamline and coordinate services to support children and their families. It also builds on increased uptake of telehealth services in the region during the pandemic.

A plan for future investment in Aboriginal community controlled infrastructure aims to respond to the current and future infrastructure needs of Wimmera Southern Mallee's Aboriginal community, as well as contribute to Closing the Gap outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians. Providing residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation facilities in Wimmera Southern Mallee and better access to mental health facilities can respond to gaps in local service availability and provision.

Recommendation 25

Use innovation to deliver better models of health care

Within two years, help slow the growth in demand for hospital infrastructure by developing a comprehensive statewide health innovation strategy, supported by funding over five years to promote and progressively implement better models of health care.

Recommendation 67

Co-design an Aboriginal community controlled infrastructure plan

In the next year, start a co-design process with Aboriginal Victorians to develop a plan to guide investment in Aboriginal community-controlled infrastructure to meet current and future social, economic and cultural needs.

Recommendation 70

Deliver infrastructure for a more responsive and integrated mental health system

In the next year, establish a dedicated infrastructure fund to support more responsive and integrated mental health and wellbeing services, consistent with the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System

Recommendation 87

Use rural schools for children's specialist and allied telehealth services

Retrofit or better use selected rural school infrastructure for children's specialist and allied telehealth services to improve children's health and development. In the next year, begin a trial in a remote region, such as Wimmera Southern Mallee, to demonstrate the value of adopting the approach in other rural locations.

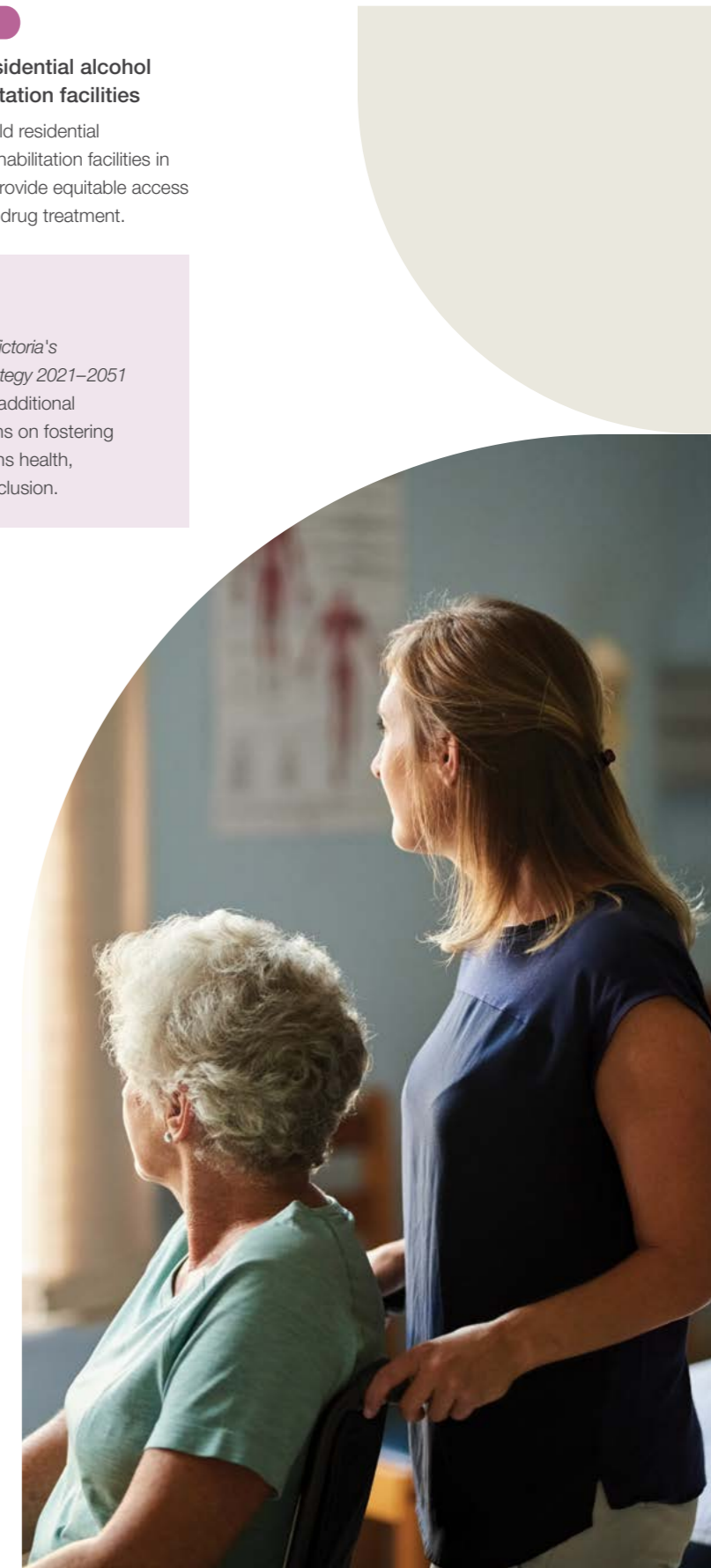
Recommendation 91

Build regional residential alcohol and drug rehabilitation facilities

Within five years, build residential detoxification and rehabilitation facilities in regional Victoria to provide equitable access to alcohol and other drug treatment.



Please refer to *Victoria's infrastructure strategy 2021–2051* (section 4.3) for additional recommendations on fostering regional Victorians health, wellbeing and inclusion.





T&G Building in Horsham

Improve and better use community and council infrastructure

Demographic changes, such as an ageing population, affect the scope and mix of services that councils need to provide. Smaller rural councils, such as West Wimmera, Hindmarsh and Yarriambiack Shires, have a relatively small ratepayer base, further constrained by declining populations and lower average incomes. This limits the financial viability of councils and their ability to maintain services and facilities to meet growing community expectations. Relatively high socioeconomic disadvantage in the region relates to a higher per capita demand for a range of health and community services to be delivered across relatively dispersed communities.

The impact of climate change adds further complexity to the challenges facing local governments and communities. Wimmera Southern Mallee is exposed to the impacts of climate change with higher temperatures, more days of extreme heat and declining rainfall forecast. Climate change also increases the frequency of conditions for catastrophic bushfires.

Wimmera Southern Mallee stakeholders support the use of shared facilities, suggesting shared workspaces could also create greater employment flexibility. They also support improving the resilience of assets re-built after a natural disaster. For example, a joint Australian and Queensland Government betterment fund helps build public assets back to a more disaster resilient standard, reducing risk to community and future construction costs from subsequent events.

Stakeholders highlighted that councils were struggling to fund upgrades and maintenance of community facilities. They also suggested decisions to update, repurpose or retire outdated community infrastructure required guidance about how to support communities to accept the need for changes to the role and usage of facilities.

Recommendations to make better use of community infrastructure

Better using community facilities can support regions and local governments to provide fit for purpose social infrastructure which can respond to local needs. Service planning can help identify gaps in existing infrastructure, or opportunities for shared facilities, or to retrofit, repurpose or retire existing community facilities. Transport planning, integrated with planning for service delivery, can help ensure essential services can be accessed by all those who need them. Building multipurpose shared social service facilities can respond to opportunities identified by Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Partnership to develop these models across the region.

Creating climate-adapted facilities for rural communities can support local governments to deliver a network of facilities which can help reduce the health impacts of exposure to heat, and prolonged smoke from bushfires.

Recommendation 19

Build back better after emergencies

In the next year, consider policy changes and funding mechanisms so high priority public infrastructure destroyed by emergencies is built to a more resilient standard or in less vulnerable locations.

Recommendation 88

Deliver multipurpose shared social service facilities in the regions

In the next year, start regional planning for social services to identify opportunities for multipurpose shared services facilities, then deliver them where appropriate, over the next five years, in partnership with local governments and community organisations.

Recommendation 89

Update community infrastructure

Fund regional councils in the next five years to update, repurpose or retire outdated community infrastructure for better service delivery.

Recommendation 90

Create climate-adapted facilities for rural communities

In the next five years, fund local governments to plan and help deliver a network of designated, accessible climate-adapted community facilities, to manage the health impacts of extreme heat and bushfire smoke.



Please refer to *Victoria's infrastructure strategy 2021–2051* (section 3.3) for recommendations on aligning social infrastructure with better service delivery.

Address social housing challenges

Although housing affordability in Wimmera Southern Mallee is better compared to other Victorian regions, regional stakeholders remain concerned. One in three rental households in Horsham experience rental stress. The region also has relatively high rates of family violence, the fourth highest per capita rate in regional Victoria, which contributes to demand for social housing. The provision of housing for families escaping violence in the region, sees demand outstripping supply.

Wimmera Southern Mallee stakeholders reported increases in housing demand, with more people moving to the region during 2020.

Recommendations to enhance access to affordable, fit for purpose housing

Expanding social housing in regional centres, in locations with good access to transport and services, renewing public housing, and continuing to improve the climate-resilience of social housing, can improve Wimmera Southern Mallee residents' access to affordable and fit for purpose housing. This includes ensuring a long-term focus on provisioning social housing following the roll out of the Victorian Government's Big Housing Build program. Horsham will receive a guaranteed minimum investment of \$15 million as part of the Big Housing build.

Recommendation 55

Rapidly renew old public housing

Rapidly renew dilapidated public housing properties to improve functionality, accessibility and energy efficiency with a priority to renew at least half of all older low-rise apartments and older three-bedroom detached dwellings by 2031.

Recommendation 93

Expand social housing in regional centres, in locations with good access

Focus social housing investments in regional centres, near transport and services, for better access to health, social and economic support.

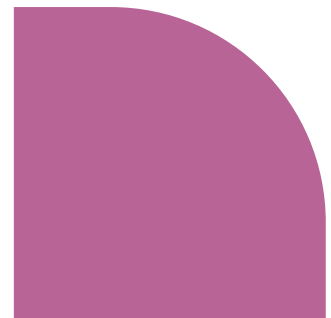
Recommendation 94

Make social housing suitable for changing local climates

Continue to deliver a long-term program of modifying social housing to be climate-resilient by improving the energy efficiency and energy affordability of residences.



Please refer to *Victoria's infrastructure strategy 2021–2051* (section 2.4) for additional recommendations on adapting infrastructure for modern needs.



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