Procurement Policy

Horsham Rural City
Council urban rural balance

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COUNCIL POLICY – C04/019

1. **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to:
- Provide policy and guidance to the Council to allow consistency and control over procurement activities
- Promote open and fair competition and provide value for money
- Demonstrate benefit to ratepayers when procuring goods, services and works on behalf of Council
- Provide guidance on ethical behaviour in Council purchasing
- Demonstrate the application of elements of best practice in purchasing
- Increase the probability of obtaining the best outcome when procuring goods, services and works.

2. **INTRODUCTION**

Section 108 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) requires Council to prepare and adopt a Procurement Policy which specifies the principles, processes and procedures to be applied to all purchases of goods and services by Council, including for the carrying out of works. The policy must seek to promote open and fair competition and provide value for money. Any opportunities for collaboration with other Councils or public bodies should also be explored.

Council must adopt the first Procurement Policy within six months of the commencement of this section of the Act and the policy must be reviewed at least once during each four-year Council term.

This policy has been written with reference to the Victorian Local Government Best Practice Procurement Guidelines 2013.

When circumstances exist which are deemed to warrant a variation to this policy, Council retains the right to vary this policy by resolution of Council, within the provisions of the Act.

All amounts noted in this policy are inclusive of GST.

3. **SCOPE**

This policy applies to all contracting and procurement activities at Horsham Rural City Council (HRCC) and is binding upon Councillors, Council officers, temporary employees, volunteers and members of delegated committees, contractors and consultants engaged by the Council.

4. **PRINCIPLES**

4.1 **ETHICS AND PROBITY**

4.1.1 **Requirement**

Council's procurement activities shall be performed with integrity and in a manner able to withstand the closest possible scrutiny. Ethics and probity considerations should also take in to account the HRCC Councillor and Staff Codes of Conduct.

4.1.2 **Conduct of Councillors and Council Staff**

Councillors and Council staff shall at all times conduct themselves in ways that are, and are seen to be, ethical and of the highest integrity and will:
- Treat potential and existing suppliers with equality and fairness
- Not seek or receive personal gain
- Maintain confidentiality of Commercial in Confidence information such as contract prices and other sensitive information

- Present the highest standards of professionalism and probity
- Comply with the respective codes of conduct
- Deal with suppliers in an honest and impartial manner that does not allow conflicts of interest
- Provide all suppliers and tenderers with the same information and equal opportunity
- Be able to account for all decisions and provide feedback on them.

Council staff with responsibility for managing or supervising contracts are prohibited from performing any works in a private capacity under the contract they are supervising.

4.1.3   Members of Professional Bodies

Councillors and Council staff belonging to professional organisations shall, in addition to the obligations detailed in this policy, ensure that they adhere to any code of ethics or professional standards required by that body.

4.1.4   Tender Processes

All tender processes shall be conducted in accordance with the requirements of this policy and any associated guidelines and procedures, relevant legislation, relevant Australian Standards and the Act. Council will only accept electronic tender submissions via the eProcure portal on the HRCC website. Hard copy tender submissions will not be accepted.

4.1.5   Government Funding

Where funding has been sought and received through the State and/or Federal Government to undertake projects, all procurement activities surrounding the expenditure of these funds must comply with this policy. This applies to Council projects, delegated and advisory committee projects and where Council has sought funding on behalf of a community group.

4.1.6   Conflict of Interest

Councillors and Council staff shall at all times avoid situations in which private interests conflict, or might reasonably be thought to conflict, or have the potential to conflict, with their Council duties.

Councillors and Council staff involved in the procurement process, in particular preparing tender documentation, including writing tender specifications, tender opening, and tender evaluation panels, must:

- **Avoid** conflicts, whether general or material, arising between their official duties and their private interests. Private interests include the financial and other interests of Councillors and Council staff, plus their relatives and close associates *(Local Government Act 2020,* sections 127 and 128).

- **Declare** that there is no conflict of interest. Where future conflicts or relevant private interests arise, Council Staff must make their manager or the chairperson of the relevant tender assessment panel aware and allow them to decide whether the officer should continue to be involved in the specific procurement exercise.

- **Observe** prevailing Council and Victorian Government guidelines on how to prevent or deal with conflict of interest situations; and not take advantage of any tender related information whether or not for personal gain.

4.1.7 Fair and Honest Dealing

All prospective contractors and suppliers must be afforded an equal opportunity to tender or quote. Impartiality must be maintained throughout the procurement process so it can withstand public scrutiny. The commercial interests of existing and potential suppliers must be protected.

Confidentiality of information provided by existing and prospective suppliers must be maintained at all times, particularly commercially sensitive material such as, but not limited to prices, discounts, rebates, profit, manufacturing and product information.

At the close of the tender process, Council will release the name and amount of the winning bid publicly where a Request for Tender process has been conducted, or privately to unsuccessful suppliers where a Request for Quotation process has been conducted.

4.1.8 Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality

Councillors and Council staff involved in procurement activities must adhere to the requirements of the Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy (available on the HRCC website).

Council has a preference for no gifts. As a general principle, Councillors and staff will:
- Decline any offer of gifts, benefits or hospitality in a way that will not cause offence
- Not make a request for the provision of gifts, benefits or hospitality a condition of any financial or in-kind support to an external party.

Councillors and staff must avoid situations giving rise to the appearance that a person or body, through the provision of gifts, benefits or hospitality of any kind, is attempting to gain favourable treatment from an individual Councillor, staff member or from Council. They must also take reasonable steps to ensure that their immediate family members do not receive gifts or benefits that give rise to the appearance of an attempt to gain favourable treatment.

Councillors and staff must refuse offers:
- Likely to influence them, or be perceived to influence them, in the course of their duties or that raise a general or material conflict of interest
- That could bring them, or Council into disrepute
- Made by a person or organisation about which they will likely make or influence a decision (this also applies to processes involving grants, sponsorship, regulation, enforcement or licensing), particularly offers:
    - Made by a current or prospective supplier
    - Made during a procurement or tender process by a person or organisation involved in the process
    - Made by someone with a planning or other application with Council
    - Where Council is involved in a dispute with another party
- Likely to be a bribe or inducement to make a decision or act in a particular way
- That extend to their relatives or friends
- Of money, or used in a similar way to money, or something easily converted to money (refer to 3.3.11 Prohibited Gifts)
- Where, in relation to hospitality and events, the CEO considers the organisation will already be sufficiently represented to meet its business
- Where acceptance could be perceived as endorsement of a product or service, or acceptance would unfairly advantage the sponsor in future procurement decisions
- Made by a person or organisation with a primary purpose to lobby Council, Councillors or staff
- Made in secret.

Refer to the Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy (Policy No A04/029).

4.1.9 Disclosure of Information

Commercial in-confidence information received by the Council must not be disclosed and is to be stored in a secure location.

Councillors and Council staff are to protect, by refusing to release or discuss the following:
- Allocated Council budgets where information may prejudice the tender process (except where a Council budget may be identified within the public budget documentation)
- Information disclosed by organisations in tenders, quotations or during tender negotiations
- All information that is Commercial in Confidence information
- Pre-contract information including but not limited to information provided in quotes and tenders or subsequently provided in pre-contract negotiations.

Councillors and Council staff are to avoid references to current or proposed contracts in discussion with acquaintances or outside interests.

Communication with potential suppliers regarding the quotation/tender in question, during the tendering process must be managed via the eProcure portal. Councillors or Council staff must not have any direct communication with suppliers in relation to the specific tender, during this phase.

At no stage should any discussion be entered into which could have potential contractual implications prior to the contract approval process being finalised.

4.1.10 Fraudulent and Corrupt Procurement

Council is committed to combating Fraud and Corruption. All Council employees and representatives must take appropriate action to prevent and report suspected fraud or corruption particularly within their area of responsibility. Any suspected fraud or corruption must be reported immediately.

Reports of suspected fraud or corruption can be reported by making a protective disclosure under the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012 (*PID Act) which will guarantee the Council employee or representative anonymity. Alternatively, concerns may be reported to the relevant Director or Chief Executive Officer.

Refer to the Public Interest Disclosures Procedure (Procedure No P04/010).

4.2 GOVERNANCE

4.2.1 Structure

Council has in place a procurement management responsibility structure and delegations ensuring accountability, traceability and auditability of all procurement decisions made over the lifecycle of all goods, services and works procured by Council.

Council shall ensure that Council's procurement structure:
- Is flexible enough to purchase in a timely manner the diverse range of material, goods, works and services required by Council
- Ensures that prospective contractors and suppliers are afforded an equal opportunity to tender/quote
- Encourages open and fair competition
- Provides value for money.

4.2.2   Standards

Council's procurement activities shall be carried out to the professional standards required by best practice and in compliance with:

- The *Local Government Act 2020*
- Council's policies and procedures
- Council's Councillor and Staff Codes of Conduct
- Local Government Best Practice Procurement Guidelines 2013
- Other relevant legislative requirements such as but not limited to the *Trade Practices Act, Goods Act* and the relevant provisions of the *Competition and Consumer Act 2010* and the *Environmental Protection Act* and consistent with the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

4.2.3   Methods

Council's standard methods for purchasing goods, services and works shall be by some or all of the following methods:

- Procurement card (no purchase order is required for this method of procurement)
- Purchase order following a request for quotation process from suppliers for goods, services and works that represent best value for money under adopted quotation thresholds
- Under contract following a tender process
- Where practical, using collaborative or aggregated purchasing arrangements with other Councils through Wimmera Regional Procurement Network, Municipal Association Victoria (MAV) Procurement, Procurement Australia, VicFleet, State Government Contracts, or other authorised bodies
- Contracts entered into under an arrangement approved by the Minister for Local Government.

The Council may conduct one stage or multi-stage tenders.

Multi-stage tender processes will commence with a publicly advertised expression of interest stage followed by a tender process involving the organisation's selected supplier/s as a consequence of the expression of interest stage.

All procurement opportunities above the thresholds set by Council will be publicly advertised on the HRCC website and in regional newspapers. Where the procurement is of a complex, specialised nature, or will exceed a budget of $5 million, tenders will be advertised in a State and/or National newspaper.

4.2.4   Collaborative Procurement

Wherever possible, opportunities for collaboration with other Councils or public bodies will actively be sought. Where a collaborative procurement process is undertaken and HRCC is the lead Council, the HRCC Procurement Policy will be the prevailing Procurement Policy.

Where a collaborative procurement process is undertaken and HRCC is not the lead Council, a review of the lead Council's Procurement Policy will be undertaken to ensure Council is entering into procurement activities aligned with its own policy.

4.2.5   Responsible Financial Management

The principle of responsible financial management shall be applied to all Council's procurement activities.

Accordingly, to give effect to this principle, the availability of existing funds within an approved budget, or source of funds, shall be established prior to the commencement of any procurement action for the supply of goods, services or works.

Council staff must not authorise the expenditure of funds in excess of their financial delegations.

Council funds must be used efficiently and effectively to procure goods, services, works, and every attempt must be made to promote open and fair competition and ensure that a proposed contract provides value for money without compromising any of the procurement principles set out in this policy.

4.3   PROCUREMENT THRESHOLDS AND COMPETITION

4.3.1   Principles to be applied to the Procurement Process

(a) Best Value

The benefits of the purchase are weighted against the costs necessary for the optimum result for the Council and local community. Council is not required to accept the lowest tender. Instead, Council is required to take into account issues of quality, cost, accessibility of the service and other factors relevant to the overall objectives of the Act.

Best Value is sometimes mistaken for meaning the lowest price, however, in terms of the contracting process, Best Value requires Council to balance quality and price with as much transparency as is reasonably achievable. In this context price should take into account the whole life cost of the procurement so far as is practicable. It follows that the delivery of Best Value is dependent upon Council priorities.

Achieving Best Value also requires *challenging* the need for the procurement and the way in which the service may be reconfigured to achieve improvements in service delivery, *comparing* service provision options against all those available, *consulting* with key stakeholders and ensuring *competition* in the open market.

Above all, a Council must determine that the tender represents 'value for money' to their community through undertaking their own analysis of the benefits of the contract on offer.

(b) Open and Fair Competition

Council will promote open and fair competition and all prospective suppliers will have access to the same information. During the request for quotation or public tender process, all prospective suppliers must be afforded an opportunity to provide a quotation or tender submission. The commercial interests of suppliers and potential suppliers must be protected.

LATE TENDERS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES.

4.3.2   Accountability

Council maintains consistency in its approach to procurement across the whole organisation through coherent frameworks, policies and procedures. Accountability in procurement means being able to explain and provide evidence on the process followed.

The test of accountability is that an independent third party must be able to see clearly that a process has been followed and that the process is fair and reasonable. Therefore, the processes by which all HRCC procurement activities are conducted will be in accordance with the principles set out in this policy and the associated Procurement Procedure, along with other relevant Council policies and procedures.

Additionally:

- All Council staff must be able to account for all procurement decisions made over the lifecycle of all goods, services and works purchased by the Council and provide feedback on them
- All procurement activities are to provide for an audit trail for monitoring and reporting purposes.

4.3.3   Risk Management

Council will manage all aspects of its procurement processes in accordance with the HRCC Risk Management Policy and in such a way that all risks, including Occupational Health and Safety are identified, analysed, evaluated, managed, monitored and communicated.

4.3.4   Probity and Transparency

Councillors and Council staff (and all persons engaged in procurement on Council's behalf) must exercise the highest standards of integrity in a manner able to withstand the closest possible scrutiny. All staff have an overriding responsibility to act impartially and with integrity, avoiding conflicts of interest (refer to section 4.1.6 Conflict of Interest).

4.3.5   HRCC Purchasing Thresholds (Inclusive of GST)

Council has determined that procurement shall be conducted following the thresholds and methods listed in the tables below.

GOODS , WORKS AND SERVICES (all amounts are inclusive of GST)			
Procurement between		Minimum Number of Quotes	Method of Obtaining Quotes
$0	$1,000	NIL	N/A
$1,001	$3,000	1	Verbal
$3,001	$15,000	1	Written
$15,001	$150,000	3	Public Request for Quotation Process
	Over $150,000	Public Tender Process	Public Tender Process

Although this table represents the minimum number of quotations required, it is considered good practice to obtain additional quotes where possible.

There may also be situations for procurement below the threshold where a public tender is preferred, or prudent, managing risk considerations are paramount, or there is a desire for greater transparency of the procurement.

4.3.6   Procurement through Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), Procurement Australia and State Government Contracts (VicFleet)

Procurement through contracts entered into via State Government Contracts, MAV Procurement or Procurement Australia still need to be undertaken in accordance with the above thresholds to ensure local suppliers have every opportunity to bid on Council works, goods and services.

4.3.7   Request for Quotations (RFQ)

Request for Quotation is required where the procurement threshold is between $15,001 and $150,000.

All requests for quotations will be undertaken through the eProcure Portal. The procurement principles for seeking a RFQ are the same as seeking a Request for Tender, however, the documentation may be less formal, depending on level of risk associated the procurement of the goods, services or works being sought.

RFQs will be made available as a public opportunity to all suppliers and advertised in the same manner as a Request for Tender (RFT).

4.3.8   Tenders

Where the estimated value of a Contract will exceed $150,000, Council will publicly advertise the opportunity in accordance with Item 4.2.3 Methods of this policy.

Public tenders may be called for the purchase of goods, services and works for which the estimated expenditure is below the thresholds in certain circumstances or where there is a high level of risk.

The tender thresholds shall apply based on aggregated spend over two financial accounting periods. It is a breach of this policy to separate a single supply or service into parts with the purpose of issuing two or more purchase orders, which combined, exceed procurement thresholds.

4.3.9   Supply Contracts

Where procurement is to be undertaken through an established supply contract, quotations are not required to be sought however, there may be times when quotations are appropriate, particularly with the provision of works or services where there is more subjectivity around what is required than with the purchasing of goods. Individual discretion and risk analysis is required.

4.3.10   Procuring Loans

Loans are considered contracts of loan and not contracts for goods, services or the carrying out of works. They are therefore not subject to the Procurement Policy and Procedure.

When raising loan funds, Council will consider value for money, together with transparency and accountability requirements, and will undertake a public tender process.

4.3.11   Evaluation Panels

(a)   Appointment of Panel Members

The relevant Project Manager will be responsible to recruit members to the panel. A minimum of three staff members will form the panel membership for evaluation of Tenders.

The following panel membership composition applies to the evaluation of Quotations:
* Where the value of the RFQ is anticipated to be less than $30,000 – one evaluator required
* Where the value of the RFQ is anticipated to be between $30,001 and $50,0000 – two evaluators are required
* Where the value of the RFQ is anticipated to be greater than $50,001 – three evaluators are required.

Where a Director has the delegated authority to accept the recommendation of the evaluation panel, the Director must not form part of the evaluation panel, unless the recommendation of the panel is to be determined by the Chief Executive Officer.

(b) Criteria for Panel Members

Panel members must have the appropriate skills and knowledge to evaluate tender responses. The panel membership should aim to include:
• Department Manager
• One staff member with appropriate level of understanding and expertise around the project under evaluation
• One member from another unit or department.

(c) External Panel Members

Where the tender is of a specific or technical nature, an external specialist in the field may be recruited to sit on the panel to provide technical advice. The specialist will not have voting rights, but must be bound by the same probity regulations and guidelines as Council staff.

4.3.12 Evaluation Criteria

Council may include the following evaluation criteria categories to determine whether a proposed contract provides value for money:
• Capacity of the tenderer to provide the goods and/or services and/or works
• Capability of the tenderer to provide the goods and/or services and/or works
• Demonstration of sustainability
• Tendered price
• Local content.

4.3.13 Whole of Life Assessment

Tendered price may be evaluated on a whole-of-life basis. If so, tenderers are to be advised that the basis of the price assessment will be whole-of-life costing, and tenderers are to be provided information on the operating regime of the item being tendered, so that they can provide information about:
• Operating costs
• Maintenance costs
• End of life value / decommissioning costs
• Other information.

4.3.12 Exemptions from Quotation/Tender Process

An exemption from the procurement process may be granted by the Chief Executive Officer or Delegate, under exceptional circumstances only.

Justifiable reasons that the Chief Executive Officer or their delegate may approve an Exemption from all procurement processes are:

(a) Where the need is extremely urgent and there is insufficient time to seek quotations

(b) Where there is a sole source of supply for the goods (previously proven)

(c) Where the office has recently sought quotations from suppliers for a similar project/product and can validate that the source of supply will provide best value for money, and is certain that obtaining quotations would not be cost effective

(d) The acquisition is of a cultural or artistic nature

(e) Procurement as a result of emergency. An emergency is an immediate response to a natural disaster or a declared emergency

(f) Extension of Contract while it's at market or in the preparedness for market
  – Allows Council to extend an existing contract where the procurement process to replace the contract has commenced or is in the process of commencing

(g) Novated Contracts
  – Where the initial contract was entered into in compliance with the Act and due diligence has been undertaken in respect to the new party

(h) Information technology resellers and software developers
  – Allows Council to renew software licenses and maintenance and support, or upgrade existing systems, where there is only one supplier of the software who holds the intellectual property rights to the software

(i) Procurement through VicFleet

(j) Statutory Compulsory Monopoly Insurance Schemes
  – Motor vehicle compulsory third party
  – WorkCover

(k) Professional services
  – Legal Services
  – Advisory Services – Freedom of Information requests
  – Insurance

Under these circumstances, the Chief Executive Officer may authorise the procurement process once the completion of an Exemption from Procurement Policy Declaration Form has been completed and uploaded during the requisition process.

4.3.13 Purchases Through Auctions

Auctions are a potential alternative method for acquisition in some circumstances.

Ascertaining best value for money will be determined in the following manner:
• Background research must be done to determine the value of the product based on it being sourced from other suppliers, this may include formal quotations.
• The number of suppliers researched must be the same as the number of quotes required to be obtained as per this policy, for the value of the product, if direct purchase was to occur.
• This research will be used to set a maximum bid.

Once compiled, the above information must to be submitted to the Chief Executive Officer for authorisation to proceed via auction, which may not necessarily be approved.

4.3.14 Cumulative Purchasing Calculation Period

For the purposes of calculating cumulative amounts from one supplier (or source and inclusive of GST), the totals for two financial years shall constitute the period limitation of such calculations.

However, when identifying estimates of procurement value for the purpose of determining the relevant threshold, the full anticipated contract period for the procurement should be taken in to account. (This is particularly applicable to software agreements that extend for more than a single year but may also be relevant to other contracts).

4.4   DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY

The Delegations Register defines the limitations that the Chief Executive Officer has delegated to nominate Council staff to undertake procurement activities. Procurement delegations ensure accountability and provide confidence to Council and the public that purchasing activities are dealt with at the appropriate level.

4.4.1   Council Staff

Council maintains a register of procurement delegations, identifying the Council staff authorised to make such procurement commitments in respect of goods, services and works on behalf of the Council and their respective delegations of duties:
• Acceptance of tenders
• Acceptance of quotes
• Contract term extensions (within authorised budget)
• Contract variations (non-financial)
• Credit Card purchases
• Procedural exceptions.

4.4.2   Authority to Approve Financial Contract Variation

Under Council's Delegation of Duties – Financial Delegations:
• A Department Manager is authorised to approve contract variations to the value of $22,000 per contract within the allowable project budget
• A Director is authorised to approve contract variations to the value of $55,000 per contract within the allowable project budget, or provided they identify alternative source of funds, from within the specific program area.
• The Chief Executive Officer may approve contract variations above $55,000 that do not exceed $275,000 per contract
• Variations above $275,000 per contract must be approved via a resolution of Council.

Where the cumulative contract variation exceeds the delegation of the Chief Executive Officer (i.e. $275,000), all further variations must be approved via a resolution of Council.

All variations must be reported through the monthly Finance and Performance report to the Executive Management Team.

4.4.3   Delegations Reserved for the Council

Commitments and processes which exceed the Chief Executive Officer's delegation and which must be approved by the Council are:
• Sealing of contract documents (Council does not require contracts to be sealed so this may only occur in exceptional circumstances)
• Tender recommendations and contract approvals that exceed the Chief Executive Officer's delegation.
• Variations above $275,000 per contract.

4.5   INTERNAL CONTROLS

Council will install and maintain a framework of internal controls over procurement processes that will ensure:
- More than one person is involved in and responsible for a transaction end to end
- Transparency in the procurement process
- A clearly documented audit trail exists for procurement activities
- Appropriate authorisations are obtained and documented
- Systems are in place for appropriate monitoring and performance measurement.

4.6 RISK MANAGEMENT

4.6.1   General

Risk Management is to be appropriately applied at all stages of procurement activities, and will be properly planned and carried out in a manner that will protect and enhance Council's capability to prevent, withstand and recover from interruption to the supply of goods, services and works.

For all procurement activity over $150,000 a Tender Initiation form must be completed.

4.6.2   Supply by Contract

The provision of goods, services and works by contract potentially exposes the Council to risk. Council will minimise its risk exposure by measures such as:
- Implementing a robust, systematic and unbiased tender evaluation and due diligence process
- Ensuring contractors have appropriate public liability and professional indemnity insurance, OHS plans and procedures, quality assurance, permits to work and other relevant practices in place
- Identify any potential risk associated with the project and take appropriate action to mitigate
- Requiring security deposits where appropriate
- Referring specifications to relevant experts
- Requiring all contractual documents to be lodged before the commencement of work
- Use of or reference to relevant Australian Standards (or equivalent)
- Effectively managing the contract including monitoring and enforcing performance.

4.7   CONTRACT TERMS

All contractual relationships must be documented in writing based on Australian standard terms and conditions, VicRoads Terms and Conditions or a suite of Contract Terms and Conditions developed by Council's lawyers or solicitors. Special instructions included on a purchase order will also form part of the contractual terms.

To protect the best interests of the Council, terms and conditions must be settled in advance of any commitment being made with a supplier. Any exceptions to doing this expose the Council to risk.

4.8   DISPUTE RESOLUTION

All Council contracts shall incorporate dispute management and alternative dispute resolution provisions to minimise the chance of disputes getting out of hand and leading to legal action.

4.9   CONTRACT MANAGEMENT

The purpose of contract management is to ensure that the Council, and where applicable its clients, receive the goods, services or works provided to the required standards of quality and quantity as intended by the contract by:

- Establishing a system monitoring and meeting the responsibilities and obligations of both parties under the contract
- Providing a means for the early recognition of issues and performance problems and the identification of solutions
- Adhering to relevant Occupational Health and Safety Contractor Compliance Procedures.

All Council contracts are to include contract management requirements and will be proactively managed by the Project Manager/Contract Superintendent of the project for delivery of the contracted goods, services or works to ensure the Council receives value for money.

4.10 NEW SUPPLIERS

Minimum checks for new suppliers with prospective business in excess of $150,000, include:
- Search of Company register
- ABN verification
- Insurance certificate of currency.

New suppliers exceeding or potential to exceed $500,000 are subject to robust due diligence checks. Checks should be undertaken using a recognised institution that specialises in researching and reporting of company backgrounds, financial viability, credit ratings, industry benchmarking and risk assessments.

4.11 APPROACH

This policy will be facilitated by:
- Developing, implementing and managing procurement strategies that support the co-ordination and streamlining of activities throughout the lifecycle
- Effective use of open and fair competition
- Using aggregated contracts where appropriate
- Identifying and rectifying inefficiencies in procurement processes
- Developing cost efficient tender processes including appropriate use of e-solutions
- Council staff responsible for providing procurement services or assistance within the Council providing competent advice in terms of available products and agreements
- Working with suppliers to create relationships that are professional and productive, and are appropriate to the value and importance of the goods, services and works being acquired.

4.12 ROLE OF SPECIFICATIONS

The principle to be applied is that specifications should focus on outputs, solutions or outcomes rather than detailing inputs and process. They should be written clearly so as to allow prospective suppliers to offer to provide goods, services or works required by Council and accurately determine their costs, so that Council can avoid claims for variations.

Specifications used in quotations and tenders are to support and contribute to Council's Best Value objectives through being written in a manner that:
- Clearly defines the objective of the contract
- Ensures impartiality and objectivity through establishment of clear evaluation criteria and weightings
- Clearly defines the Council's requirements
- Uses industry or Australian standards where practicable
- Encourages the use of standard products
- Encourages sustainability
- Eliminates unnecessarily stringent requirements.

4.13   CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is about taking positive action to demonstrate the Council's commitment to the local community and environment on which it impacts. This means the Council maximising the benefits of the services they provide across the community and minimising the negative aspects of their activities.

Social Procurement generates positive outcomes by building on initiatives already undertaken by the Council in enhancing sustainable and strategic procurement practice, further enabling procurement to effectively contribute towards building stronger communities and meeting the social objectives of the Council.

Council is committed to Social Procurement by:
• Ensuring all procurement practices are sustainable and strategically aligned with the wider Council objectives
• Achieving greater value for money across the community through the use of effective procurement
• Ensuring all businesses have the same opportunity to tender for Council contracts
• Where practical, enhancing partnerships with other Councils, suppliers and community stakeholders
• Supporting procurement from local businesses where purchases can be justified on value for money grounds.

4.14   SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT

Council recognises it has an implicit role in furthering sustainable development, through its procurement of goods, and services and works.

In addition, Council recognises the potential impact this spend has on the environment and where applicable will integrate sustainability, environmental and social issues into the procurement process.

Council aims to achieve this by:
• Taking into account the need to minimise greenhouse gas emissions and reducing the negative impacts of transportation when purchasing goods and services
• Taking steps to minimise carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions through the detailed consideration of products and services procured
• Considering the basic life cycle analysis of products to minimise the adverse effects on the environment resulting directly or indirectly from products
• Consider Fair-trade, or equivalent, and ethically sourced and produced goods and services
• Working with local suppliers to ensure they are encouraged to bid for Council's business in line with the Procurement Policy
• Record and manage all procurement and contractual documentation including relevant correspondence through works and service delivery life cycle, so that accessing any stored information, at any time, would be streamlined.

4.15   DIVERSITY

Promoting equality through procurement can improve competition, value for money, the quality of public services, satisfaction among users, and community relations. Diversity should be a consideration in every procurement project and reflect corporate commitment to diversity and equal opportunities wherever possible.

4.16   SUPPORT OF LOCAL BUSINESS

Council recognises that it is a major purchaser of goods, services and works and that its procurement practices have the potential to impact the local economy. Council will endeavour to support businesses and industries within the municipality where such purchases can be justified in achieving best value for money.

4.17   ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PROCUREMENT

Council will endeavour to engage in procurement activity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses wherever opportunities arise and will ensure there are no barriers preventing procurement of works, goods and services with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses. Council encourages and supports the use of the Supply Nation website when sourcing suppliers for procurement activity. The Supply Nation website is Australia's leading database of verified Indigenous businesses.

4.18   OTHER MATTERS

4.18.1   Apply a Consistent and Standard Approach

Council will provide effective and efficient commercial arrangements for the acquisition of works, goods and services.

4.18.2   Standard Processes

Council will provide effective commercial arrangements covering the acquisition of works, goods and services across the Council to enable employees to source requirements in an efficient manner.

This will be achieved via establishing the following:
•   Pricing where relevant
•   Tools and business systems (e.g. e-tendering)
•   Procurement Procedures
•   Reporting requirements
•   Application of standard contract terms and conditions.

4.18.3   Management Information

Council seeks to improve its performance by capturing and analysing procurement management information in a variety of areas, including:
•   Volume of spend
•   Number of transactions per supplier
•   Compliance
•   Supplier performance
•   User satisfaction.

4.18.4   Build and Maintain Supply Relationships

Council recognises that in order to achieve sustainable value, a strategic assessment of the appropriate 'channel to market' should be undertaken – whether to go to market on its own, participate in regional or sector aggregated projects or panels, access State Government panel agreements or other means. Council will consider supply arrangements that deliver the Best Value outcomes in terms of time, expertise, cost, value and outcome.

4.18.5 Developing and Managing Suppliers

Developing and managing suppliers is essential to achieving a competitive market capable of delivering the Council's services and works requirements. Council needs to interact with the market and its suppliers in particular to understand their views and what enables and encourages diverse parts of the market to bid for work with Council.

At the same time, Council will ensure that its relationship with strategic suppliers is mutually productive and that goals are shared. Council aims to develop a relationship with suppliers that create mutually advantageous, flexible and long term relations based on the quality of performance and value for money.

4.18.6 Relationship Management

Council is committed to developing constructive long-term relationships with suppliers. It is important that Council identifies its key suppliers so that its efforts are focused to best effect. Such areas may include the size of spend across Council, criticality of goods / services, to the delivery of the Council's services and availability of substitutes.

4.18.7 Review Process

Council endeavours to continually improve its procurement performance, and that all relevant policies, guidance and training are continually reviewed and updated. The effectiveness of this approach will be measured and reported upon annually.

5. COMMUNICATION

This policy will be published on the HRCC website at www.hrcc.vic.gov.au and a hard copy provided by contacting the Customer Service department at the Civic Centre Municipal Offices, 18 Roberts Avenue, Horsham or by telephoning 03 5382 9777.

6. RESPONSIBILITY

Policy Owner: Director Corporate Services

7. DEFINITIONS

Term	Meaning
Act	*Local Government Act 2020*
Best Value	Best Value in Procurement is about selecting the supply of goods, services and works taking into account both cost and non-cost factors including: • contribution to the advancement of the Council's priorities • non-cost factors such as fitness for purpose, quality, service and support • cost-related factors including whole-of-life costs and transaction costs associated with acquiring, using, holding, maintaining and disposing of the goods, services or works
Commercial in Confidence	Information that, if released, may prejudice the business dealings of a party. For example prices, discounts, rebates, profits, methodologies and process information, etc
Contract Management	The process that ensures both parties to a contract, fully meet their respective obligations as efficiently and effectively as possible, in order to deliver the business and operational objectives required from the contract and in particular, to provide value for money
Corporate Social Responsibility	Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is about taking positive action to demonstrate the Council's commitment to the local community and environment on which it impacts
Council Staff	Includes full-time and part-time Council officers, and temporary employees, volunteers, contractors and consultants while engaged by the Council and Committees of Management under Section 86 of the Act

Term	Meaning
Expression of Interest (EOI)	An invitation for persons to submit an EOI for the provision of Works, Goods and/or Services generally set out in the overview of requirements contained in the document. This Invitation is not an offer or a contract
Probity	The dictionary definition of probity refers to uprightness, honesty, proper and ethical conduct and propriety in dealings. Within government, the word "probity" is often used in a general sense to mean "good process." A Procurement process that conforms to the expected standards of probity is one in which clear and transparent procedures that are consistent with the Council's policies and legislation are established, understood and followed from the outset. These procedures need to consider the legitimate interests of suppliers and ensure that all potential suppliers are treated equitably
Procurement	Procurement is the whole process of acquisition of external goods, services and works. This process spans the whole life cycle from initial concept through to the end of the useful life of an asset (including disposal) or the end of a service contract
Request for Tender (RFT)	The process of inviting parties to submit a bid by tender through the eProcure portal followed by evaluation of submissions and selection of a successful bidder or tenderer
Request for Quote (RFQ)	The process of inviting parties to submit a quotation through the eProcure portal followed by evaluation of submissions and selection of a successful bidder or tenderer
Social Procurement	Social procurement uses procurement processes and purchasing power to generate positive social outcomes in addition to the delivery of efficient goods, services & works
Sustainability	Activities that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs

8.   SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

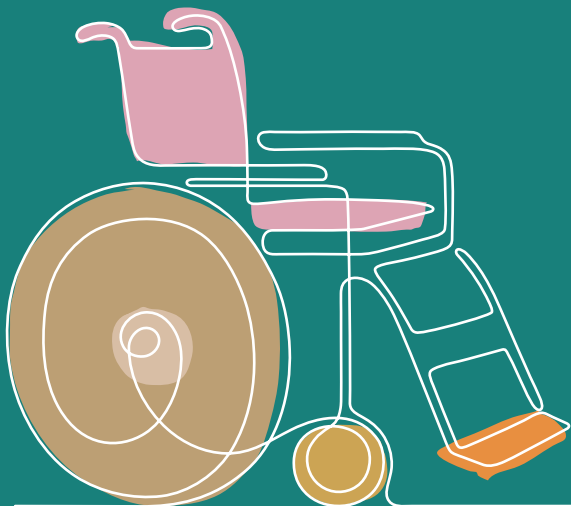| Document	Location
Victorian Local Government – Best Practice Procurement Guidelines - 2013	www.dpcd.vic.gov.au
Treasury & Finance, State Government Victoria (VicFleet)	www.dtf.vic.gov.au/vicfleet
Councillor Code of Conduct	HRCC Website
Staff Code of Conduct	Intranet
Fraud and Corruption Policy	Intranet
Conflict of Interest Procedure	Intranet
Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy	HRCC Website

9.   DOCUMENT CONTROL

Version Number	Approval Date	Approval By	Amendment	Review Date
04	16 December 2013	Council	Annual revision	
05	01 June 2015	Council	Annual revision	
06	06 June 2016	Council	Annual revision	
07	15 May 2017	Council	Annual revision	15 May 2018
08	12 Jun 2018	Council	Annual revision	15 May 2019
09	24 June 2019	Council	Annual revision	30 June 2020
10	11 May 2020	Council	Annual revision and revised procurement thresholds	11 May 2021
11	26 April 2021	Council	Annual revision	31 December 2021
12	23 August 2021	Council	Compliance with new *Local Government Act 2020*	23 August 2025
13	** January 2023	Council	Minor Amendment: Revised wording	23 August 2025

DISABILITY ACCESS AND INCLUSION PLAN

2023-2026

DRAFT I NOVEMBER 2022

Horsham Rural City
Council urban rural balance

We acknowledge the five traditional owner groups of this land; the Wotjobaluk, Wergaia, Jupagulk, Jaadwa and the Jadawadjali people.

We recognise the important and ongoing place that all Indigenous people hold in our community.

We pay our respects to elders, both past and present, and commit to working together in the spirit of mutual understanding and respect for the benefit of the broader community and future generations.

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (the Plan) has been developed to reduce barriers and increase inclusion and participation for people with disability in the local community.

Introduction

People with disability represent 6.4 percent of the Horsham Rural City population and have the right to equal access to services, infrastructure, and support. Informed by community feedback, this Plan identifies key actions that will enable improved participation and inclusion for people living with disability.

Developing the Plan

This Plan was developed between July and October 2022. Horsham Rural City Council engaged Projectura to work with the broad community and develop the Plan.

During the development, 112 people contributed to the Plan through an online survey, focus groups, workshops, and interviews. This engagement identified barriers to access and inclusion for people with disability, as well as key opportunities for improvement.

Opportunities

Key opportunities to improve access and inclusion for people living with disability include improving or increasing:

• attitudes and reducing stereotypes around people with disability.

• tailored support and the accessibility of information.

• accessibility of infrastructure, particularly paths, crossings, and buildings.

• accessibility of events.

• accessible and inclusive employment.

The Plan

Vision

The Horsham Rural City community is inclusive, accessible, and values the diversity of its people.

Goals

The Plan has four broad goals with specific actions identified for each. The goals are:

Goal 1: To improve understanding of the barriers faced by people with disability and the value they bring to the community.

Goal 2: To provide tailored support and information to improve access to Council services for people with disability.

Goal 3: To continually improve access and inclusion in the built environment and at events for people with disability.

Goal 4: To provide meaningful opportunities for people with disability to participate in the workforce.

MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR
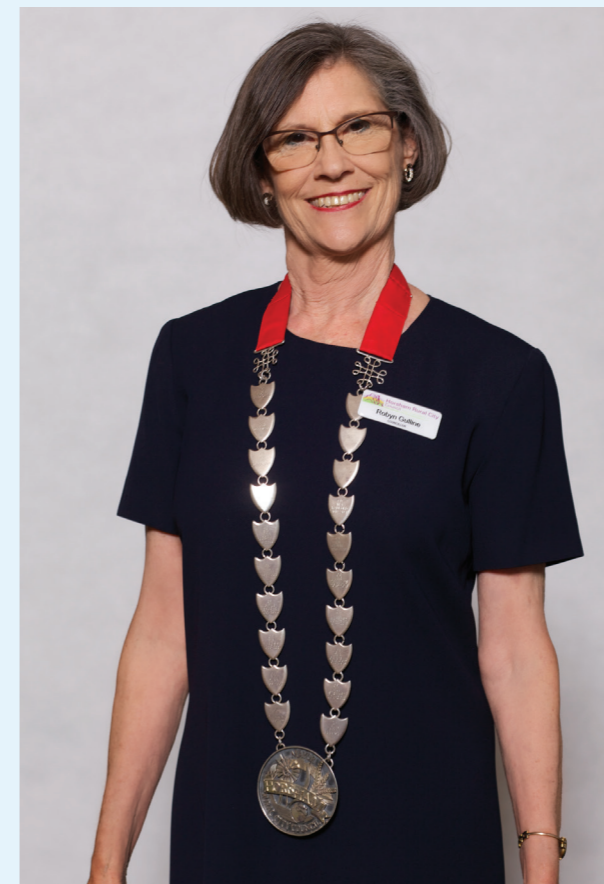
I am delighted to present the draft Horsham Rural City Council Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2023-2026. This Plan demonstrates the Council's commitment to building a community where the diversity of our people is valued, and everyone can participate and be included.

This Plan is aligned with Horsham Rural City Council's vision for the community to be a vibrant, liveable hub that thrives on strong economic growth and social connectedness.

Council is committed to improving accessibility and inclusion in all its practices. This Plan will enhance our practices by refining our policies, creating a forum for people with lived experience to provide feedback and improving our services, public spaces, events, and employment to be more inclusive and accessible.

The Council Executive has overall responsibility for the delivery of the Plan. However, we see access and inclusion as an area all members of our community can contribute to. We are looking forward to the input and insight the new Disability Advisory Committee will offer us.

Cr Robyn Gulline Mayor
Horsham Rural City Council

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. About this Plan

The Disability Access and Inclusion Plan aims to reduce barriers and increase inclusion and participation for people with disability in the Horsham Rural City community.

The Plan focusses on how Horsham Rural City Council can help to improve access and inclusion for people with disability through consideration of Council services, events, employment, and facilities.

This Plan also considers Horsham Rural City Council's role as a leader and advocate for reducing barriers to people with disability in the local community.

Rationale

Disability is any impairment of a physical, intellectual, psychiatric, neurological, or sensory nature.[1]

6.3 percent (n.1,272) of the Horsham Rural City Council community report needing assistance with self-care, mobility, or communication due to a long-term health condition, disability, or old age.[2]

This Plan recognises Council's role as a civic leader, service provider, and employer and their ability to drive improvements in access and inclusion for people living with disability.

The Plan is also a requirement of the *Victorian Disability Act 2006*. Further information on the legislative context of this plan is provided in APPENDIX 1.

Plan development

This Plan was developed between July and October 2022. Horsham Rural City Council engaged Projectura to work with the community and develop the Plan.

The development of the Plan has been informed by a desktop literature review, and engagement with residents, stakeholders, and Horsham Rural City Council staff.

This Plan provides a summary of the Horsham Rural City population including people living with disability, the relevant policy and legislative context, an overview of stakeholder and community engagement, and articulates a three-year strategy to achieve the purpose of the Plan.

1.2. Engagement to inform the Plan

Community conversations took place between 3 August and 14 September 2022.

Engagement objectives

The engagement explored:

1. The accessibility of Horsham Rural City Council's services, events, facilities and employment and opportunities for improvement.

2. Barriers to access and inclusion within the community and within Council.

3. Opportunities to improve access, participation, and inclusion across the Horsham Rural City community.

Participation

Various methods were used to provide people with a diversity of options to have their say. A summary of the methods and participation is provided in Table 1.

Input from over 110 people from the community informed the development of this Plan.

Of the participants:

- 69 percent (n.77) were community members.
- 20 percent (n.34) were Horsham Rural City Council staff.
- 21 percent (n.23) had lived experience of disability.
- 20 percent (n.23) were carers, family members or friends of people with disability or worked for disability support organisations.
- 24 percent (n.27) were male.
- 67 percent (n.75) were female.
- 0.9 percent (n.1) identified as non-binary.

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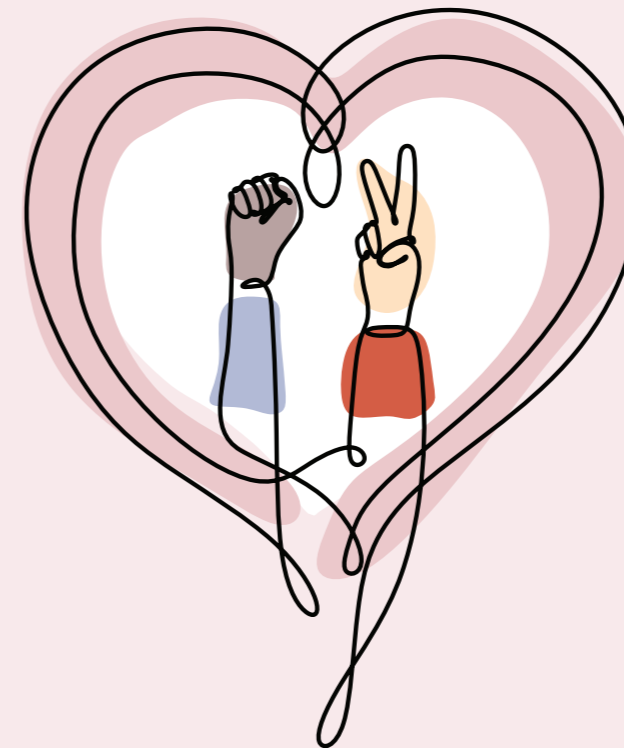
[1] Disability Discrimination Act 1992

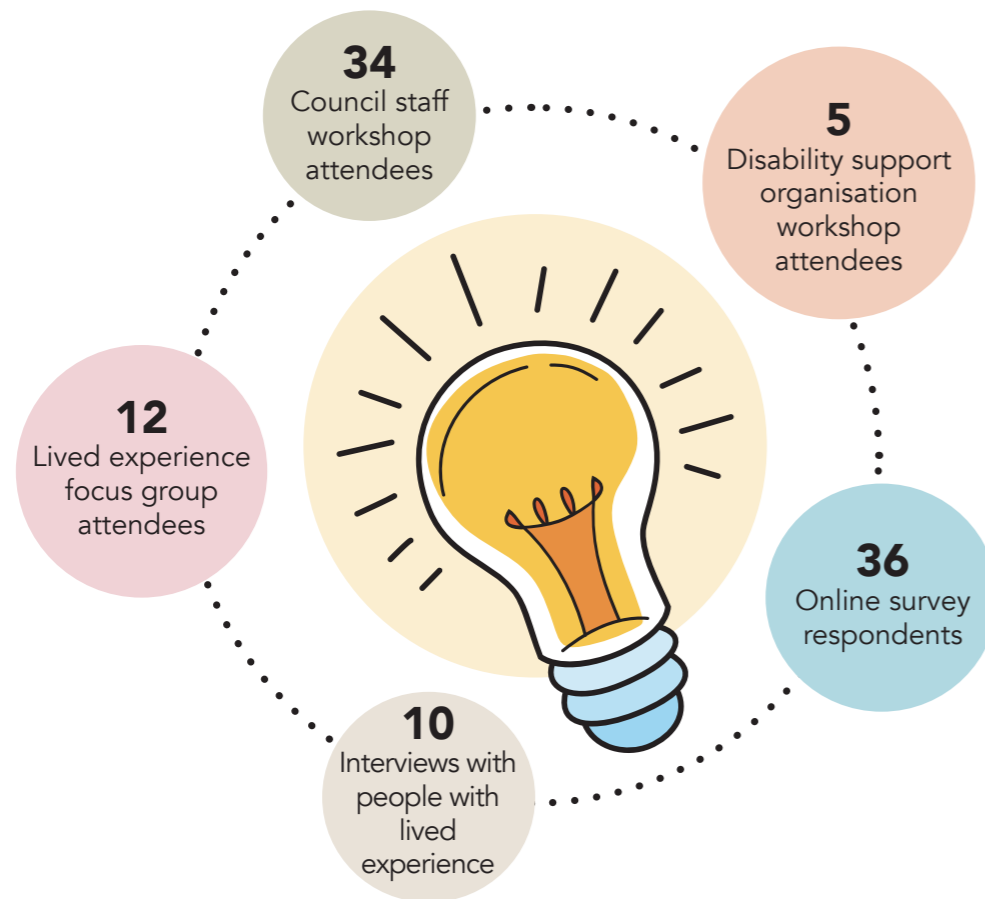[2] 2022, ABS Census 2021, General Community Profile Horsham LGA23190

34 Council staff workshop attendees

5 Disability support organisation workshop attendees

12 Lived experience focus group attendees

36 Online survey respondents

10 Interviews with people with lived experience

Table 1.   Engagement summary

Date & time	Method	Detail	Location	Respondents
3 -23 August 2022	Interviews	Interviews of people with lived experience of disability and family/carers	Telephone and in-person	10 people
11 August - 9 September 2022	Online survey	Online survey of people with lived experience of disability, their families, carers and support organisations	Online	36 people
25 August 2022	Workshop	Workshop with disability support organisations	Online	5 organisations
25 August and 14 September 2022	Workshops	Two workshops with Council staff	Online	34 people
29 August 2022	Focus group	Focus group for people with lived experience	Centre for Participation	12 people
1-3 September 2022	Interviews and focus group	Focus groups and in-person discussions with people at the Horsham Talks Expo	Horsham Town Hall	15 people

2. CURRENT SNAPSHOT

2.1. Inclusion in our community

Horsham Rural City Council is located in the Wimmera region of Victoria, 300 kilometres north-west of Melbourne.

The municipality covers an area of 4,267 square kilometres and includes major centres of Horsham and Natimuk, as well as many other smaller localities.

With an economy largely driven by agriculture, manufacturing, construction, public sector industries, retail and services, the area supports 9,361 jobs and has an annual economic output of $2.865 billion.[3]

Population facts
According to the 2021 ABS Census, the Horsham Rural City community has:

- A population of 20,429 people.

- 1.8 percent of the population (n.361) who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

- 21 percent of the population (n.4,347) who are over 65 years.

- 33 percent of the population (n.6,765) who report having long term health conditions, with the most common conditions being arthritis and mental health conditions.

- Lower median weekly incomes ($1,381) compared to the Victorian average of ($1,759).

Disability
Disability is any impairment of a physical, intellectual, psychiatric, neurological or sensory nature.[4]

In 2021, 6.3 percent (n.1,272) of the Horsham Rural City community reported needing assistance with self care, mobility or communication due to a long term health condition, disability or old age.

A greater number of females (n.709) reported needing assistance than males (n.570).

The number of people needing assistance increases with age, with 65 percent of people who reported needing assistance aged over 55 years (n.834).

Whilst 2,291 people (13.7 percent) within the community reported providing unpaid assistance to a person with a disability, health condition, or old age. [5]

3 2022, REMPLAN Economy, Jobs and Business Insights - Horsham

4 Disability Discrimination Act 1992

5 2022, ABS Census 2021, General Community Profile Horsham LGA23190

2. CURRENT SNAPSHOT

2.2. Engagement findings

This section summarises the findings from the community engagement.

Buildings, facilities, and infrastructure

Online survey respondents were asked to rate how well Council buildings, facilities and infrastructure meet the needs of people with disability.

The highest rating facilities included the Aquatic Centre, the Town Hall and Horsham Library, with 52 percent, 45 percent and 41 percent of survey respondents respectively rating them as meeting the needs of people with disability well or very well.

Footpaths and roads and the Horsham Cinema were the lowest rating facilities, and infrastructure. 62 percent of respondents rated footpaths and roads as meeting the needs of people with disability poorly or very poorly. Whilst, 37 percent of respondents rated the Horsham Cinema as meeting the needs of people with disability poorly or very poorly.

Engagement participants were asked to list opportunities to improve the accessibility of buildings, facilities, and infrastructure. The top six themes were:

- Safe paths and crossings for people with disability.
- Building accessibility improvements.
- Accessible parking.
- Creating quiet and sensory-sensitive spaces.
- Improving the accessibility of signage.
- Public toilets and information on availability.

Council staff considered the community engagement findings and identified opportunities for internal systems and process changes to support the delivery of the improvements. Key systems and process opportunities included working with people with lived experience of disability to support planning, audits, and decision making; prioritising people and movement over cars and trade; wholistic planning of crossing and path improvements.

Events

When asked how well council-run events met the needs of people with disability, 52 percent rated this as average, whilst 24 percent rated this as well or very well.

Engagement participants were asked to list opportunities to improve accessibility. The top six themes were:

- Holistic event planning to encourage participation and inclusion.
- Availability of accessible car parking.
- Promotion and event information.
- Creating quiet and sensory-sensitive spaces.
- Public toilets and information on availability.
- Safe paths and crossings for people with disability.

The community engagement findings were considered by Council staff, and they identified internal opportunities for systems and process changes to support the delivery of improvements. Key systems and process opportunities included early planning to enable access and inclusion at events; working with people with lived experience to plan events and staff training around the needs of people with disability.

Services

When asked how well Council services cater for people with disability, Customer Service was the highest rating service with 35 percent of respondents rating this as well or very well, whilst Building and Planning Approvals rated lowest with 19 percent of respondents rating this service as poorly meeting the needs of people with disability.

Engagement participants were asked to list opportunities to improve the accessibility of Council services. The top two themes were:

- Provision of accessible information and communication.
- Additional support for people with disability when accessing council services such as building/planning approvals and customer service.

Council staff were presented with the community engagement findings and identified opportunities for internal systems and process changes to support the delivery of the improvements. Key systems and process opportunities included staff training on how to prepare accessible documents; the creation of Easy English resources and providing documents in a range of different formats for accessibility.

Employment

Concerns were raised during the engagement that as an employer Horsham Rural City is not making adequate adjustments to provide access and inclusion for current or potential employees.

Key improvements for increased access and inclusion during recruitment and employment at the Horsham Rural City included:

- Improved understanding of the value of employing people with disability and their needs.
- Support and adjustments to provide meaningful, accessible, and inclusive employment.
- Inclusive communication and advertising during recruitment.

Council staff considered the community engagement findings and identified opportunities for internal systems and process changes to support the delivery of the improvements. Key systems and process opportunities included offering support to candidates during application processes; development of a workplace adjustment policy; training for staff on inclusive recruitment and employment and improving the accessibility of recruitment advertisements.

Cultural and attitudinal change

Opportunities for Horsham Rural City to influence internal and community attitudes and stereotypes about people with disability were raised during the engagement. Opportunities included increasing the visibility of people with disability, challenging hidden biases, and improving internal policies and systems to place greater value on listening to people with disability and on the rights of people with disability in the community.

2. CURRENT SNAPSHOT

2.3. Opportunities

When considering access and inclusion for people living with disability in Horsham Rural City, the engagement identified several key themes and opportunities for improvement, which are summarised below.

Cultural and attitudinal change

There are opportunities for Horsham Rural City to influence internal and community attitudes and stereotypes about people living with disability. Opportunities include increasing the visibility of people with disability, challenging hidden biases, and improving internal policies and systems to involve people with disability in decision making.

Tailored support and information

Improved accessibility of Horsham Rural City documents and information was identified as a key opportunity. Tailored support for people with disability to access Council services was also raised, examples included one-on-one support to navigate council planning and building applications or other services.

Accessible infrastructure and events

The need to improve the accessibility of paths, crossings, parking, building access, and public toilets were raised consistently throughout the engagement. Working with people with lived experience of disability to support planning and audits of infrastructure was a key opportunity raised, along with improved use of relevant infrastructure standards.

Early planning for people with disability during event coordination to ensure events had adequate access, quiet spaces, and accessible toilets was raised. The development of a venue audit checklist and working with people with lived experience of disability to support event planning were also raised as opportunities.

Inclusive and accessible employment

Opportunities identified to make employment more inclusive and accessible included inclusive advertising, offering support to candidates during the application process, developing a workforce adjustment policy, and making physical changes to the workplace to accommodate people with disability. Internal attitudinal and cultural changes were also raised to ensure unbiased recruitment and the success of employment for people with disability.
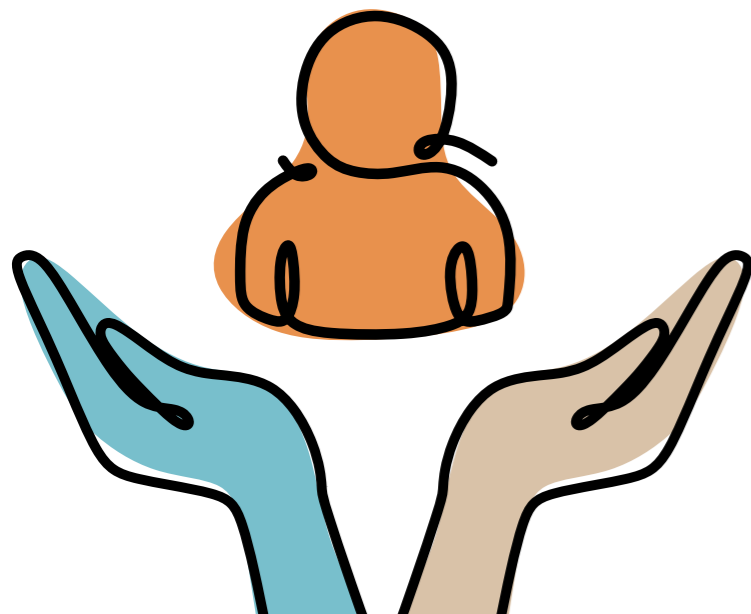
3. DISABILITY ACCESS AND INCLUSION PLAN

3.1. Vision

The Horsham Rural City community is inclusive, accessible, and values the diversity of its people.

3. DISABILITY ACCESS AND INCLUSION PLAN

3.2. Guiding principles

Principles that guide the implementation of the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan include:

Participation: People with disability not encountering barriers to their participation in community activities.

Contribution: People with disability can build their capacity, skills and expertise, engage in meaningful roles and contribute to their community.

Access: People with disability having equal access to community and mainstream services and supports.

Inclusion: People with disability are included in leading, shaping and participating in decision making about their community.

Connection: People with disability are connected and have the information they need to make decisions and choices.

3.3. Goals

Four overarching goals have been identified for the Plan.

Each of the goals have a series of actions which are detailed in the Action Plan.

Goal 1: To improve understanding of the barriers faced by people with disability and the value they bring to the community.

Goal 2: To provide tailored support and information to improve access to Council services for people with disability.

Goal 3: To continually improve access and inclusion in the built environment and at events for people with disability.

Goal 4: To provide meaningful opportunities for people with disability to participate in the workforce.

3. DISABILITY ACCESS AND INCLUSION PLAN

3.4. Action Plan

This Plan documents the goals and actions prioritised by the community during engagement activities. These actions align with the guiding principles of participation, contribution, access, inclusion and connection and further the vision of this Plan to ensure Horsham Rural City Council and the community embraces access, inclusion and participation for everyone.

Table 2. **Action Plan**

Actions		HRCC lead	Timeline
Goal 1: To improve understanding of the barriers faced by people with disability and the value they bring to the community.			
1.1	Establish a Disability Advisory Committee to provide feedback on key Council projects, policies, and processes.	Communities and Place	2023-2026
1.2	Staff working on community facing projects are required to engage with people with lived experience of disability on a regular basis about relevant projects.	Communities and Place	2023-2026
1.3	Fifty percent of Council staff, including Managers and Directors, to undertake disability awareness training, involving people with lived experience of disability.	Corporate Services	2023-2026
1.4	New and existing staff to undertake online disability and cultural training.	People, Performance and Culture	2023-2026
1.5	Use media opportunities and events to highlight the talents and creativity of people with disability and to reduce stereotypes.	Corporate Services	2023-2026
1.6	Recognise and celebrate International Day of People with Disability and Carers Week.	Communities and Place	2023-2026
1.7	Increase the use of images of people with disability in all council publications.	Corporate Services	2023-2026
1.8	Develop an internal Access and Inclusion Statement of Intent, that highlights the Councils commitment to an accessible and inclusive community where the rights of people with disability are recognised and valued.	Communities and Place	2023-2024

Actions		HRCC lead	Timeline
Goal 2: To provide tailored support and information to improve access to Council services for people with disability.			
2.1	Identify key Council documents that require translation into Easy English and arrange for production.	Communities and Place	2023-2026
2.2	Improve the accessibility of Council's website and content, complying with accessibility standards.	Corporate Services	2023-2024
2.3	Work with disability services to create and make accessible a centralised collection of information about services, accessible infrastructure, and support for people with disability within the local area.	Communities and Place	2024
2.4	Review application processes for council services e.g., building and planning approvals, and animal registration, to ensure that adequate support is available for people with disability.	Communities and Place	2023
2.5	Coordinate staff and deliver staff training on producing easy and use plain English in Council publications.	Corporate Services	2023-2024
2.6	Coordinate and deliver staff training on providing inclusive and accessible customer support.	Corporate Services	2023-2024
2.7	Review the Council's style guide to ensure guidelines are accessible and inclusive.	Corporate Services	2024-2025
2.8	Develop accessible signage guidelines.	Infrastructure Services	2024-2025

3. DISABILITY ACCESS AND INCLUSION PLAN

3.4. Action Plan

Actions		HRCC lead	Timeline
Goal 3: To continually improve access and inclusion in the built environment and at events for people with disability.			
3.1	Organise Universal Design Training for appropriate Council staff to participate in.	Infrastructure Services	2023
3.2	Continue the development of design specifications for amenities to ensure accessibility.	Communities and Place	2023
3.3	Include design specification requirements for accessibility in tenders relating to capital works.	Infrastructure Services	2023-2026
3.4	Involve people with lived experience of disability in audits and planning for new capital works.	Infrastructure Services	2023-2026
3.5	Address Building Code and Australian Standards access requirements in all Council building works and upgrades.	Infrastructure Services	2023-2026
3.6	Continue to upgrade public infrastructure and public spaces to improve safety and access for people with disability.	Infrastructure Services	2023-2026
3.7	Develop and implement a crossings and paths upgrade plan improving prioritisation, connectivity, and accessibility across the community.	Infrastructure Services	2023-2026
3.8	Update the Accessible Events Guide to ensure planning, communication and venues meet the needs of people with disability.	Communities and Place	2023-2024
3.9	Consider opportunities for quiet spaces and chill out areas in new buildings, retrofits and at events.	Infrastructure Services Communities and Place	2023-2026
3.10	Promote relevant local laws and physical access needs to residents and businesses to improve accessibility for people with disability.	Communities and Place	2024

Actions		HRCC lead	Timeline
Goal 4: To provide meaningful opportunities for people with disability to participate in the workforce.			
4.1	Develop and implement a workforce adjustment policy to ensure employees with disability are supported in the workplace.	Corporate Services	2023
4.2	Review recruitment processes to ensure job advertisements and application processes are inclusive and support participation.	Corporate Services	2023-2024
4.3	Work with local disability employment providers to identify opportunities to increase the employment of people with disability at the Council.	Corporate Services	2023-2026
4.4	Provide annual training for staff involved in recruitment and employment, including managers, to develop 'disability confidence' and ensure processes are inclusive and unbiased.	Corporate Services	2023-2026
4.5	Support local businesses to become more inclusive by considering physical access, communication, disability awareness and inclusive employment.	Investment and Business Development	2023-2024

3. DISABILITY ACCESS AND INCLUSION PLAN

3.5. Implementation

This Plan will be implemented and evaluated over four years.

The successful implementation and evaluation of this Plan relies on:

- Appropriate levels of resourcing.
- Ongoing commitment from Council to work in partnership to advance the vision for inclusion.

Governance

For the implementation of the Plan to be successful, clear governance and executive oversight is required. Individual roles across the Council will be assigned responsibility for the leading the implementation of specific actions, this accountability will be documented in workplans.

Council's Communities and Place Directorate is the lead for this strategy and will facilitate, monitor, and report on its implementation.

Council, service providers, and the broader community will need to join forces in various capacities to achieve the vision in this Plan.

Implementation

The Communities and Place Directorate will develop an annual delivery plan for implementing the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan. The annual delivery plan will set out the projects and activities for implementation, the timelines for the actions to be conducted, and any budgetary considerations for these actions.

Measuring success

The implementation of actions will be reviewed annually to determine the status of progress. Progress will be reported to Council to assist in future community and corporate planning needs assessments and budget development. Progress will also be reported to the new Disability Community Advisory Group.

A formal review and evaluation of the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan will be undertaken every four years, in line with the Council term.

Federal context

The *UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disability (2006)* recognises the rights of people with disability to participate in social, economic and political spheres of their life through access to education, healthcare, information, justice, public transport and the built environment.[6]

The *Disability Discrimination Act (Cth) 1992* prohibits the discrimination of people with disability in areas including employment, access and education.

The *National Disability Strategy 2021-2031* is a high level policy framework which focuses improving the lives of people with disability in Australia.

The *National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)* seeks to increase the quality of life for people with disability whilst increasing their social and economic participation.[7] The NDIS funds supports for people with permanent and significant disability that impacts your ability to manage everyday activities.

The *My Aged Care Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP)* supports people who are struggling with everyday tasks aged over 65 years, or aged 50 years and over for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. The program aims to keep people well and independent, and in their home longer.

State context

The *Victorian Disability Act (Vic) 2006* provides requires Councils to prepare a Disability Action Plan. The plan must focus on reducing barriers which discriminate against persons with a disability.

The *Equal Opportunity Act (Vic) 2010* prohibits the discrimination of people based on a personal characteristic – including disability.

The *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities (Vic) 2006* formalises the rights of all Victorians, including those with disability.

The *Inclusive Victoria – State Disability Plan 2022-2026* is Victoria's plan for making things fairer for people with disability. The Plan focusses on systematic reforms across the Victorian government.

Local context

Horsham Rural *City Council Plan 2021 -2026* sets a vision for 'a vibrant, liveable hub that thrives on strong economic growth and social connectedness.' The Plan includes strategies for 'an inclusive, accessible, connected and safe community' and prioritises 'enhancing the inclusivity, accessibility and safety of our places and spaces.'

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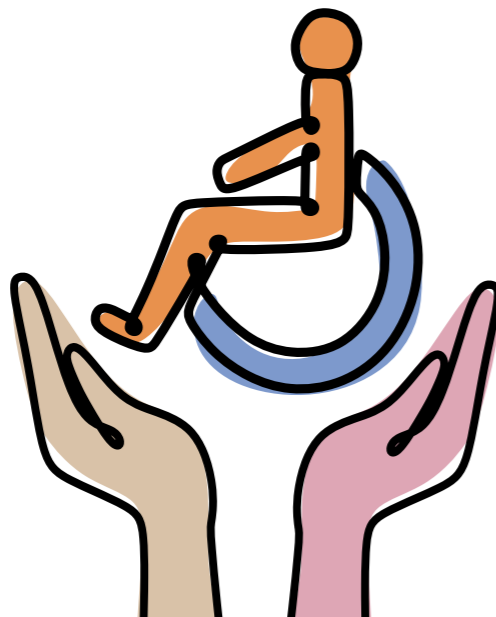
[6] 2006, United Nations, The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)

[7] 2011, Productivity Commission, Disability Care and Support Inquiry

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CHILDCARE IN THE

Wimmera Southern Mallee

Understanding the story

BY**FIVE**
WSM Early Years Initiative

ABOUT

By Five WSM Childcare Report

By Five WSM Early Years Inititative have collected data about centre based long day care demand and availability across the five Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Hindmarsh, Horsham, Northern Grampians, West Wimmera and Yarriambiack in the Wimmera Southern Mallee (WSM).

The term Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is the universal term for education and care of children five and under in Australia. For ease of use, the term 'childcare' shall be used in this report.

The focus of this work has been to understand childcare across the region, and what actions are required to ensure children and families can access childcare.

An accessible, quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system is a critical element in supporting children to thrive. The synergies between childcare, kindergarten and the early years of school across our region from the perspective of a child is evident. Improving our understanding of funding and the operating environment enables us to identify opportunities to ensure our children can get what they need, when and where they need it. The childcare story is a critical piece in improving not only outcomes for children experiencing adversity and gender equality but our region's economic prosperity and liveability.

Childcare infrastructure and access forms part of a suite of efforts necessary to support the delivery of improved health and development outcomes for children between the ages of 0-5 across the region.

More broadly, a lack of childcare availability impacts the livability and economic development of our region. In the WSM, childcare is recognized as a key issue that would improve the availability of our skilled and unskilled workforces already living in the region. Limited childcare availability also has implications for achieving gender equity in our regional workforces as well as impacting on the attraction of this region compared to other regional areas.

This report has been compiled from desktop reviews, interviews, and engagement with ECEC service providers, and Wimmera Southern Mallee families.

THE
Rural Childcare Challenge

→ Childcare operates and is funded in a market-based system, which assumes private providers will meet demand for childcare. This does not work in rural and remote areas.

→ Rural areas cannot match economies of scale for commercial childcare markets, and as a result, rural areas are unattractive as a business proposition for private childcare providers.

→ Rural and remote childcare is delivered by not-for-profit providers, driven initially by the community or the commitment of a local government.

→ If approved childcare is not present in a rural community, Federal Government subsidies do not flow to rural parents and carers with children to support work, study or engagement in volunteering. This is an equity issue for rural people and a policy failing of the current childcare subsidy system.

→ A lack of subsidy and support for rural areas prevents the development of a rural childcare market and limits workforce development and local training opportunities for rural staff, further compounding the problem.

→ There are no organisations responsible for addressing childcare market failure in rural areas, so efforts to drive change are unfunded and therefore costly for rural communities.

→ While the same issues occur in most rural communities, efforts to change are by necessity individualised, localised and limited in scale.

> *Current childcare policy settings result in thin markets and an absence of provision in regional areas.*
> *- Deserts and Oases: How accessible is childcare in*

OUR
Region's Childcare Challenge in stats

By Five Wimmera Southern Mallee Early Years is an initiative of the Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Partnership that aims to improve the developmental outcomes of children.

WIMMERA SOUTHERN MALLEE

The Wimmera Southern Mallee (WSM) is covering 34,000km, about 13% of the State. We have a population of about 48,500, which is just under 1% of the Victorian total. This sparsely populated region is home to many small, vibrant communities and two regional centres, Horsham and Stawell.

Whilst we are an older population, with the average age being 49 years, 10 years up on the State average, we have 2,555 children aged 0-4 years who all deserve the best services and community supports to thrive.

Regional population:	48,500
Population 0-4 years:	2,555 (5.0%)
Wimmera Southern Mallee area:	34,000 km²

THE CURRENT CHILDCARE SITUATION

Across the WSM region we have 869 approved childcare positions delivered through 13 long-day care centres across nine towns. There are eight providers currently operating childcare in the WSM. We have 2,555 children aged 0-4, currently at least 300 children are on waitlists for childcare positions in the WSM.

There are 21 towns in the WSM with populations over 180. Five towns with populations over 500 do not have childcare available.

Approved childcare positions	869
Children on childcare waitlists:	300
Approved long day care centres:	13
Not for Profit:	8
Local Government:	2
For Profit:	3
Number of providers:	8
Towns (over 500 pop.) available childcare:	9
Towns (over 500 pop.) no available childcare:	5

WORKFORCE
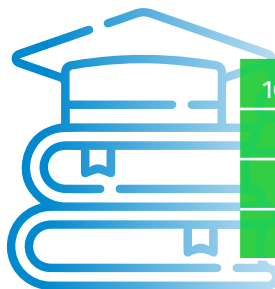
Attracting and retaining a workforce is an Australian wide concern. Current estimates by the Federal Treasury and reported in The Sector, indicate that the ECEC sector will require around 37,000 additional educators by 2024. To enable the WSM childcare centres to be at full capacity, 34 positions need to be filled. To enable the 300 children on waitlists to attend childcare, the WSM require an additional 50 staff, thus 84 in total.

To enable the children of the WSM to receive education and care we need to recruit the following qualified staff.

Current Vacancies across WSM childcare centres	
Certificate III Early Childhood Education and Care:	18
Diploma Early Childhood Education and Care:	6
Bachelor Early Childhood Education and Care:	10
Future vacancies	
To meet childcare waitlists:	50

A highly skilled and valued workforce underpins high quality service provision. All childcare centres in the WSM currently have staff in training with centres reliant on staff working towards their qualifications.

100% of childcare centres with staff in training	
Studying Certificate III Early Childhood Education and Care:	21
Studying Diploma Early Childhood Education and Care:	23
Studying Bachelor Early Childhood Education and Care:	8

OUR FAMILIES

Ninety-seven families across the WSM provided input to this report through the completion of surveys and interviews. Approximately 65% surveyed stated that they required between 10-30 hours of childcare to return to work, increase their hours of work or work in a higher skilled position. We know that there is also a demand in areas where childcare doesn't exist and there is no waitlist to join.

Families surveyed reported the following:		
Requiring more childcare to return to work:	65	%
Requiring more childcare hours:	59	%
Studying Bachelor Early Childhood Education and Care:	58	%

CHILDCARE
Understanding the Wimmera Southern Mallee Story

ACCESS

85%

Waitlists in 11 of 13 WSM centres

Demand exceeds supply in 85% of the WSM childcare centres.

300

300 children waiting

Approximately 300 children across the WSM are waiting for childcare positions.

5

5 towns with no childcare

5 out of the 14 WSM towns with populations over 500 people do not have childcare.

CHALLENGES

Supply is impacted by

Workforce

Infrastructure

84

ECEC staff are needed

84 staff are required to meet the known ECEC demand across the WSM. Centres have 34 current job vacancies.

0

No agency has responsibility

No government or bureaucratic authority is responsible for building, developing and providing childcare services.

PRESSURES

100%

All centres have staff in training

All WSM centres have staff currently in training.
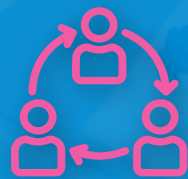
High staff turnover

WSM Centres report high staff turnover is due to low pay, lack of pay parity, conditions and paperwork.

65%

Families are unable to work

65% of families reported experiencing employment restriction due to lack of access to childcare.

A VISION
For the future

HOW WSM CHILDCARE SHOULD LOOK AND FEEL

A strong and stable Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce in the region enables parents and carers to work and train while ensuring children have access to the lifelong benefits of high-quality early education.

To enable rural and remote children and families consistent access to quality childcare, critical shifts in structural drivers controlled by government is required.

→   Towns with populations of over 500 people (there are 14 in the WSM) will have funded, stable and regular childcare services available.

→   Services in these towns are consistently delivered through the establishment of a block funding model. This model recognizes fluctuations in demand for rural childcare services but supports communities to ensure consistency of staffing and supply.

→   The WSM region has a well-trained and stable, local early years workforce who are qualified to deliver a high level of service to children in the region.

→   Childcare services will be recognised as part of the suite of ECEC services and co-located with kindergartens and primary schools in WSM townships with populations over 500 people.

→   Rural ECEC staff will all have pay parity thanks to a Common Award for rural and remote service delivery, which recognizes that wage rates should be consistent for equivalent qualifications regardless of the sector (childcare, kindergarten, primary education).

> *Working and training is hard. To be accountable, staying motivated is a challenge.*
>
> *- Director WSM ECEC provider*

THE CURRENT
WSM childcare situation

Childcare in the region is delivered through a range of models, including private, not for profit and Local Government. Childcare operates in nine townships in the WSM. Five towns with populations over 500 do not have a childcare service.

There are waiting lists for childcare services at 11 of the 13 childcare centres in the WSM. In August 2022, this equated to 300 children in the WSM unable to access childcare.

The WSM region has critically low unemployment (2.7%, REDS Aug 2022) which is well below other Victorians. Issues with attracting and retaining skilled workers in the region are exacerbated by limited childcare options for younger families with children.

In August 2022, there were 34 vacant positions within existing childcare centres, which means that workforce shortages are preventing existing infrastructure from being fully utilized and inhibits new facilities from being built in our regional centres.

In 2022, more than 37 people, including 17 VET in school students, are studying a Certificate III in ECEC in the region. The region also has 12 students completing a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education & Care via scholarships. This is a significant additional workforce development but will not be enough to address current and projected workforce demand. The region is also challenged by trained workforce not converting to practice, and low levels of workforce retention in the industry.

Additional physical premises and workforce infrastructure will be required to meet current service demand for childcare. It is estimated that an extra 84 staff are required to meet the region's ECEC needs.

Importantly, in the WSM, "childcare is being defined as an individual issue for individual parents, when it is in fact a structural problem managed by a regulatory environment and subsidy scheme that disadvantages people in areas where approved care is unavailable" (Tischler, McDonald, Reeves, 2020). Currently there is no government agency with oversight of or responsibility for addressing childcare delivery gaps in the absence of a workable market.

As a result, rural efforts to address market failure are usually unfunded and ad-hoc.

> *People are scared to have another child, because they can't get childcare.*
> *- Survey respondent*

THE
Next Steps for By Five

To achieve consistent access to quality childcare in our region the following action foundations are required

Childcare Access

→ Business cases and sustainability modelling to be completed to support families in all towns with populations of more than 500 people in the WSM to access childcare services.

Infrastructure

→ Explore how childcare infrastructure is put in place to support families in all towns with populations over 500 in the WSM to access childcare services, to build the strength of the service model.

→ Investigate how, in thin markets, supply of childcare is left to non-profit providers, who require subsidised overheads provided through rent-free arrangements to support small enrolment numbers.

→ Investigate funding model for childcare infrastructure funding in rural communities which covers full cost of developments.

Quality Workforce

→ Undertake research into workforce retention issues that identify approaches for supporting workforce retention, including block-funding in rural and remote areas, with a Common award in place for all forms of rural ECEC delivery.

→ Explore local accreditation programs for former staff who have left the industry to return that recognises prior learning.

→ Collaborative approach established for ECEC development within scope of Victorian Government 3-year-old kindergarten program. This will include an action strategy for rural childcare.

→ Improve consistency and quality of ECEC services as staff feel more secure and services are reliably established in smaller townships (> 500 people).

→ Trial mentoring programs with clear strategies for supporting staff to deliver the highest quality services regardless of where they are located.

→ Advocate for pay parity across the ECEC sector to ensure that all WSM children and families have consistent access to quality childcare.

FOUNDATION 1

Childcare Access

About

The accessibility of childcare intersects with a multitude of issues for the WSM. It impacts the welfare of children and families, is a significant limiter in regional economic development, effects regional livability, and limits gender equity in regional communities.

Childcare accessibility in the WSM is an important contributing factor in reducing a range of statistical indicators around developmental vulnerabilities in children, reduced workforce participation for women and incidences of family violence.

The WSM region has significantly higher rates of children presenting at school with developmental vulnerabilities in two or more domains than the Victorian average at 11.49% compared to 8.26% (Australian Early Development Census 2021).

Childcare can play an important role for families in reducing inequities in child health and developmental outcomes, especially where disadvantage exists (Kalb, 2017).

The region also has the lowest workforce participation rate for women in the 24 – 44 year age group of any region in Victoria (WSM Skills Audit, 2022), identifying a likely correlation between low childcare availability and women's workforce participation.

Family violence rates in the WSM are approximately double that of the Victorian average (Women's Health Grampians 2022), and research suggests that childcare availability can be a significant factor in improving women's wellbeing and independence (Schmitz, 2019).

The Opportunity

The WSM has 5 towns with populations over 500 people that currently do not have childcare.

The State government has a strong position on increasing ECEC opportunities for children, recently introducing funded 3 year old kindergarten programs. Hybrid models could be supported to bring childcare into line with kindergarten delivery, producing a more seamless service in WSM.

Addressing childcare access in the WSM has implications for other policy and investment areas. In particular, it is likely to have significant benefits in addressing a range of issues impacting on both wellbeing and regional development, including:

→ Reducing the extent of developmental vulnerabilities in children commencing school.

→ Reducing family violence incidences and providing a protection factor for children in 'at-risk' situations (Sandner & Thompsen, 2020).

→ Addressing key workforce shortages (skilled and unskilled labour).

→ Improving livability and the attractiveness of the region for families to relocate to, supporting regional population growth targets.

→ Providing a market for training and development in ECEC as opportunities for a career workforce as this area expands.

Tactics

→ Acknowledge the intersection of childcare support with issues of family wellbeing, female independence and childhood development.

→ Understand childcare as an important support factor in achieving economic growth and livability of regional communities.

→ Complete business case development activities (sustainability modelling) to establish workable model/s for childcare delivery in townships with populations greater than 500 that complements kindergarten and school services, especially in rural and remote communities.

Deliverables

→ Business cases and sustainability modelling to be completed to support more WSM families access childcare services.

FOUNDATION 2
Infrastructure

About

Infrastructure needs for childcare delivery vary in each community and is a significant contributor in restricting the development of facilities. In areas experiencing market failure, the cost of constructing and delivering a childcare building that meets quality standards is generally higher than funding allows, and requires matching funding from organisations like Local Government that have no legislated responsibility for providing childcare (Yarriambiack Shire, 2021).

In the WSM, rural and remote Local Governments are left to subsidise childcare infrastructure – relying on a small ratepayer base to foot the cost of infrastructure for childcare facilities.

The developmental focus of kindergarten within the remit of the Department of Education (DET) has created a stronger focus on kindergarten infrastructure to be funded by the State Government (Victorian Government, 2022).

Victorian government policy to co-locate kindergartens near schools or within school footprints is an important step, but the risk is that childcare in rural and remote areas will be 'left behind', as services are most viable when they are complementary with kindergarten.

The implications of this policy change for rural communities and childcare is a significant unknown in relation to planning for current and future childcare needs.

The Opportunity

There are a known number of additional childcare facilities needed in the WSM for towns with populations over 500. Effort can be focused on advocating for childcare facilities in these specific communities where no childcare is currently available:

→ Rainbow

→ Minyip

→ Natimuk

→ Murtoa

→ Rupanyup

In addition, the region needs to work towards additional capacity in Horsham.

Establishing a block funding model for rural childcare services will also support reliability of services and infrastructure in smaller communities, thereby supporting families and rural employers to manage workforce needs.

Tactics

→ Advocate for childcare to be considered within the Victorian Government's rural ECEC remit, with provision made for co-located delivery of childcare services in rural and remote towns.

→ Ensure the Victorian Government is aware of the necessity of co-location of childcare services with kindergartens in rural areas to support viability, thereby preventing adverse policy outcomes.

→ Complete business case development activities (sustainability modelling) to establish workable model/s for childcare delivery in townships with populations greater than 500.

→ Advocate for block funding for rural ECEC which would ensure reliable service delivery during periods of fluctuating enrolments in rural and remote communities.

Deliverables

→ Explore how childcare infrastructure is put in place to support WSM families to access childcare services, to build the strength of the service model.

→ Investigate how, in thin markets, supply of childcare is left to non-profit providers, who require subsidised overheads provided through rent-free arrangements to support small enrolment numbers.

→ Investigate funding model for childcare infrastructure funding in rural communities which covers full cost of developments.

FOUNDATION 3
Quality Workforce

About

The WSM has a shortage of ECEC workforce, with current estimates suggesting an additional 34 staff are required to fill existing vacancies at childcare facilities in the region (August 2022). To address childcare workforce issues in meeting demand in the region, this is expected to require at least an additional 84 staff.

Workforce challenges in the industry are limiting existing services from operating at capacity and deter operators even in commercially viable locations.

Noting the flow of staff between the childcare sector, kindergarten and primary school, the ECEC workforce gap is larger than the current childcare workforce alone. Over 40 percent of teacher vacancies advertised in parts of the region go unfilled (REDS 2022), indicating broader issues with educational workforce needs. This highlights the need for not only pay parity, but an exploration of a Common Award for rural ECEC staff, to enable the flexible use of staff across the sector.

In 2022, there were 37 students undertaking a Certificate III ECEC, including 17 VET in schools students. 12 students are completing a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education and Care via scholarship. This is a significant number of students being trained in the region, but this will not meet current demand.

All childcare centres in the region have staff in training, which indicates a strong focus on workforce development. But this also places additional pressure on the existing workforce to not only meet the significant demands of their role, but also to provide additional mentoring and support for newly trained staff. This should be acknowledged as a significant additional stressor for a stretched workforce.

The WSM workforce is also challenged by staff leaving the sector. There is scope for additional work to be done to understand these challenges, but discussions with local employers indicates colleagues are leaving the sector due to issues such as lack of pay parity with similar industries, paperwork, and feeling undervalued.

The Opportunity

Given the scale and scope of the workforce challenge to be addressed, there is potential to approach this issue with bespoke solutions that also support regional development and growth needs.

There is also potential to build a stronger workforce with the childcare sector, acknowledging and engaging with the investment and attention being given by the State Government to kindergarten and ECEC.

The region engages in childcare delivery through a range of settings, including not-for-profit, Local Government and private childcare settings. Creating stronger pathways and linkages between the range of players in the ECEC space is likely to add value for workforce outcomes across the sector.

Providers in the childcare space already engage collaboratively in the effort to attract and develop an ECEC workforce in the region, through careers expos, a coordinated working group for ECEC workforces, and pre-accredited training models and study support courses (WDEA Works and Centre for Participation) for students studying towards a Certificate III. This has led to a high uptake of people studying towards employment in the industry (19 enrolled through WDEA Works & 17 at VET Cert III at Federation University Australia).

Job security for rural ECEC workforces can also be improved through a block funding model for small rural and remote providers. This would support continuation of services during periods when child numbers fluctuate. It would reduce job insecurity and prevent temporary staffing stand downs in areas that are difficult to recruit staff to. It would also assure rural communities of service consistency and quality (The Front Project, 2022).

Tactics

→ Build a stronger understanding of the workforce challenges for this sector in a rural setting, including knowledge about why staff leave the sector or don't take up roles once trained, and what incentives are available to support training and staffing.

→ Establish locally supported accreditation pathways for people who have left the industry to upskill and return to the sector with appropriate recognition of prior learning (RPL).

→ Build knowledge about the likely impacts of the expansion of fully funded kindergarten on the childcare workforce within the WSM, and the related projected impact of this on the ECEC workforce.

→ Explore a common award for all ECEC staff in rural areas to address pay parity issues and enable flexible staffing arrangements.

→ Explore opportunities for attracting workforce to the region through structured migration strategies, noting that Australia will need an additional 37,000 ECEC educators by 2024 (Lucas, 2021).

→ Advocate for block funding for childcare service delivery to reduce job insecurity for ECEC workforce and to maintain consistency of staffing and services in small rural and remote communities.

→ Trial models that support staff mentoring in workplaces to improve quality standards across the sector and provide professional support for both staff in training and those providing mentoring support in ECEC workplaces.

Deliverables

→ Undertake research into workforce retention issues that identify approaches for supporting workforce retention, including block-funding in rural and remote areas, with a common award in place for all forms of rural ECEC delivery.

→ Explore local accreditation programs for former staff who have left the industry to return that supports RPL.

→ Collaborative approach established for ECEC development within scope of Victorian Government 3-year-old kindergarten program. This will include an action strategy for rural childcare.

→ Improve consistency and quality of ECEC services as staff feel more secure and services are reliably established in smaller townships (>500 people).

→ Trial mentoring programs with clear strategies for supporting staff to deliver the highest quality services regardless of where they are located.

→ Advocate for pay parity across the ECEC sector to ensure that all WSM children and families have consistent access to quality childcare.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

DISCLAIMER:

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Deserts and oases:

How accessible is childcare in Australia?

March 2022

mitchell INSTITUTE

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY

About us

The Mitchell Institute for Education and Health Policy at Victoria University is one of the country's leading education and health policy think tanks and trusted thought leaders. Our focus is on improving our education and health systems so more Australians can engage with and benefit from these services, supporting a healthier, fairer and more productive society.

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Cover image

Photo by Filip Urban on Unsplash.

Foreword

No Australian child should be left stranded in a childcare desert

The evidence is overwhelming on the impact of good quality early learning in fuelling children's development and giving them a great start in life.

The size of a child's brain reaches 90 per cent of an adult's by the age of five. These early years are critical for lifelong learning and well-being. Talking, reading, playing and singing with babies and toddlers is vital in shaping thinking and emotional patterns for life and influencing learning, relationships and resilience.

That's why this Australian-first analysis of childcare accessibility mapped against children aged 0 to 4 years is so critical – and its findings are stark.

This new research reveals where in Australia the demand for space in early childhood education and care (ECEC) outpaces local capacity to provide services, where 'childcare deserts' are found.

It shows us childcare deserts are disproportionately located in rural and regional areas and where there are higher proportions of children and families on lower income or below the poverty line.

Early learning can be a great equaliser for children, helping them start formal learning on an equal par with other children.

High quality early learning has a big impact on children from disadvantaged backgrounds as the education they receive provides the stimulation and development trigger that may not be readily available at home or surrounds.

Children and families in these areas are among the most likely to benefit from early learning, yet structural problems in the system have abandoned them without the access they need.

This is not just a report, it is a call to action for political leaders and our community.

We should insist on policies that will make Australia the greatest place in the world to grow up, and the greatest place in the world to be a parent.

Australia needs universally accessible high-quality and affordable early learning for every child, regardless of their postcode or family circumstances.

Jay Weatherill
CEO- Thrive by Five

Foreword

Table of Contents

Part I: Executive Summary

Access to quality childcare is increasingly critical to Australian children, families and the economy. There are many anecdotal reports of families having difficulty finding appropriate childcare services, especially in regional Australia and some parts of our major cities. However, there is a lack of evidence exploring the nature and extent of the problem.

This report aims to help to fill this evidence gap by examining access to childcare in Australia. In this report, we are focussing on one type of childcare - centre-based day care, which is subsidised by the Commonwealth Child Care Subsidy (CCS) and is the service most used by children and families.

We measured the supply of childcare in almost every part of the country and compared this to the potential demand – the number of children who living in each neighbourhoods. We used spatial measurement techniques that enabled us to determine the relative accessibility of childcare in Australia and to determine where there are childcare deserts and oases.

Our analysis shows that where you live matters. Families in regional areas are the most at risk of suffering from poor access. There are also concerning correlations between access to childcare and socio-economic status.

Our analysis highlights that Australia needs new policy approaches to ensure that all Australian families can access the benefits of high quality childcare.

What did we find?

Our analysis shows that when it comes to childcare access, where you live matters. We found that about 9 million Australians, or 35.2% of the population, live in neighbourhoods we classify as a 'childcare desert'. A childcare desert is a term that comes from the early learning research literature and refers to areas where childcare is most scarce. The definition of a childcare desert is a populated area where there are less than 0.333 childcare places per child, or more than three children per one childcare place. About 568,700 children aged 0 to 4 years, or 36.5% of children in this age group, live in neighbourhoods we classify as a childcare desert.

Figure 1 below shows childcare accessibility for Sydney. Areas in yellow and green indicate higher levels of childcare accessibility. The areas in green we describe as 'childcare oases'. These are located in the centre of Sydney and in the more affluent areas in Sydney's east, inner west and north. There are also patches of green in suburban areas. These areas can be similar to neighbouring regions in terms of socio-economic status but have lower levels of culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

Part I: Executive Summary

Figure 1: Childcare accessibility for selected areas of Sydney

Childcare deserts. Orange and red areas indicate childcare deserts

Areas of orange and red on this map indicate childcare deserts – where there are less than 0.333 childcare places per child, or more than three children per place. These are often in suburban and outer suburban regions. Compared to childcare 'oases' they generally have a greater relative disadvantage or a higher proportion of culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

Childcare accessibility varies by region

The pattern for Sydney shown in the above map is typical for Australia's major cities. Families in regional and remote areas, however, are the most at risk of suffering from poor access to childcare.

Figure 2 below shows several smoothed density estimates (which is a smoothed version of a histogram) of the ratio of available childcare places per child. The figure displays neighbourhoods in different areas of Australia, from major cities to very remote areas. The higher the line, the more regions with the number of childcare places per child. The national median of 0.38 childcare places per child also appears as a dashed blue line.

Next to each figure is an overview of what the shape of the line indicates about childcare accessibility for that region of Australia.

Figure 2: Smoothed density estimates of childcare places per child in Australian neighbourhoods by remoteness area


Major cities of Australia
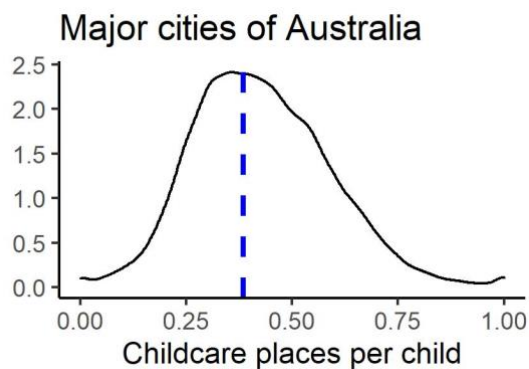
In major cities of Australia, there are very few neighbourhoods where there is no childcare supply. Accessibility gradually increases and peaks at around the national median before falling. The median for major cities of Australia is 0.42 childcare places per child. The line rises slightly at 1 childcare place per child indicating areas with very high levels of childcare supply. About 28.8% of the population live in areas classified as childcare deserts.

Inner regional Australia
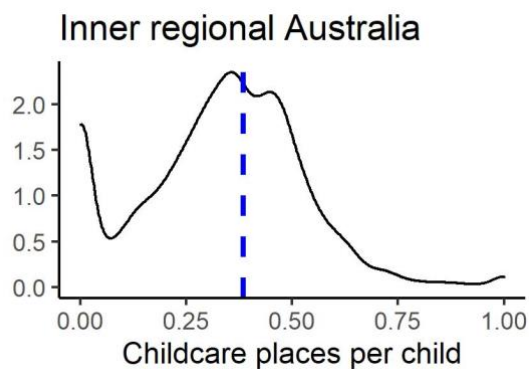
Inner regional Australia has a similar distribution of childcare accessibility to major cities with some important exceptions. First, the height of the line at the start indicates there are many areas where there is no childcare supply. Second, the median for inner regional Australia is less than major cities, at 0.35 childcare places per child. 44.6% of the population live in a childcare desert.

Outer regional Australia
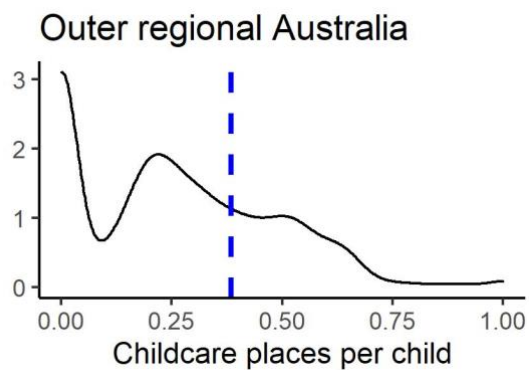
There are many areas where there is no childcare supply in outer regional Australia. Overall, childcare is scarcer in outer regional areas than nationally, and the median is 0.24 childcare places per child. However, outer regional areas have the highest proportion of neighbourhoods above 0.4 childcare places per child. This suggests that overall accessibility is low, but there are some parts of outer regional Australia with relatively high levels of childcare supply. 61.3% of the population live in a childcare desert.
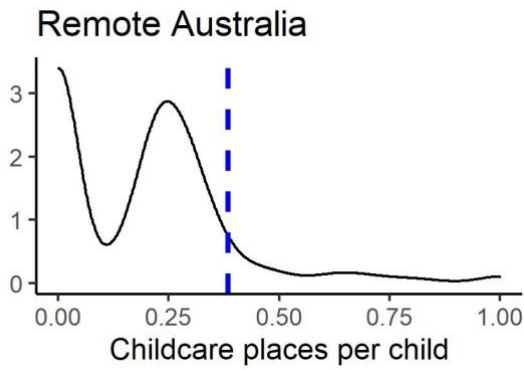
Remote Australia

Remote Australia has many areas with no childcare supply. Most of the line is either close to zero or below the national median, indicating there are few neighbourhoods with high levels of childcare supply. The median for remote Australia is 0.21 childcare places per child. At 85.3%, remote Australia has the highest proportion of the population living in a childcare desert

Very remote Australia
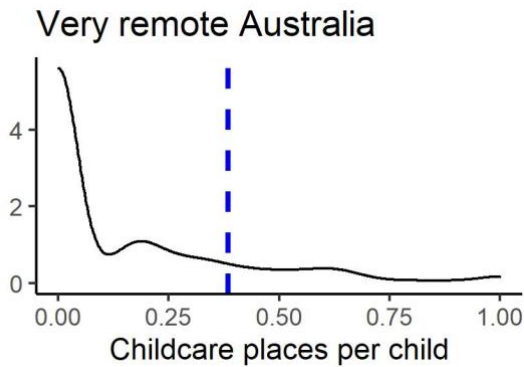
Childcare is scarce in very remote Australia. A majority of locations have no childcare supply – the median is 0 childcare places per child. 77.8% of the population live in a childcare desert.

More disadvantaged areas have lower levels of childcare accessibility

This research also shows that there are concerning correlations between access to childcare and socio-economic status. Figure 3 below shows the total population living in a childcare desert by the Index of Education and Occupation (IEO) decile. The IEO is one of the socio-economic indices used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

Figure 3: Population living in a childcare desert by Index of Education and Occupation decile
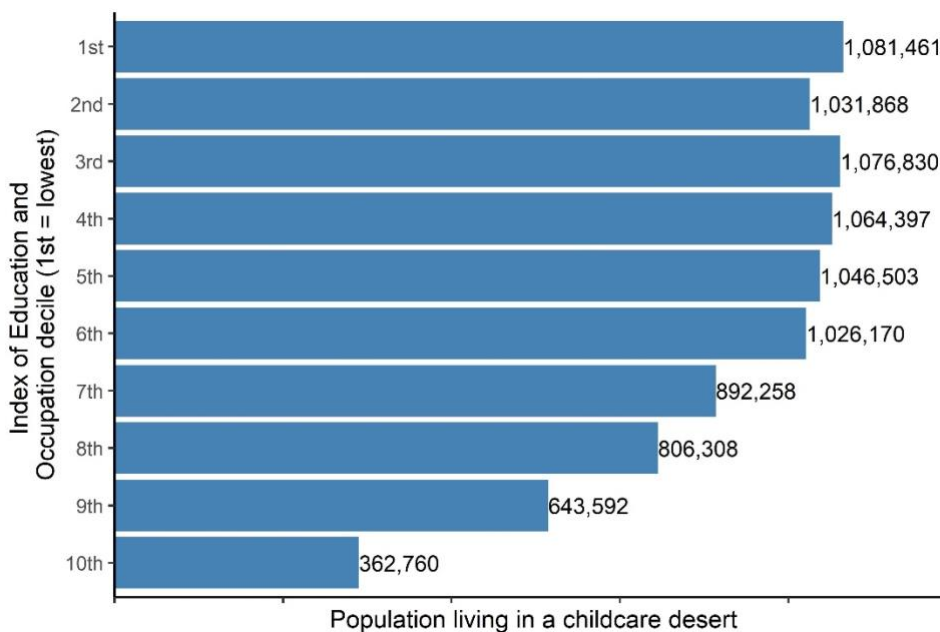
This figure shows that about 1 million people in each of the 1st to 6th IEO decile live in a childcare desert. This is about 40% to 47% of the total population in these deciles. The more advantaged areas have fewer people living in childcare deserts. In the 10th decile, the most advantaged parts of the country, about 363,000 or 13% of the population live in a childcare desert.

Implications of the research

Our research shows Australia's early learning system may not be fully meeting its aims. Current settings result in the low provision or an absence of provision in many areas. Regional and remote areas are especially at risk. About one million Australians have no access to childcare at all. The population centres most likely not to have any childcare accessible within a twenty-minute drive are towns with a population under 1,500.

When examining the relationship between cost and relative access, we found that areas with the highest fees also generally have the highest levels of childcare accessibility. This suggests that providers are not only establishing services where there are greater levels of demand, but where they are likely to make greater profits.

There is also an association between the accessibility of childcare and female workforce participation. Female parents with a child aged under 5 years who live in a childcare desert have lower levels of workforce participation.

While lower levels of female workforce participation in an area will affect demand for childcare, it may also be that difficulty in accessing childcare leads to parents and carers choosing not to participate in the workforce while their children are young.

One of the many functions of ECEC is to enable greater workforce participation. However, it is not clear that the current approach is fully supporting this aim.

There is an immense body of evidence highlighting the value of quality early learning. Our research suggests that in terms of access, Australia is not fully able to take advantage of this evidence base.

There is a need for new approaches to ensure all families have access to the early learning and care that they need to help children thrive.

Part II: Introduction and background

Childcare plays a major role in the lives of many children and families, so easy access to it is a critical issue. Childcare operates very differently from other parts of the education system and faces a unique set of challenges - the cost to families, availability of places, and retention of staff have been ongoing, prominent issues (Noble & Hurley, 2021). The coronavirus pandemic has meant the system has teetered on the brink of collapse – twice – requiring special government support packages.

While childcare can take different forms (such as family day care or outside school hours care), this report focuses on centre-based day care. This is because centre-based day care caters to very young children (aged 0-5) who are the focus of this report, and is by far the most accessed service type, providing education and care to almost one million children every year (DESE, 2019). In this report, we use the term childcare to refer to centre-based day care services that are covered by the Commonwealth Child Care Subsidy (CCS). When discussing the wider sector, we use the term Early Childhood Education and Care, or ECEC.

Although the usage figures demonstrate that many children benefit from centre-based day care, our research aimed to identity the extent to which this form of childcare is available locally, across the different states, cities and regions of Australia, and how availability varies by socioeconomic composition of the locality.

Early learning has a host of benefits for children, as well as for their families. Despite an established evidence base on the importance of the early years of every child's life to their ongoing development, the early learning sector faces a unique set of challenges. The cost to families, quality of provision, and retention of staff have been ongoing issues (Noble & Hurley, 2021).

Easy access to childcare services is also an important issue for many Australians, yet it is relatively under-researched.

Our research aims to help fill this gap by identifying the extent to which childcare is available locally, across different states, cities and regions of Australia, and how accessibility varies by the socio-economic composition of the locality.

Our research questions included:

- Which areas in Australia have the highest and lowest levels of access to childcare?
- Are there differences in accessibility in regional and remote Australia?
- What are the socio-economic dimensions of access to childcare?
- How does access to childcare affect workforce participation, especially female workforce participation?
- How does access to childcare compare with other parts of Australia's education system such as schools?

What do we mean by childcare?

What is most commonly thought of as childcare is centre-based day care, which provides education and care services to non-school aged children at specialised centres. Families whose children attend centre-based day care are supported by the Commonwealth Child Care

Subsidy (CCS), which is paid to childcare centres on behalf of families, who pay the difference between the subsidy and the fees charged by centres – known as the gap fee.

Services that provide education and care to young children that are funded by the CCS include:

- centre-based day care (full-day programs for children aged from birth to school age)
- family day care (full-day programs in educators' homes)
- outside school hours care (before-school, after-school and school holiday care for children aged between 5-12).

ECEC also includes preschool, which is not funded by the CCS.

In this report, we focus on one part of the ECEC sector – centre-based day care. This is because it is the largest part of the sector and the most accessed service type, providing education and care to almost one million children every year (DESE, 2019). Centre-based day care is also the largest service type covered by the Australian government's Child Care Subsidy (CCS).

What is the policy background to childcare?

While the childcare sector has grown substantially over the past three decades, services have existed in Australia for more than 100 years when not-for-profit organisations offered childcare to families in need. Unlike schooling, childcare was traditionally not viewed as a government responsibility. Government involvement in childcare has increased over time, primarily as a response to parental labour force participation.

Unlike the school sector (where schools normally cannot receive government funding if they are for-profit), private childcare providers can be for-profit and receive government support. About 50% of childcare providers are private for-profit and 35% are private not-for-profit. A further 11% are managed by state or local governments and 4% by non-government schools (ACECQA, 2022).

In terms of funding, there has been a gradual shift from the funding of the supply of childcare to the funding of demand, along with many changes to eligibility for subsidies. The most recent major reform has been to streamline two separate subsidies (the Child Care Rebate and Child Care Benefit) into a single, means-tested, and activity-tested payment. This began in 2018 and is now called the Child Care Subsidy. The means-tested element of the Child Care Subsidy means that families who earn less receive a greater subsidy.

The Australian government uses 'activity tests' to calculate the number of hours of subsidised childcare a family is entitled to each fortnight. Activities include paid work, volunteering, undertaking an approved course of education or study, an internship or training, or actively looking for work. Families must meet other requirements to be eligible for the CCS, such as caring for their child for a minimum number of hours per week, child immunisation requirements, and making a co-contribution to fees at an approved childcare service.

Who is responsible for ensuring access to childcare?

According to the Oxford Dictionary, for something to be accessible, it needs to be 'easy to obtain or use and ... easily understood.'

It is widely acknowledged that Australia's childcare system is not well understood by the public or always easy to use. Nor is it universally accessible for all families in terms of affordability, proximity, and availability of places without waiting lists or variable hours of operation.

As a recent report by the Centre for Policy Development (2021, p. 10) describes ECEC as:

> "… difficult, expensive, and confusing for everyone to navigate. The range of services available for parents to choose from often does not reflect what would best meet the needs of children and families. In fact, it's misleading to call this collection of services a "system" at all since the parts rarely connect well."

In terms of access, individual providers largely determine the availability of childcare. Providers decide where they will operate and what fees to charge. This differs from school policy where there is an obligation for governments to provide universal access and there is more central planning.

Government policy focuses on establishing the rules and governance of the system and encouraging a mixture of providers to deliver services. The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), is the national body, with federal, state and territory

governance arrangements, responsible for guiding the implementation and management of the national system. There are some policies directed at ensuring that there is the provision of services in regional areas, particularly in Indigenous communities, and in some instances, local governments provide childcare. But it is largely childcare operators who to select where to operate.

How has the research literature explored childcare accessibility?

Access to childcare has been the subject of some exploration within the research literature. A focus of the research has been on equitable access which is defined as all families "with reasonable effort and affordability, can enrol their child in an arrangement that supports the child's development and meets the parents' needs" (Friese et al., 2017, p. 5). Research focusing on the provision of childcare in Europe has highlighted how geographical factors affect families' decisions when it comes to finding childcare that is either close to their home or work (McLean, Naumann, & Koslowski, 2017). Factors include proximity, access to suitable transport, and the suitability of the provider in relation to the families' work patterns and budget. Other factors such as the number of places available, cost, and quality, may have a geographical component if there is a need to travel further to access appropriate facilities (Langford, Higgs, & Dallimore, 2019).

Several studies have plotted access to childcare facilities, usually through the lens of availability and equity or affordability. There are some conflicting findings about the availability of childcare services in relation to median family incomes, or socio-economic status of communities, which could possibly be attributed to targeted policies. For example, Davis, Lee, and Sojourner (2019) found that low-income families in Minnesota have greater access to early learning services than mid- and high-income families. Whereas in another American study, Sandstrom et al. (2018) predicted the amount of additional subsidised childcare places needed for low-income families in four areas in the states of New York and Illinois by using census data. Their results show that there is limited childcare provision in many communities that have a high number of families eligible for childcare subsidies.

Kawabata (2011) identified a disparity between the supply and demand of childcare in Tokyo. Where access was limited, it was because no childcare services were within the boundary, providers did not cater to the age group (finding childcare for 0-2 year-olds was particularly challenging) or there was excess demand (more children than places). Chiuri (2000) found that childcare in Italy lacks the flexibility to meet the needs of full-time working parents (specifically mothers). Findings from Compton and Pollak (2014) reflect the difficulty families face to find suitable childcare when mothers return to work and the flow-on impact on labour supply. Their analysis showed that married women whose mothers or mothers-in-law could provide childcare were more likely to be working. These results highlight the challenges families face to find childcare that is accessible and available, and is consistent with the observation that policy is usually set at a national or regional level but the experience of variation is felt at the community level (Azuma, DeBaryshe, Gauci, & Stern, 2020).

Seminal research undertaken by the Centre for American Progress mapped the availability of childcare in eight US states, finding that 42% of children under five years old live in an area classified as a childcare desert (Malik & Hamm, 2017). The authors defined a desert as more than 50 children under the age of five (and their families) residing within a postal/ZIP code where there are no childcare services, or childcare provision is so limited that there is a ratio of more than 3 children for each childcare place (Malik & Hamm, 2017; Malik, Hamm, Adamu, & Morrissey, 2016). Almost half (48%) of the postal/ZIP codes that were analysed were found to be childcare deserts, indicating a significant issue for governments, families, and workforce participation. When focusing on the quality of childcare provision, as determined by each of

the eight state's quality rating and improvement systems, only 16% of childcare services were in the top tier of quality. This finding alludes to the complexity of childcare accessibility – not only is there a lack of childcare in many regions, finding quality services is incredibly challenging. Rural localities face the most severe childcare shortage with 54% of rural postage/ZIP codes classified as childcare deserts. Of these, around two-thirds have a total absence of childcare providers. Interestingly, this is in spite of rural and non-rural postage/ZIP codes having approximately the same number of children under the age of five within their boundaries, showing that population alone may not determine access. In a more recent publication, researchers have been able to account for arbitrary administrative limitations, such as postal/ZIP codes and allow weighting to preference childcare that is closer.

Part III: How did we undertake the research?

To measure the spatial accessibility of childcare services across Australia, we used an extended two-step floating catchment area method (E2SFCA).

Floating catchment areas essentially measure the supply and demand of services based on the number and capacity of a service (supply or potential supply) and the population using these services (demand or potential demand).

Researchers have used floating catchment area approaches to measure spatial accessibility of a range of services, such as healthcare provision, access to parks, and access to childcare (Davis et al., 2019; Gao, Jaffrelot, & Deguen, 2021; Hu, Song, Li, & Lu, 2020). Floating catchment areas have strengths compared to other area-based measures, which can be limited to analysing data using arbitrary boundaries, such as suburbs or local government areas.

For instance, a popular area-based measure of spatial access to childcare typically measures access using the ratio of the total capacity of providers in an area divided by the estimated number of children in that area. These boundaries may not accurately affect accessibility as experienced by a family. An example would be a household where there is a childcare centre on the opposite side of the road that is also in a different local government region. Measures based on local government areas would exclude the facility across the road when measuring the number of childcare places available to the household, potentially misrepresenting the level of accessibility.

Instead, the approach taken in this report establishes a 'floating catchment area' based on a set of parameters, such as distance or driving time. This means the definition of accessibility more accurately reflects household access to childcare and overcomes limits caused by using artificial boundaries.

In our study, we adapt the approach taken by Davis et al. (2019) who use the parameter of 20 minutes of travel time between households and childcare locations to determine accessibility.

For regional areas, we use the measure of 20 minutes travel time to determine accessibility. For metropolitan areas, however, we use the measure of 10 minutes driving time to more accurately account for traffic conditions, which are not reflected in the calculations by the software we used[1].

In order to undertake the analysis, we needed to determine the location and capacity of childcare centres (potential supply) and the location and population of children aged under five (potential demand) who would use childcare.

Table 1 below outlines the steps used to calculate the supply and demand parameters.

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[1] The software used calculates travel time when there is no traffic. This may lead to inaccurate measures of accessibility in metropolitan areas as normal traffic conditions significantly increase travel times.

Table 1: Overview of process to determine potential supply and potential demand for two-step floating catchment area

Calculating supply (number of available childcare places)	Calculating potential demand (number of children)
1. Use ACECQA register to determine the number and capacity of approved ECEC facilities.	1. Use ABS census data to determine the number of children aged 0 to 4 years living in a neighbourhood (SA1 regions).
2. Select ECEC services that offer centre-based day care.	2. Calculate the proportion of SA2 population living in each neighbourhood.
3. Determine services that are open less than 8 hours a day and 5 days a week and adjust the number of approved places (for instance, services open 4 hours a day five times a week would have their capacity multiplied by 0.5).	3. Adjust for preschool enrolments by determining the number of 3 and 4-year-olds in each SA2 enrolled in non-centre-based day care services, then subtracting these enrolments pro-rata.
5. Use registered address to determine longitude and latitude of service.	4. Apportion 2020 SA2 0 to 4-year-old population to neighbourhood.
	5. Use SA1 centroids to determine the longitude and latitude of neighbourhoods.

All locations were geocoded to determine their longitude and latitude. We then calculated the travel time between the neighbourhood and centre-based day care locations.

For neighbourhoods, we used the centroid of the SA1 region as the origin point. For instance, the figure below shows the suburb of Merrylands in Sydney. This suburb consists of 60 SA1 regions as outlined in black. The centre point of each of these SA1 regions formed the origin points and the location of the childcare service in Greater Sydney were the destination points.

Figure 4: Neighbourhoods (SA1) of Merrylands, NSW
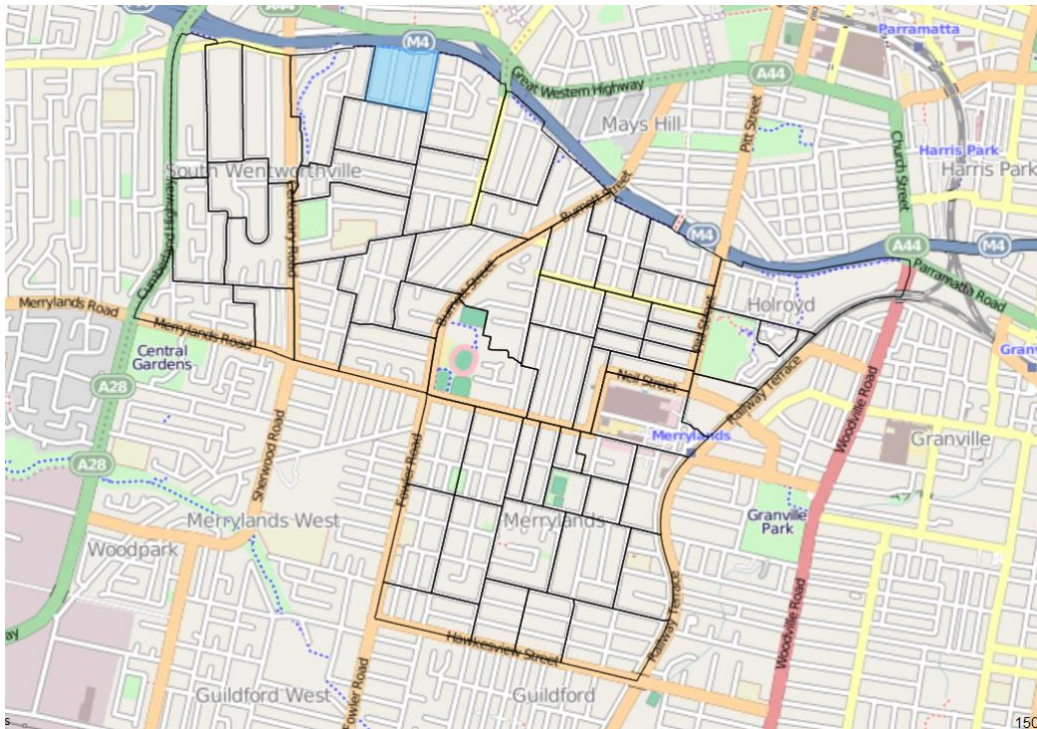
We then constructed a matrix of travel time using the osrm package in r.

There are about 57,000 SA1 regions in Australia and more than 8,700 childcare centres, which would result in a matrix of almost 500 million possible results. To make the calculations more efficient, we calculated states and territories individually. We also calculated Greater Sydney as a separate area from New South Wales because of the larger number of neighbourhoods and childcare centres. Border communities were included in the calculations for NSW, the ACT, Queensland and Victoria.

Once travel times were obtained, we then used the SpatialAcc package in r to calculate the overall accessibility of each neighbourhood.

There were about 603,000 total approved childcare places across Australia and 1.55 million children aged 0 to 4 years old. When this is adjusted to account for centres that are open less than forty hours per week and for children who attend preschool, the potential supply of childcare is about 602,000 and the potential demand is 1.52 million children. This results in a ratio of about 0.396 childcare places per child. The extended two-step floating catchment area method essentially apportions this ratio across neighbourhoods.

The first step of the two-step floating catchment process involved calculating a weighted capacity to population ratio for every childcare service. For every service, all neighbourhoods within a ten-minute drive for metropolitan areas and a twenty-minute drive for regional areas were identified. We used an exponential decay function so that neighbourhoods closer to the service received more weighting. For instance, in regional areas, a neighbourhood within a five-minute drive of a service had a 50% greater weighting than neighbourhoods that were twenty minutes away. The number of approved places for each service was divided by the sum of the weighted total number of children to obtain a capacity-to-nearby child population ratio for every provider.

The second step of the two-step floating catchment process involves determining the quantity of supply for each neighbourhood. This is done by identifying all services within the catchment area around the neighbourhood. The same weighting was applied so that a childcare service within a five-minute drive of a neighbourhood had a 50% greater weighting than services that were twenty minutes away in regional areas, and in metropolitan areas, a childcare service 2.5 minutes away received 50% more weighting than a childcare service 10 minutes away.

The result of the analysis is a score for each neighbourhood that is a ratio of available childcare places per child. For instance, a score of 0.5 suggests that for that neighbourhood there were 0.5 childcare places available per child, or two children per available childcare place.

We used this figure to determine whether a region was a childcare desert or a childcare oasis. The working definition for a childcare desert is where there are fewer than 0.333 childcare places per child. This follows established definitions used elsewhere in the literature for a childcare desert (Davis et al., 2019).

The working definition for a childcare oasis is where there are more than 0.6 childcare places per child. We chose this definition because 0.6 places per child would enable three full days of childcare per child (where each full place of childcare is the equivalent of five days, 0.6 is the equivalent of three full days). Three full days of childcare appears elsewhere in policy proposals that support universal access to childcare (Centre for Policy Development, 2021).

A flow chart outlining the process used to determine whether a region was desert or oasis is below.

Figure 5: Flow chart to determine childcare deserts and oases of neighbourhoods
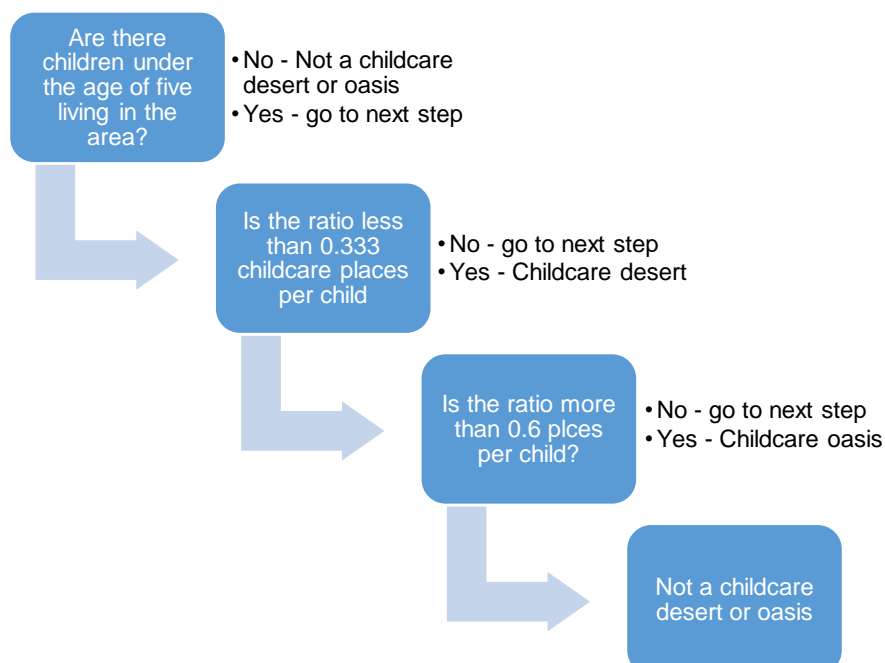
Accounting for preschool

A complicating factor in calculating childcare accessibility is that most children will be attending preschool in either the year or two years before school. This can have an impact on the potential supply of childcare (as some services may offer childcare and preschool) and potential demand for childcare services (as some children may require less childcare as they will be attending preschool).

Our approach can account for children attending preschool in a centre-based day care provider because these services appear on the national register and, consequently, the calculation of potential supply includes these approved places. However, many children may attend a stand-alone preschool or a preschool at a school.

To account for children attending preschool in non-centre-based day care services, we used information from the national collection on preschool enrolments. We identified the number and location of children aged three and four years enrolled in a stand-alone preschool. We then adjusted the potential demand to account for the time where children would be attending a stand-alone preschool.

For instance, if a region had 100 three and four year olds enrolled in a stand-alone preschool, this would equate to approximately 30 full-time equivalents (100 children x 0.3 of the week enrolled in preschool = 30 full-time equivalents) and the potential demand is adjusted to 70.

Limitations

All research has limitations that may affect the interpretation of results.

To determine accessibility, the methodology uses driving time distance and not time by walking or public transport. Driving time relies on the accuracy of information from OpenStreetMap, which is a free editable geographic database. We calculate supply based on data from ACECQA and services not listed on the national register are not included. The data we used is from December 2021 and our findings will not reflect changes after this date. We exclude family day care and in-home care from our analysis, which may affect calculations of supply. We also exclude informal care, which includes unpaid care usually provided by relatives, such as grandparents, or friends and neighbours. We exclude five year olds from calculations of demand, although some five year olds will not yet be at school and may be using centre-based childcare services. Our methodology calculates accessibility based on where a family lives and not where they work, although some families may choose childcare services closer to work. ABS data shows that about 16% of families chose a childcare service because it was close to our on the way to work (ABS, 2018).

Despite these limitations, we believe the approach provides a strong methodological grounding to illustrate the relative scarcity of childcare by neighbourhood and to make valid comparisons across Australia.

Part IV: Results and findings

How accessible is childcare in Australia?

Our findings show that where Australian families live plays a major role in access to childcare.

Figure 6 below shows a density estimate, which is a smoothed version of a histogram, of the ratio of available childcare places per child for more than 57,000 neighbourhoods in Australia. The higher the line, the more regions with the number of childcare places per child. This figure also highlights the median, which appears as a dashed blue line.

Figure 6: Smoothed density estimate of childcare places per child in Australian neighbourhoods
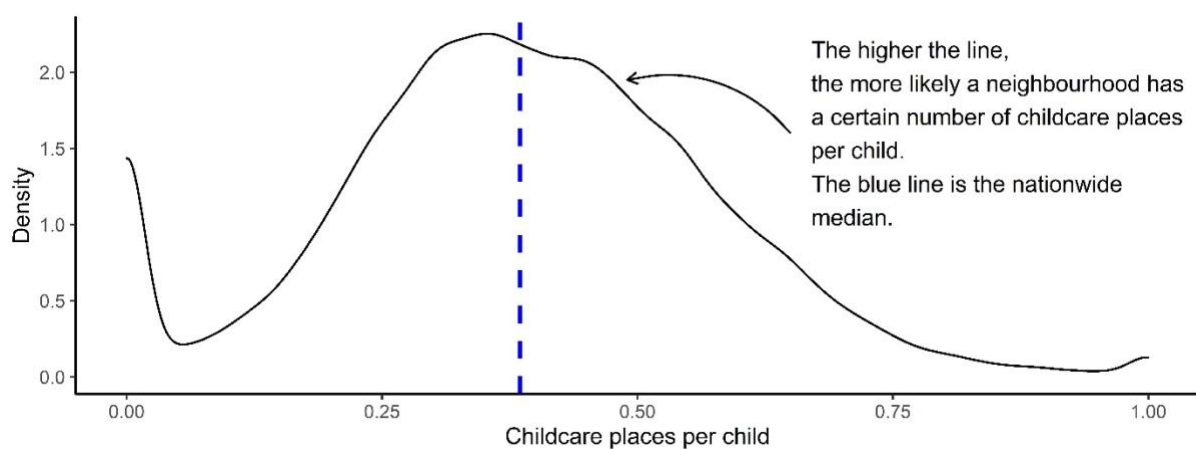
There are a large number of regions, about 3,600, that have no childcare places available per child. Many of these regions are located in regional and remote Australia.

The figure shows that the accessibility score peaks at about 0.37 childcare places per child before gradually falling. The median score is 0.385 childcare places per child.

Our method means every neighbourhood in Australia receives an accessibility score of childcare places per child and this makes it possible to represent these scores on a map.

Figure 7 below shows the results of mapping the neighbourhoods of Greater Adelaide. The areas highlighted in red and darker orange are areas of lower childcare accessibility - regions we classify as deserts. The areas of green have the greatest childcare accessibility scores and are neighbourhoods we classify as childcare oases.

Figure 7: Childcare accessibility of Greater Adelaide

Childcare deserts. Orange and red areas indicate childcare deserts
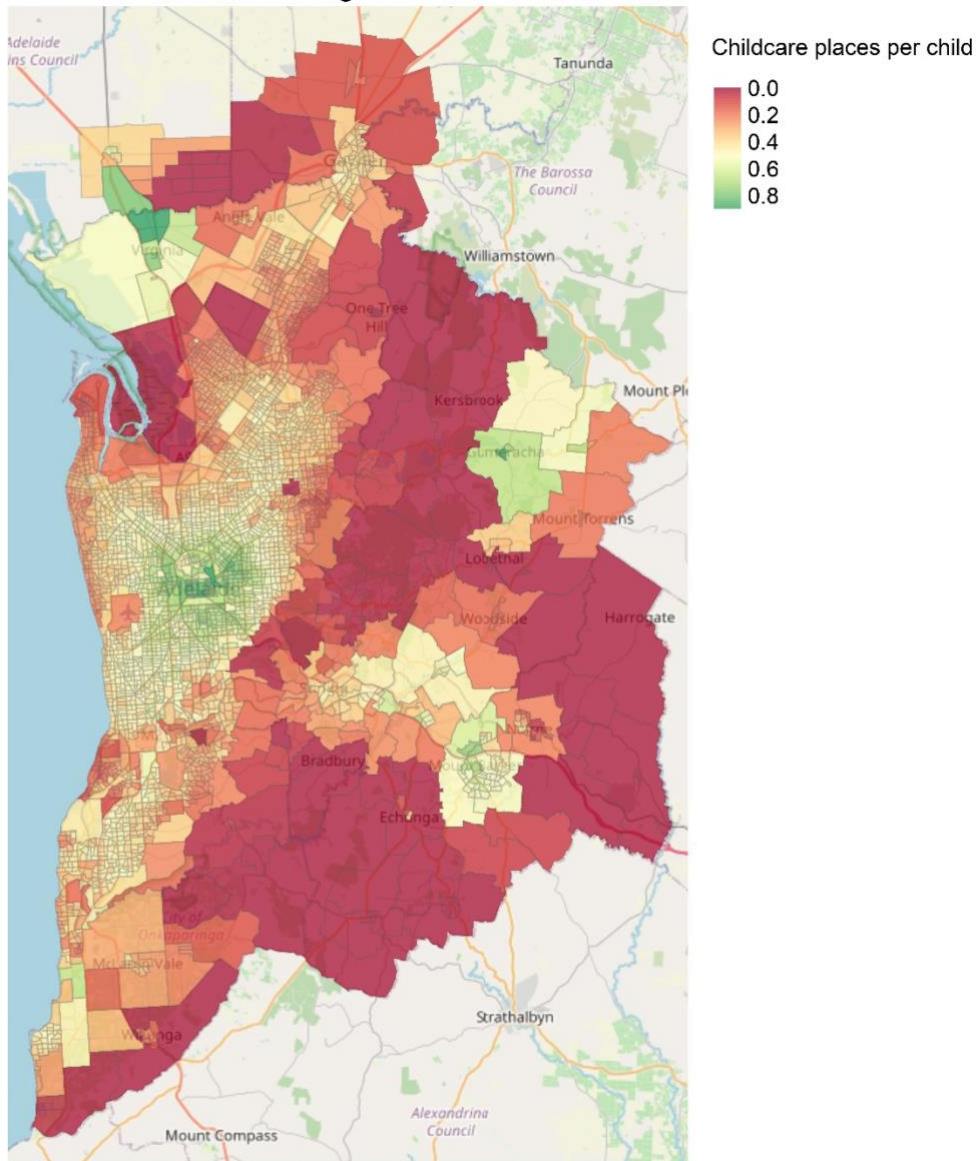
The pattern shown in the above figure of Greater Adelaide is typical of childcare accessibility in Australia's major cities. The centre of cities, close to central business districts, have the greatest accessibility, indicated on the map in green. There are pockets of green elsewhere in the city indicating neighbourhoods with relatively high childcare access. The orange and red areas indicate childcare deserts and are located throughout the city. Some outer regions appear as dark red and are areas where there is very little or no childcare available. These areas also often have fewer people living in them.

How does childcare accessibility compare between states and territories?

Our analysis shows that states and territories have a different profile of childcare accessibility. To explore these differences, the figures below show a density estimate of childcare places per child for each state and territory, similar to Figure 6. The shape of the curve helps illustrate the distribution of accessibility across neighbourhoods in each state and territory and makes it possible to make comparisons. The national median appears on each plot as a dashed line to allow a better comparison. Curves that peak to the left of the blue line indicate overall accessibility lower than the national median, and curves that peak to the right of the blue line indicate overall accessibility higher than the national median.

Figure 8: Smoothed density function of childcare places per child by state and territory
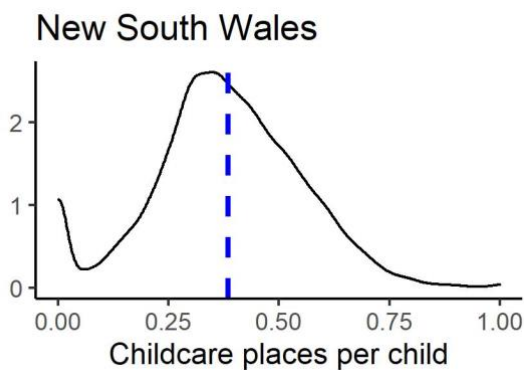
New South Wales has slightly lower childcare accessibility than the rest of Australia with a median of 0.37 childcare places per child. The shape of the density plot is similar to the Australia wide figure shown in Figure 6 suggesting a similar distribution of accessibility across neighbourhoods.
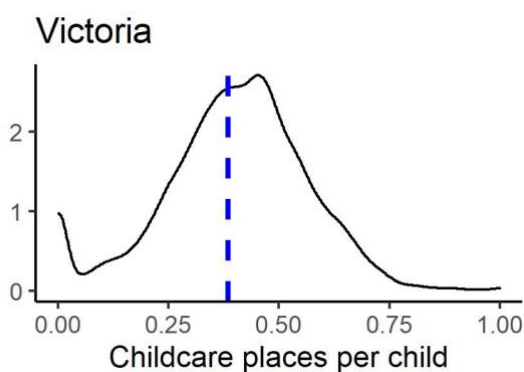

The peak above the national median shows that Victoria has a greater level of childcare accessibility. The Victorian median is 0.41 childcare places per child. The shape of the density plot is similar to the Australia wide figure suggesting a similar distribution of accessibility across neighbourhoods.
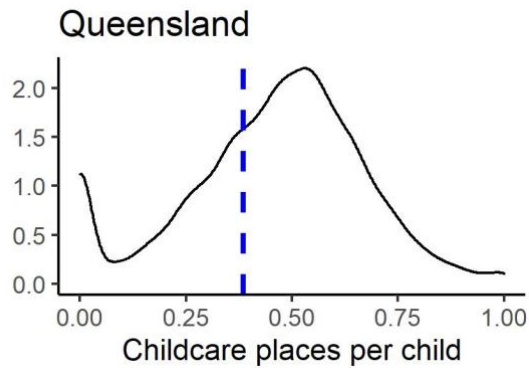
Queensland

In this figure, the peak is above the national median and helps to illustrate how Queensland has some of the highest levels of childcare accessibility in the country. The Queensland median is 0.48 childcare places per child, well above the national median.
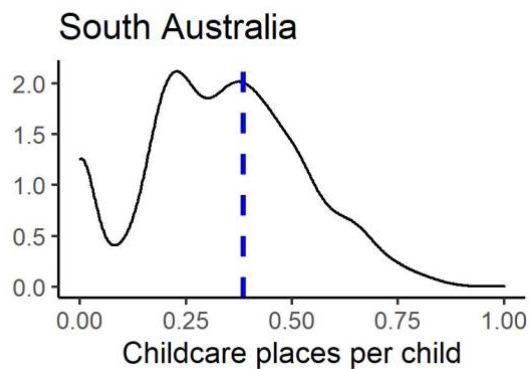
South Australia

South Australia has two peaks suggesting accessibility clustering around 0.2 childcare places per child and another around the national median. The median in South Australian neighbourhoods is 0.34 childcare places per child, below the national median.
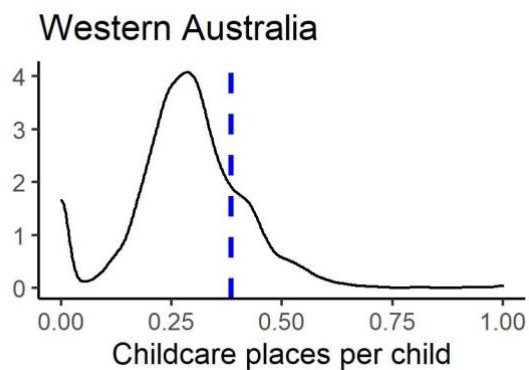
Western Australia

Western Australia has the lowest overall childcare accessibility, with a peak below the national median. The peak is also higher than other states and territories (indicated by the different y-axis scale) suggesting greater clustering of neighbourhoods around the Western Australian median of 0.28 children per childcare place.
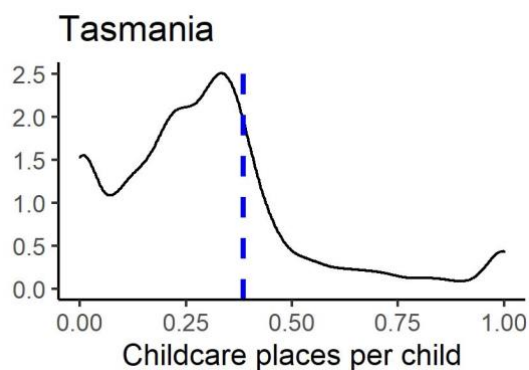
Tasmania

Tasmania has relatively low levels of childcare accessibility with the peak occurring below the national median. The shape of the curve suggests Tasmania has a higher number of neighbourhoods compared to other states and territories in the range of 0.05 to 0.2 childcare places per child.

Northern Territory
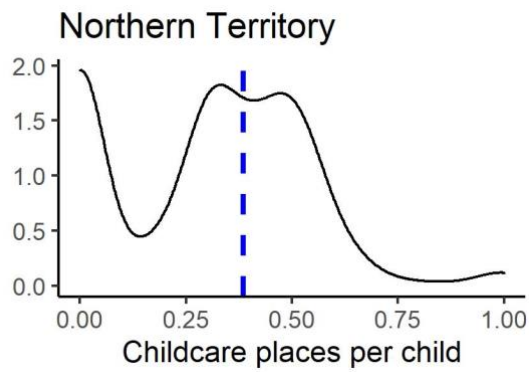
The peak at 0 shows that many regions in the Northern Territory do not have any childcare supply. This may be due to the high number of remote and very remote locations in the Northern Territory. The median for the Northern Territory is 0.32 childcare places per child, below the national median.

Australian Capital Territory
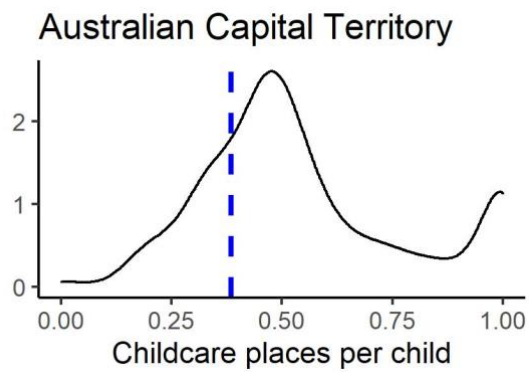
Like Queensland, the ACT has some of the highest levels of childcare accessibility in the country. There are very few neighbourhoods with no supply of childcare and the ACT has the highest proportion of neighbourhoods with 1 childcare place per child.

Where are Australia's childcare deserts?

Our analysis shows that about 9 million Australians, or 35.2% of the population, live in neighbourhoods we classify as a childcare desert. About 568,700 children aged 0 to 4 years, or 36.5% of children in this age group, live in neighbourhoods we classify as a childcare desert. These are populated areas where there are less than 0.333 childcare places per child or more than one childcare place per three children. There are deserts in all states and territories, and in all capital cities.

Table 2 below shows the composition of the population living in childcare deserts by their remoteness area. There are five remoteness areas: major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote, and very remote. About 59.0% of people living in childcare deserts, or 5.36 million, are located in major Australian cities. Inner regional areas comprise 22.4% of people, or 2.03 million, living in childcare deserts and outer regional areas comprise 14.0% of people, or 1.26 million. The remaining proportion of the population living in childcare deserts are in remote and very remote areas of Australia as outlined in the table below.

Table 2: Composition of the population living in a childcare desert by remoteness area

Regional area	Population	Proportion of deserts	Proportion of regional area as desert
Major cities	5,360,547	59.0%	28.8%
Inner regional	2,028,944	22.4%	44.6%
Outer regional	1,264,269	14.0%	61.3%
Remote	248,451	2.7%	85.3%
Very Remote	152,738	1.7%	77.8%
Total	9,054,949	100.00%	35.3%

As most Australians live in major cities, it is also important to explore the proportion of the population in different regions who live in childcare deserts. While regional and remote areas make up less than 50% of childcare deserts, people in regional and remote areas are more likely to live in a childcare desert, with 44.6% and 61.3% of people living in inner regional and outer regional areas respectively located in childcare deserts. Australians living in remote and very remote regions are highly likely to be living in a childcare desert. This table helps highlight the regional disparities in access to childcare. Comparatively, major cities in Australia have greater access to childcare than other parts of Australia.

It is also important to highlight the different meanings of a desert in metropolitan areas versus regional areas. The figure below shows the results of the analysis for the Belconnen region (SA3) in Canberra. The ACT has some of the highest average levels of childcare accessibility in Australia.

Figure 9: Childcare accessibility in Belconnen, ACT (SA3)

Childcare deserts. Orange and red areas indicate childcare deserts
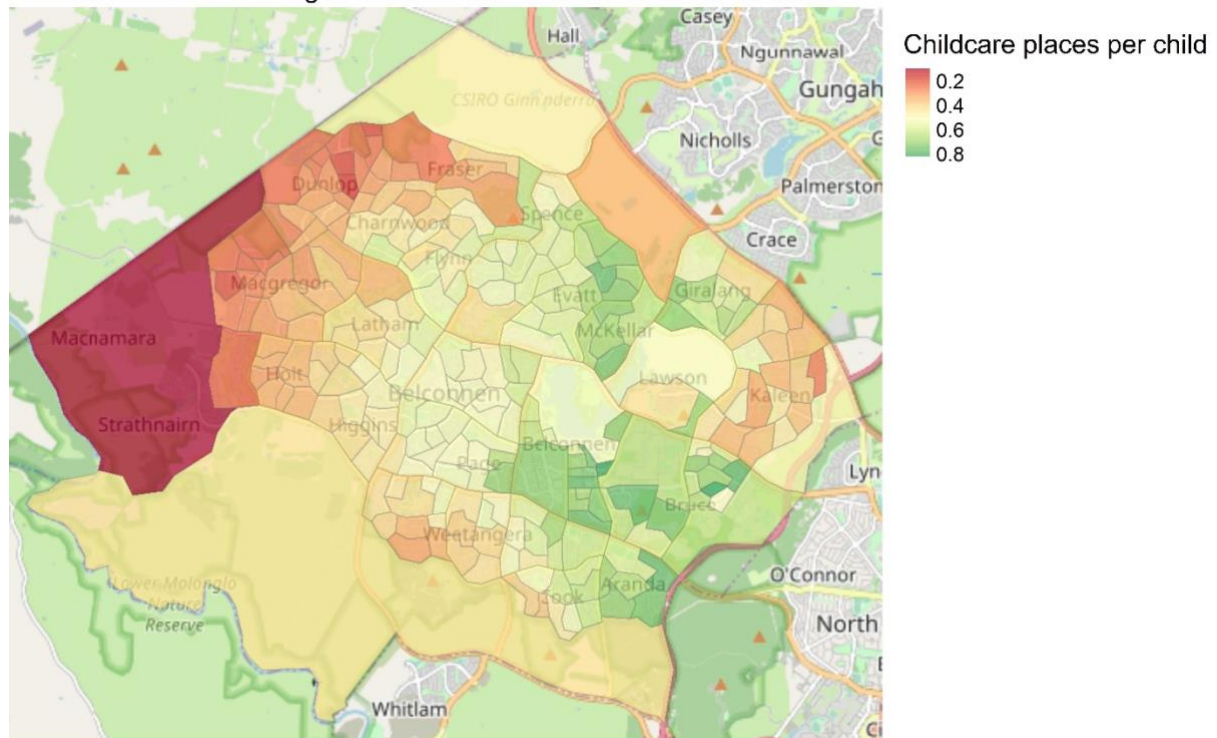
Some parts of the suburbs of Fraser, Dunlop and McGregor, on the left of the map, meet our definition of a childcare desert. Families living in these suburbs can still access childcare, but they may have to travel further or may face more competition for available places than families living closer to the centre of Canberra.

In rural and regional areas, however, a childcare desert can have a different meaning. The figure below shows the childcare accessibility for the region (SA2) of Alexandra in Victoria. This region also includes the townships of Buxton and Marysville, which appear in green at the bottom of the figure and are about a 30-minute drive from Alexandra.

Figure 10: Childcare accessibility in Alexandra, Victoria (SA2)

Childcare deserts. Orange and red areas indicate childcare deserts
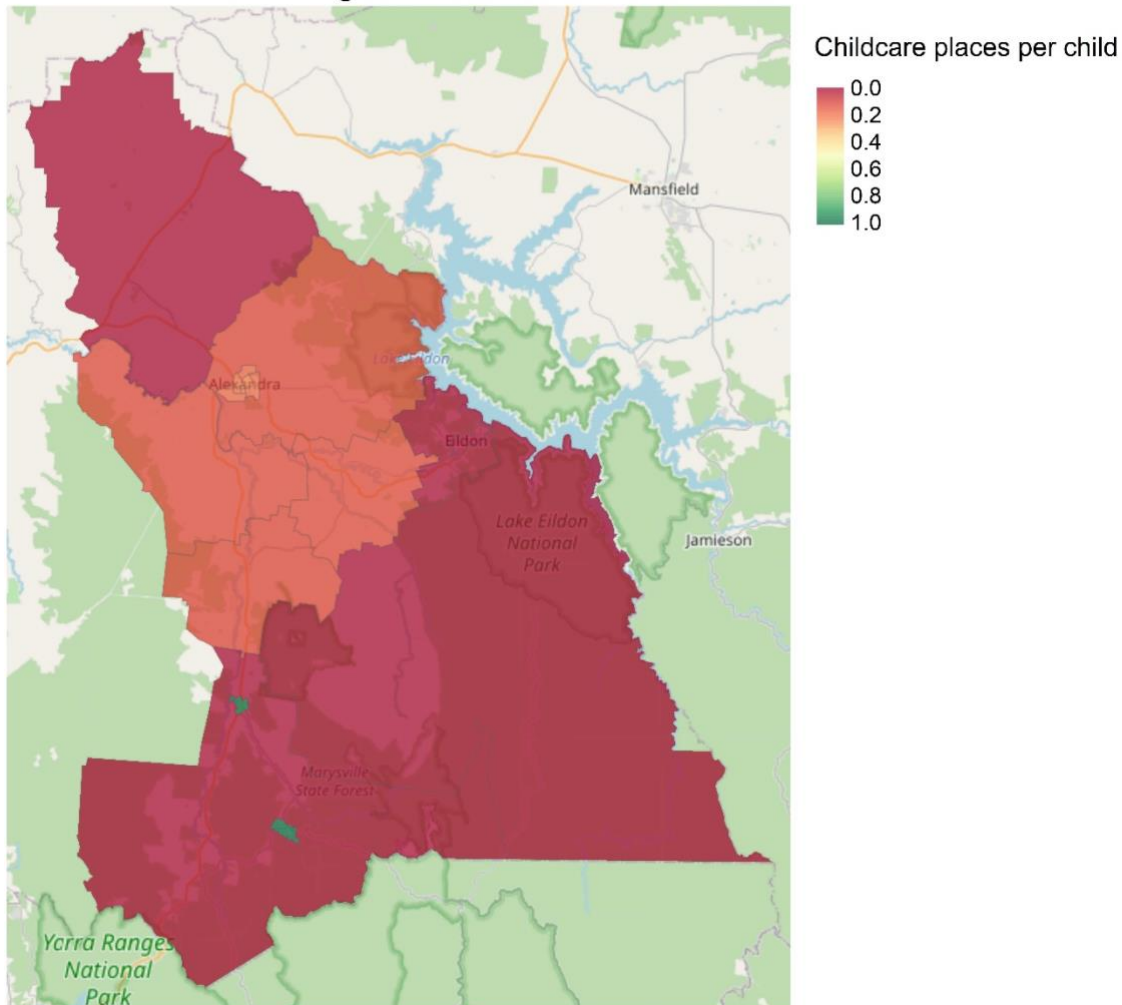
This figure shows that the town of Alexandra meets the definition of a childcare desert. There is one childcare centre located in Alexandra, with 29 approved places. Families are highly reliant on this service and if there are no available places at the childcare centre, families do not have the option of selecting another local provider. The next nearest provider is located in Marysville or Yea, which are about a half-hour drive from Alexandra.

While metropolitan and regional neighbourhoods can have similar accessibility scores, the lack of childcare can have different consequences. In major cities, childcare deserts indicate relatively low levels of spatial accessibility to childcare, but there are more possibilities to access childcare. In regional Australia, childcare deserts also indicate relatively low levels of spatial accessibility to childcare, but with fewer options if there are no vacancies at local providers.

Where are Australia's childcare oases?

As shown in Table 3, our analysis shows about 3.3 million Australians, or 12.7%, live in an area we classify as a childcare oasis. About 174,000 children aged 0 to 4 years, or 11% of children in this age group, live in areas we classify as childcare oases.

Table 3: Composition of the population living in a childcare oasis by remoteness area

Regional area	Population	Proportion of oases	Proportion of region as oasis
Major cities	2,799,055	85.5%	15.1%
Inner regional	293,898	9.0%	6.5%
Outer regional	156,277	4.8%	7.6%
Remote	13,560	0.4%	4.7%
Very Remote	12,325	0.4%	6.3%
Total	3,275,115	100.0%	12.7%

A childcare oasis is somewhere where there is a relatively high level of access to childcare (we use the definition of 0.6 childcare places per child). Our methodology calculates accessibility based on where families live and not where they work. However, many families may choose to use child care close to their employer. Consequently, a childcare oasis is often located in regions with a large number of jobs. For instance, the figure below shows the childcare accessibility for the region (SA4) of Brisbane – Inner City. The areas of green indicate a childcare oasis.

Figure 11: Accessibility of childcare for Brisbane – Inner City

Childcare deserts. Orange and red areas indicate childcare deserts
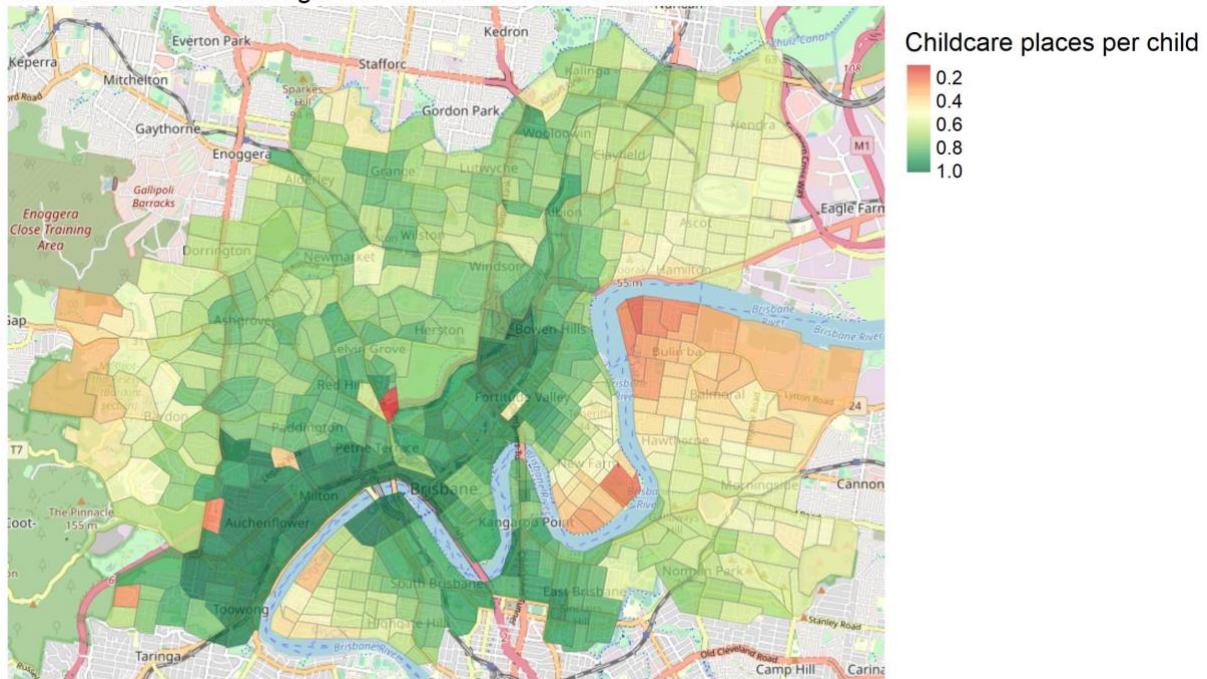
As this map shows, the centre of the city around the Brisbane CBD has relatively high childcare accessibility. The pockets of orange in the east of the city, in New Farm and Bulimba, are areas where there are relatively lower levels of access to childcare. These areas can have lower childcare accessibility than nearby areas because there are fewer centre-based day care providers they can reach within a ten-minute drive.

The centres of major cities are not the only locations of childcare oases. As Table 3 above shows, many regional areas are in a childcare oasis. These regional locations can be major service and employment hubs for regional and remote communities. The existence of a childcare oasis in some of these locations illustrates the variability of services available in regional areas. While some small towns may have a plentiful supply, others can be lacking.

# What are the socio-economic dimensions of childcare accessibility?

Childcare access by socio-economic status is an important area of exploration. Researchers in other countries have noted a correlation between lower socio-economic areas and lower childcare availability (Davis et al., 2019). Areas of higher socio-economic advantage also often have higher levels of access to employment, transport, and other services such as healthcare.

To explore this issue, we examined the relationship between childcare access, neighbourhoods and the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD). IRSAD is a measure created by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) that summarises information about the economic and social conditions of people and households within an area, including both relative advantage and disadvantage measures. Measures used in the compilation of the scores include variables relating to level of education, income, labour force status, disability, home ownership and the number of bedrooms in a house.

We matched neighbourhoods to their IRSAD decile, where 1 indicates the decile with the highest disadvantage and lowest advantage, and 10 indicates the decile with the lowest disadvantage and the highest advantage. We then calculated the median for each IRSAD decile.

The results of the analysis appear in Figure 12 below. In this figure, the median for each decile appears as a dot and the lines represent a range from the 25th to 75th percentile of childcare places per child for each decile group.

Figure 12: Childcare places per child by socio-economic (IRSAD) decile
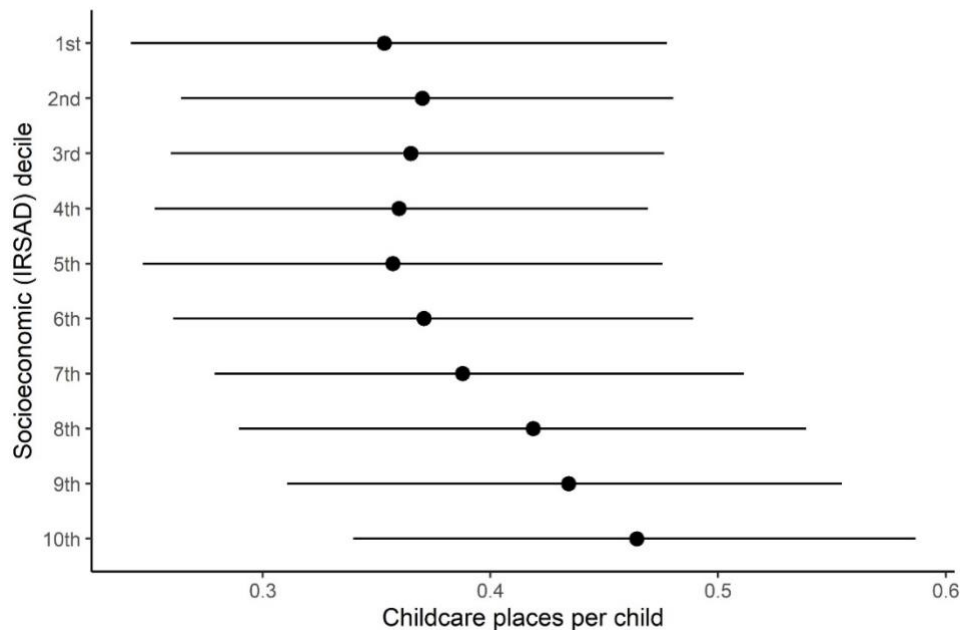
This figure shows that for neighbourhoods in the first to the sixth decile, there are relatively lower levels of childcare accessibility, with the median childcare accessibility at around 0.35 places per child for IRSAD deciles 1 through to 6.

But from the seventh decile upwards, the top 40%, as the IRSAD deciles increase so does the median number of childcare places available per child. In the 10th decile, the average number of childcare places per child is 0.46. This suggests that it is the most advantaged neighbourhoods in Australia that have the greatest childcare access.

This is an important finding, especially in the context of Australia's ECEC policy. The main subsidy families receive, the CCS, is weighted so that families who earn less receive the greatest level of subsidies.[2]

This figure shows that access to childcare works the other way – it is the more advantaged areas that have the best access.

This could be due to many factors. For instance, there may be lower levels of parental and carer employment in lower socio-economic areas that lead to lower demand for childcare services. Nonetheless, it does suggest that families in lower socio-economic neighbourhoods have lower access to childcare than those living in more advantaged neighbourhoods.

This is particularly concerning because there is a huge body of evidence that shows positive early childhood experiences lead to positive outcomes. High-quality early childhood education and care at an early age enables children, particularly form disadvantaged backgrounds, to succeed later in life. Figure 12 suggests that, overall, it is the children and families who would benefit most from high-quality childcare who have the least access.

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[2] As previous Mitchell Institute research has shown though, while there are greater subsidies to those families who earn less, those families often can afford childcare the least (Noble & Hurley, 2021).

What is regional access to childcare like and how does this compare to schools?

This next section compares the overall impact on accessibility in regional areas due to different policy approaches, with a focus on comparing accessibility to schools and childcare in regional settings.

To do this, we calculated the driving time between all Australian schools and childcare facilities. We identified those schools where there are no childcare services within a twenty-minute drive.

This helps identify where there are communities that may be large enough to support a school but do not have a childcare service.

We found there were 976 schools where there was childcare within a twenty-minute drive. There were eight childcare centres where there was no school in a twenty-minute drive.

Many regional schools have very low enrolment numbers, and the existence of a school may not suggest possible demand for childcare services. For further analysis, we excluded non-government schools, primary schools with an enrolment below 50 students, and combined schools (schools that provide both primary and secondary education) with an enrolment below 100 students.

We identified 247 schools (131 primary schools and 116 combined schools) that met this definition.

For many regional towns, Australia's policy approach results in a complete absence of provision. These are not thin markets but rather an absence of a market as the current policy settings mean it is not economically feasible for providers to operate in these areas.

To identify these towns, we used data from the ABS that listed about 1,700 small towns in Australia with populations ranging from 30 to 10,000 people. We broke these towns into four groups as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Number of towns by population in Australia

Group	Population of township (residents)	Number of Australian towns within the group
1	Less than 500	643
2	500 - 1,499	613
3	1,500 - 2,999	248
4	3,000 - 10,000.	193

We then identified the number of towns in each category that did not have a childcare centre or school within a 20-minute drive. Figure 13 below shows the results.

Figure 13: Number of towns by population with no childcare and schools within twenty-minute drive
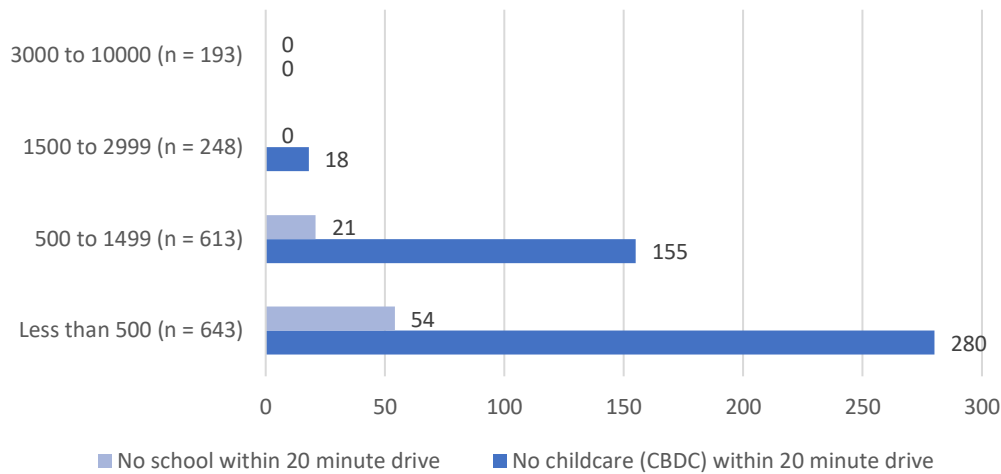
Our analysis finds that smaller towns are much more likely to have a school than a childcare centre. About 360 towns with a population under 1,500 do not have centre-based day care but do have a school. The large majority of towns with a population above 1,500 have centre-based day care and all of these towns have a school within a twenty-minute drive.

Figure 13 helps highlight the level of the population where the current childcare policy results in variable access. Whereas schools benefit from central planning to ensure universal access, the current policy settings means that many towns with a population under 1,500 lack childcare services. Further research may be required to understand the need in these small towns, and the policies that would assist in providing appropriate access to ECEC services.

Part V: Discussion and conclusion

What are the policy implications?

The findings in this report highlight that the provision of childcare in Australia is unequal. Regional and remote areas are most likely to be childcare deserts and there are significant pockets of childcare deserts in all our major cities. Our most disadvantaged communities have the least access to childcare.

These findings present governments with serious policy challenges, some of which are discussed below.

Current childcare policy settings result in thin markets and an absence of provision in regional areas

Thin markets is a term used in a variety of ways to describe situations where there are deficiencies in a service, which is largely delivered by non-government providers, such as not enough providers or a lack of a diversity of providers to meet demand. For instance, there is research showing how parts of the NDIS suffer from thin markets (Reeders et al., 2019).

Our research shows there are many parts of Australia that suffer from a lack of access to childcare due to thin markets. Regional and remote areas suffer the most. A population of less than 1,500 seems to be the threshold for when smaller towns are most at risk of suffering from an absence of childcare provision.

In a recent report, the Centre for Policy Development outlined a possible route for reimagining an ECEC system that is support families and children from birth through to the early years of schooling (Centre for Policy Development, 2021). Central to its call for policy reform is a guarantee for young children in Australia, as exists in the public health and education systems. A well-defined guarantee would determine roles and lines of responsibility for state and federal governments and should reorient ECEC to centre on children. The report proposes that families be able to access three days of free (or low cost) ECEC, with more days available at a minimal cost for all children between birth and school age, complementing pre-school and proposed measures for increased and shared paternity leave (Centre for Policy Development, 2021). Modelling an early childhood guarantee would enable governments to predict the need for services where they are currently lacking and respond accordingly, with the potential to respond to areas most in need initially.

Disproportionate access for lower socio-economic groups

There is strong evidence that families from more disadvantaged backgrounds benefit the most from high-quality early childhood education and care. Heckman (2021), the US Nobel Prize winning economist, writes that the "…highest rate of return in early childhood development comes from investing as early as possible, from birth through age five, in disadvantaged families". In an American study focusing on disadvantaged children, Heckman (2008) found that the rate of return (the return per dollar of cost) on high-quality early childhood education and care to be 7 to 10 %.

Yet our research shows that it is the most disadvantaged that have the lowest accessibility to childcare. Part of the reason for this may be the underlying principles of the childcare system that encourage providers to establish services where there is the lower risk and the greater reward. One way of illustrating this is to explore the correlation between price and accessibility.

Figure 14 shows the relationship between the median cost per hour of childcare and the average childcare places per child in the five major capital cities with a population over 1 million people. Each dot is an SA3 region and represents a population of between 30,000 to 180,000 people. The horizontal axis shows the mean fee per hour and the vertical axis shows the average childcare places per child in each SA3 region. The blue line shows the trend.

Figure 14: Average childcare places per child and mean fee per hour ($) by SA3 in the five largest cities in Australia
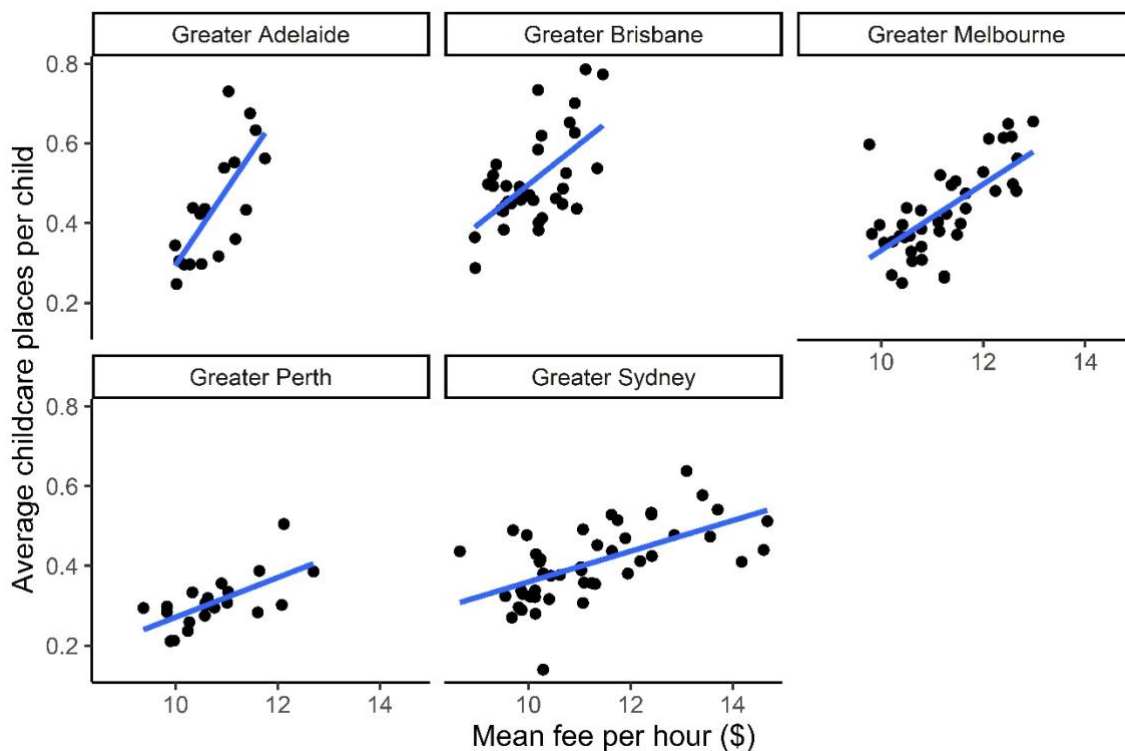
This figure highlights how areas, where there is greater supply of childcare, are also areas where providers charge higher fees. Often these areas of higher supply and higher fees are also areas of greater advantage. For instance, in Greater Melbourne, the area with both the highest fees per hour and the highest average number of childcare places per child is Stonnington – West. This area includes some of Melbourne's most affluent suburbs such as Toorak, South Yarra and Armadale.

This figure suggests that there is an incentive for providers to operate in advantaged areas where they can charge higher fees, even if there is greater competition. This leaves more disadvantaged areas with lower levels of childcare accessibility. As a consequence, Australia is not fully capitalising on the long-term benefits to children from more disadvantaged backgrounds of high-quality early learning.

There is further research needed on the link between access and female workforce participation

One of the many functions of ECEC is to enable greater workforce participation. However, it is not clear that the current approach is fully supporting this aim.

The figure below explores the relationship between childcare deserts and levels of workforce participation. This figure shows the proportion of the population living in childcare deserts in 88 regions (SA4) across Australia. Also shown is the workforce participation of female parents who have at least one child aged under five in the household.

Figure 15: Percentage of SA4 region population living in a childcare desert and workforce participation of female parents with a child in the household aged under five
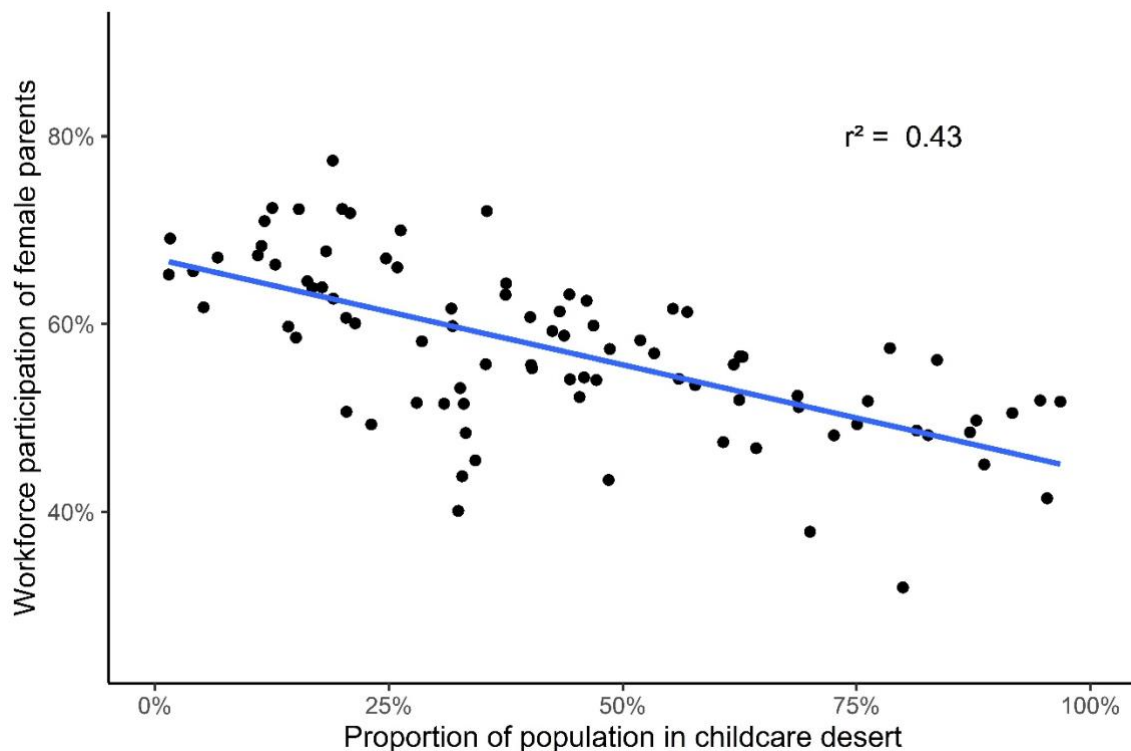
This figure shows there is a correlation between the accessibility of childcare and female workforce participation. Regions where more people live in a childcare desert also have lower levels of workforce participation for females who have a child aged under five in the household.

The reasons for this association are complex. Lower levels of female workforce participation in an area will affect demand for childcare. It may also be that difficulty in accessing childcare can lead to parents and carers choosing not to participate in the workforce while their children are young.

The interaction between demand and supply of childcare will affect families and carers differently. There is a need for further research to understand how access to childcare is influencing workforce participation and the decisions parents and carers are making, especially females, regarding employment. This is particularly important in terms of understanding barriers that some may experience based on location and lower access to childcare.

Conclusion

Access to quality childcare has enormous impacts on the current and future lives of Australians. Yet our research shows that current policy settings mean that where Australians live still plays a significant role in whether they can access this crucial service.

While there are neighbourhoods that may have enough supply to meet demand, many Australians will have difficulty finding the childcare service that is right for them. In many regional areas, there is no access at all.

It does not have to be like this. More than a hundred years ago, Australia built a school system that still operates today. In regional areas, these schools are crucial parts of communities. The policy settings for the school and preschool sectors show that universal access to childcare does not have to be an unattainable dream.

There is a large body of research showing the huge returns to investment in ECEC. For instance, recent research from Victoria University showed that investment in the ECEC sector can largely pay for itself through increased tax receipts from greater female workforce participation (Dixon, 2020).

Australians deserve an ECEC system that includes universal access to childcare and supports families in whatever decision they make that they see is best for them. Most importantly, children need a system that meets their needs so that they can have the best start in life, regardless of where they live or the income of their parents.

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Horsham Rural City Council is keen to hear from families who will have a child attending either 3 or 4 year old kindergarten in 2022. Please answer this short survey (1-2 minutes)

Overall response rate n= 158

1. Does your child currently attend a long day care service? (Yes/No)

Yes n = 98

No n= 60

In Horsham in 2022, there will be five hours of subsidised 3YO and 15 hours of 4YO kindergarten available to children.

2. In 2022, will your child be attending
   - 3year old kindergarten (5 hours) n= 70
   - 4year old kindergarten (15 hours) n = 82
   - Other – Long Day Care n= 3

3. Where children have access to 15 hours of subsidised kindergarten a week, what program structure best suits your family?
   - 3x5 hour days n= 88
   - 2x 7.5 hour days n= 61

4. You are able to access your subsidised kinder from any early childhood service with a Bachelor-qualified Early Childhood Teacher. These services will display a sign with a purple kindergarten tick to show they are a Victorian government approved service. Select which service you intend to access your subsidised kindergarten from in 2022.
   a. Long day care:
      i. Community Kids Horsham (not currently funded to deliver) n = 11
      ii. Goodstart n = 31
      iii. Green Leaves n= 10
      iv. Horsham Community Child Care n= 43
   b. Sessional:
      i. Bennett Road n= 16
      ii. Green Park n= 50
      iii. Kalkee Road n= 16
      iv. Natimuk Road n= 22
      v. Natimuk n = 3

5. What is the reason for your choice of service?

(Summary or responses)

   - All other children have attended there/family connection   n= 19
   - Location   n = 26

- Need a change from LDC environment   n = 6
- Perceived "better quality at sessional kindergarten   n = 22
- Have to use LDC as sessional times unsuitable   n = 17

6. Will you require additional care:
   a. Long day care n = 32
   b. LDC + Before kinder care n = 1
   c. LDC + After kinder care + before kinder care n = 10
   d. LDC + AKC n= 8
   e. BKC + AKC n= 2
   f. AKC n = 21
   g. No additional care n = 70

7. How many additional days outside of those subsidised do you require?
   1 n= 7
   2 n = 11
   3 n = 13
   4 n= 1

8. Do you have any other feedback on kindergarten delivery in the Horsham municipality?

(Summary of comments)

- Need more LDC and kindergarten
- Need more sessional kinder options to suit working parents
- After kinder care and before kinder care are needed
- Kindergarten information should all be centralised on one online website
- More hours of 3 year old should be available
- 3 x 5 hours does not suit working parents

Spendmapp Monthly Report

Local Government Area:
Horsham Rural City Council

Spendmapp cleans and analyses bank transaction data by time, geography, Expenditure Category and Type allowing continuous monitoring and analysis of local economic activity.

For the month of November 2022:

- Resident Local Spend was $25.0M. This is a 2.74% increase from the same time last year.
- Visitor Local Spend was $12.7M. This is a 13.36% increase from the same time last year.
- Total Local Spend was $37.7M. This is a 6.09% increase from the same time last year.
- Resident Escape Spend was $9.4M. This is a 18.67% increase from the same time last year.
- Resident Online Spend was $13.2M. This is a 1.63% increase from the same time last year.

The 18.67 % increase in Resident Escape Spend means local goods and service providers are losing market share to non-local businesses.

Expenditure by Expenditure Type

These expenditure charts show the long-term pattern of expenditure activity by Expenditure Type across the Horsham Rural City Council LGA. Typically, we see spending spikes at Easter and Christmas; dips in the post-Christmas period; and a steady climb through winter.

By way of a benchmark, the mean ratio of Resident Online Spend to all resident spending is 0.22. That is, for every dollar spent by resident cardholders anywhere, 22c goes online. Another 34c is in Escape Expenditure and the rest is spent locally.

Over the last few years across most of Australia, total expenditure has been relatively flat, even in fast growing municipalities. The exception to this has often been in Resident Online Spend, which continues to grow relative to Total Local Spend.
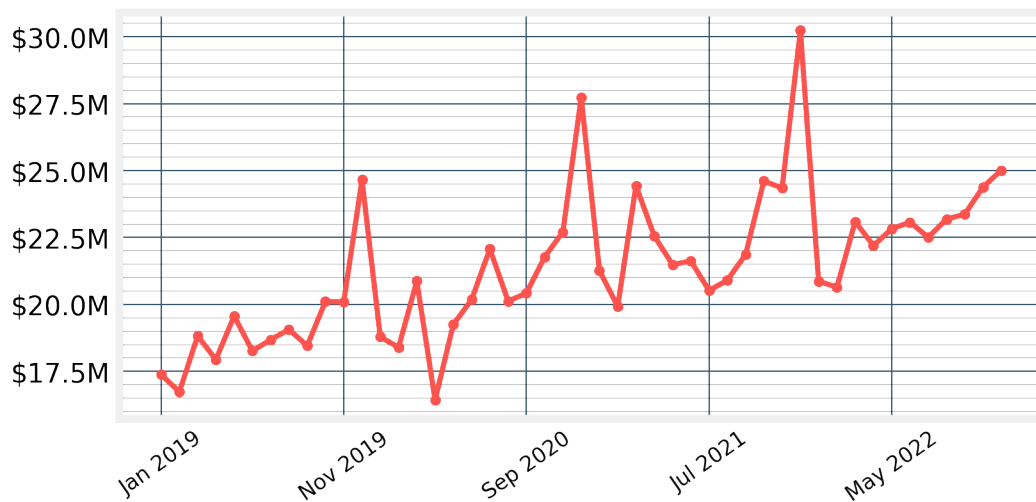
Total Local Spend

The total amount spent with merchants within the Horsham Rural City Council LGA.
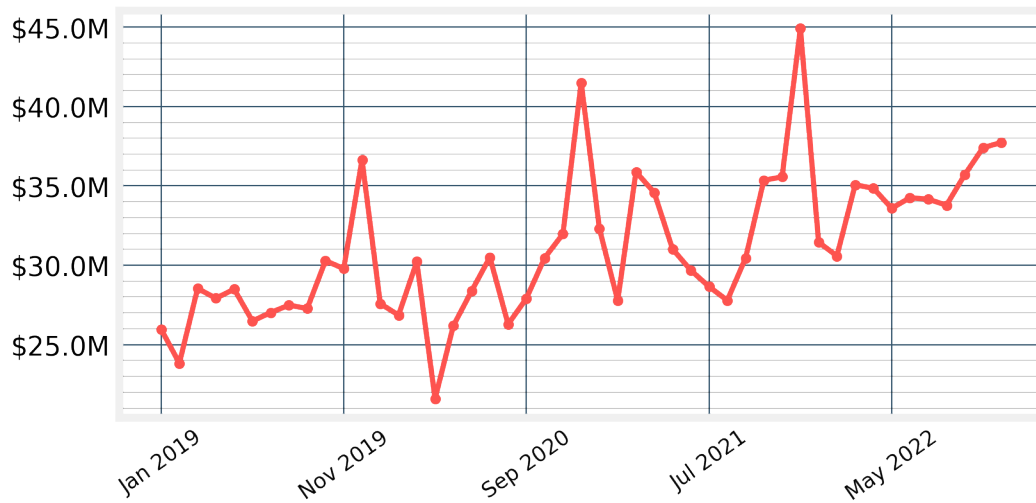
Over the last 47 months, the spending trend (as shown by the trendline in the Spendmapp app) for Total Local Spend has been upwards.
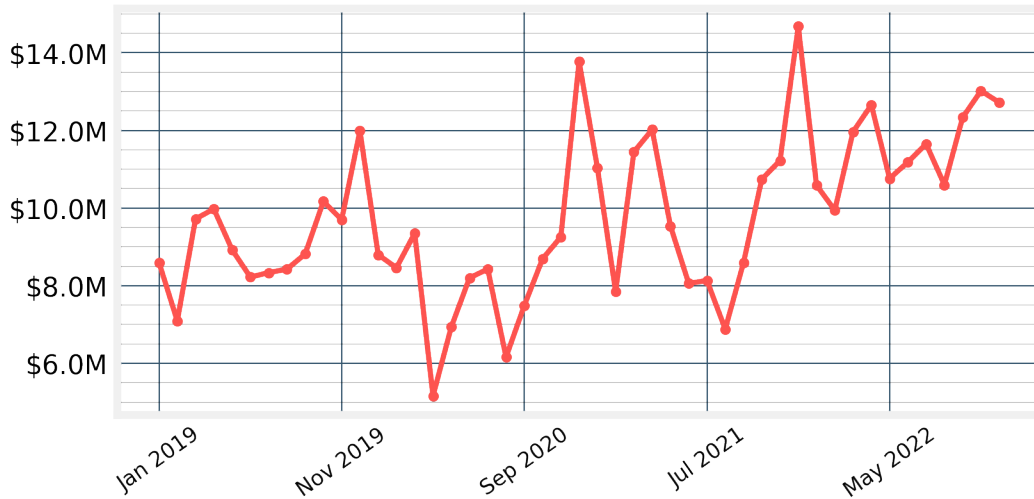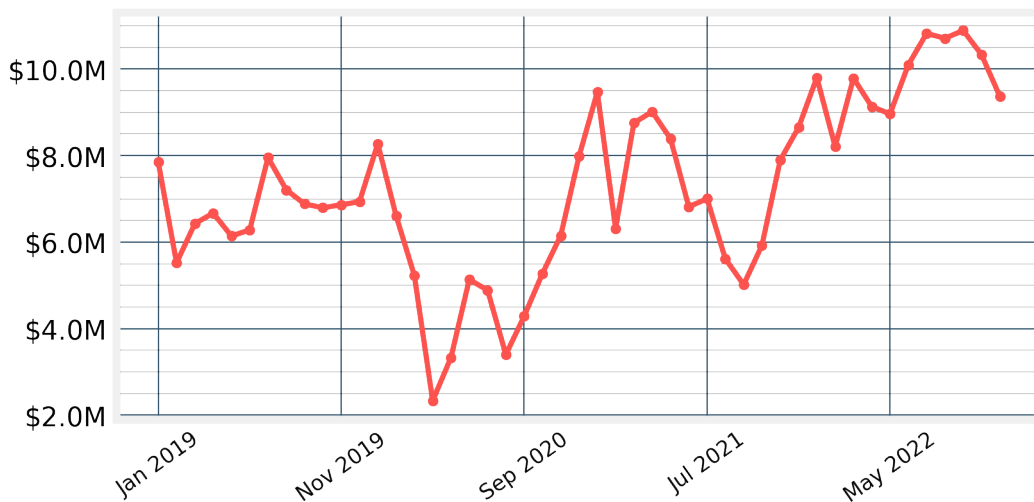
Resident Local Spend

The amount spent by residents and local businesses with merchants inside the Horsham Rural City Council LGA.

Over the last 47 months, the spending trend (as shown by the trendline in the Spendmapp app) for Resident Local Spend has been upwards.

Visitor Local Spend

The amount spent by non-residents and non-local businesses with merchants inside the Horsham Rural City Council LGA.

Over the last 47 months, the spending trend (as shown by the trendline in the Spendmapp app) for Visitor Local Spend has been upwards.

Resident Escape Spend

The amount spent by residents and local businesses outside the Horsham Rural City Council LGA.

Over the last 47 months, the spending trend (as shown by the trendline in the Spendmapp app) for Resident Escape Spend has been upwards.

Resident Online Spend

The amount spent by Horsham Rural City Council LGA residents and local businesses with online merchants.
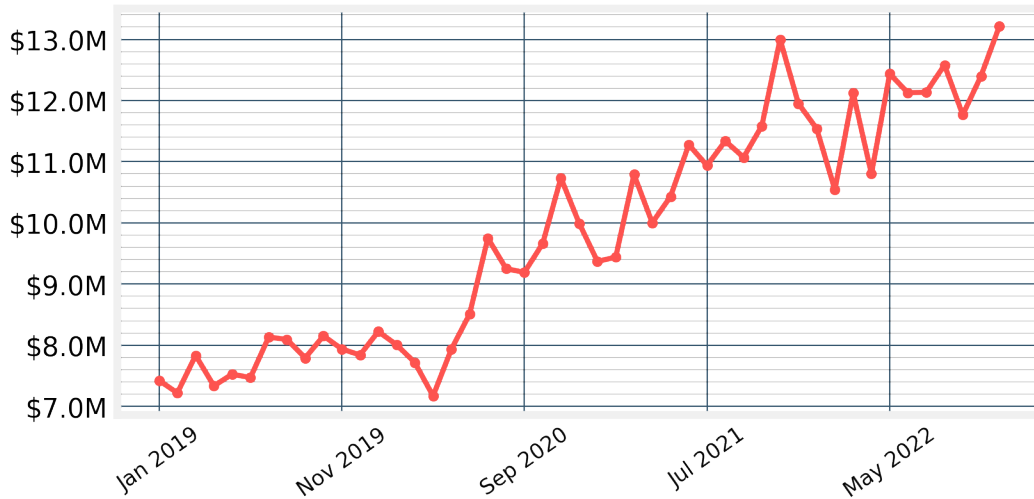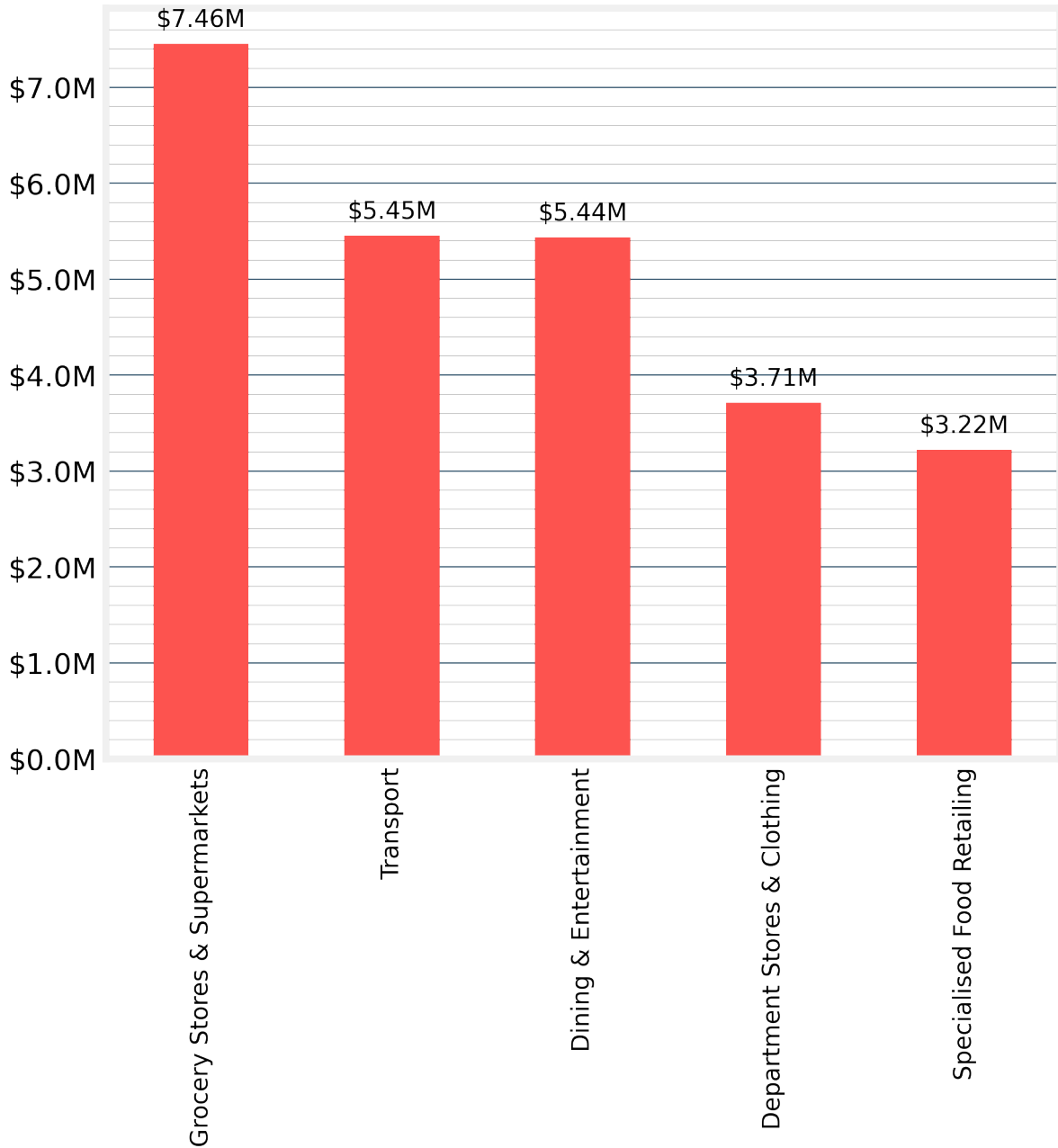

Over the last 47 months, the spending trend (as shown by the trendline in the Spendmapp app) for Resident Online Spend has been upwards.

Expenditure by Expenditure Category

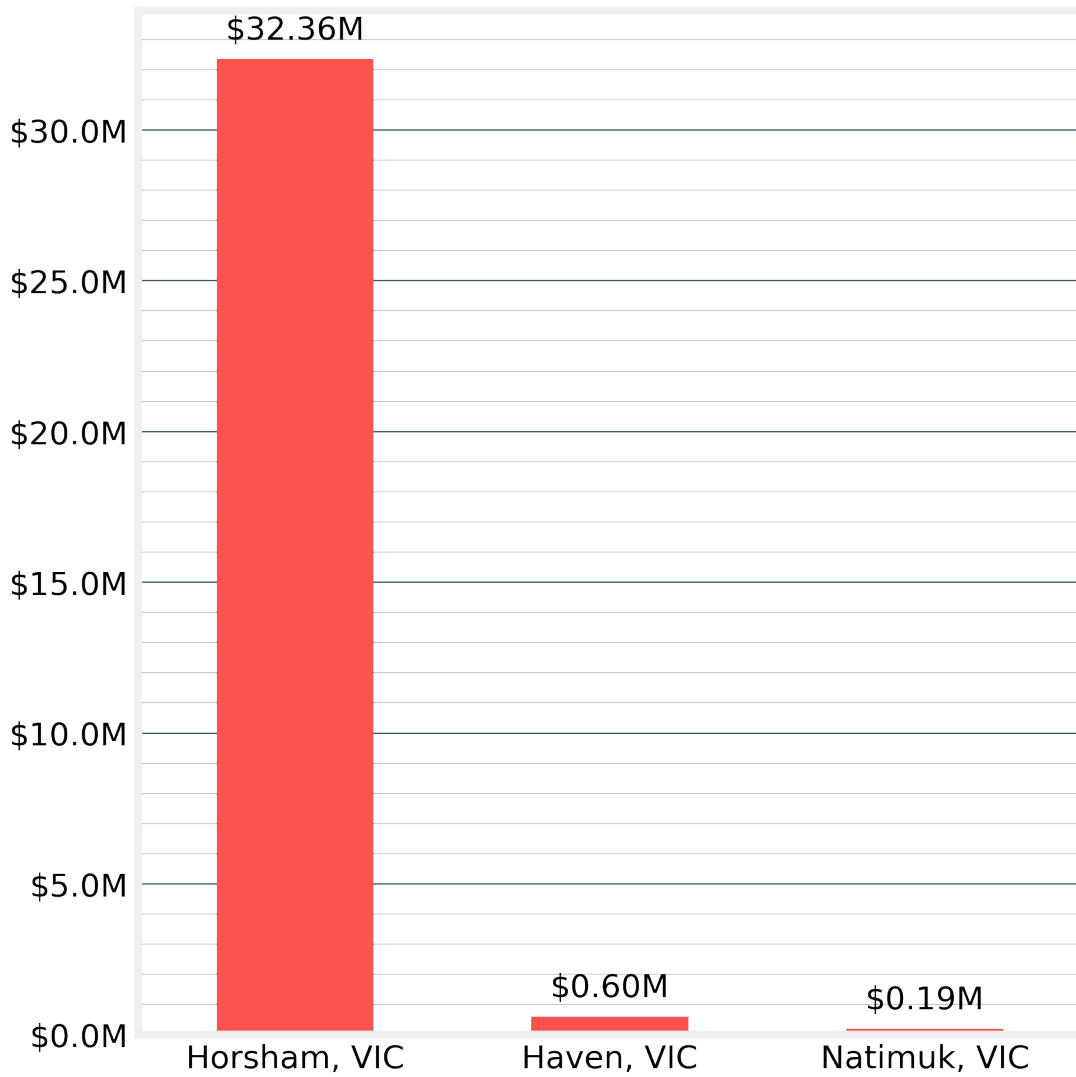## The Top 5 Spending Categories for November 2022

Total Local Spend split by the top 5 Expenditure Categories.
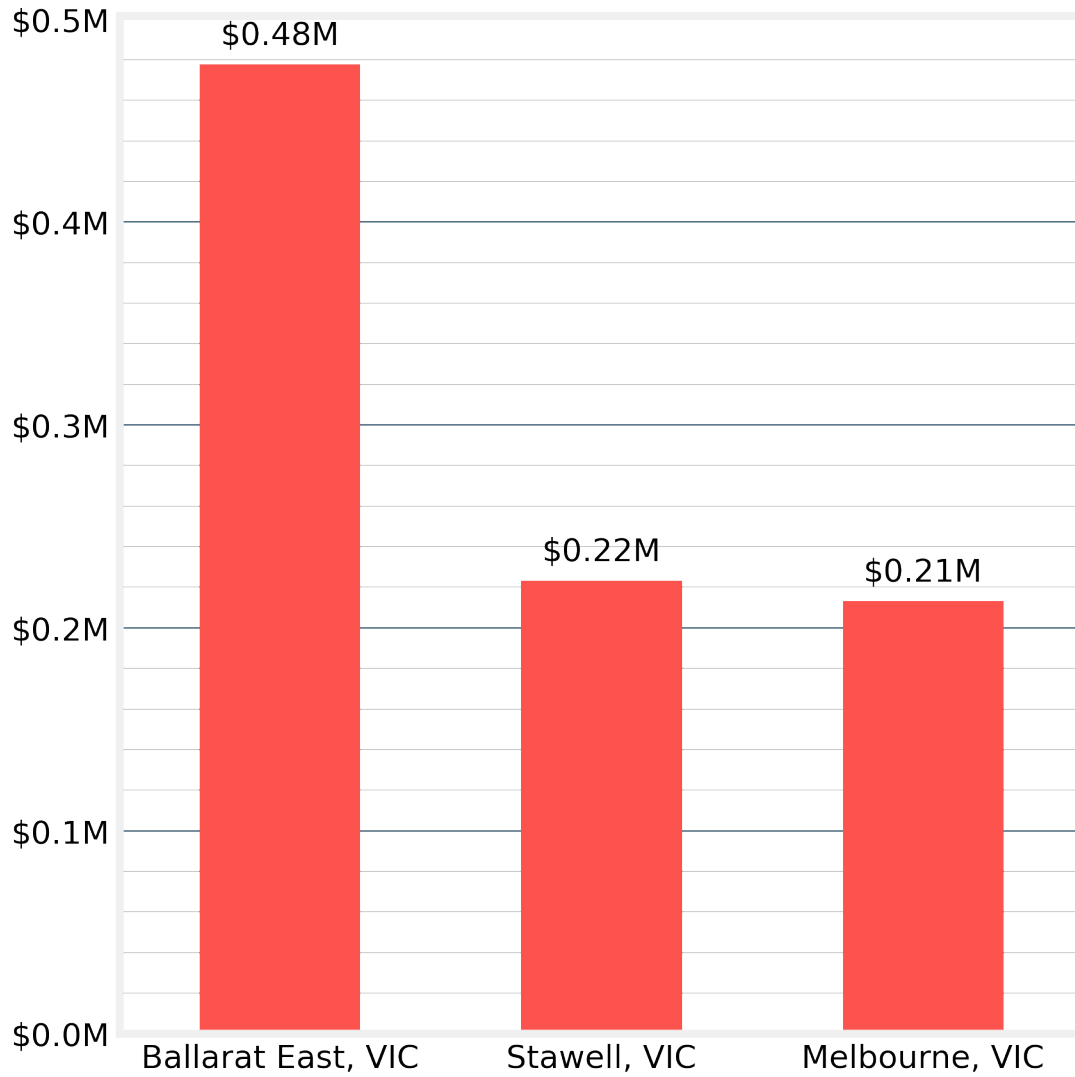
Spend by Origin and Destination

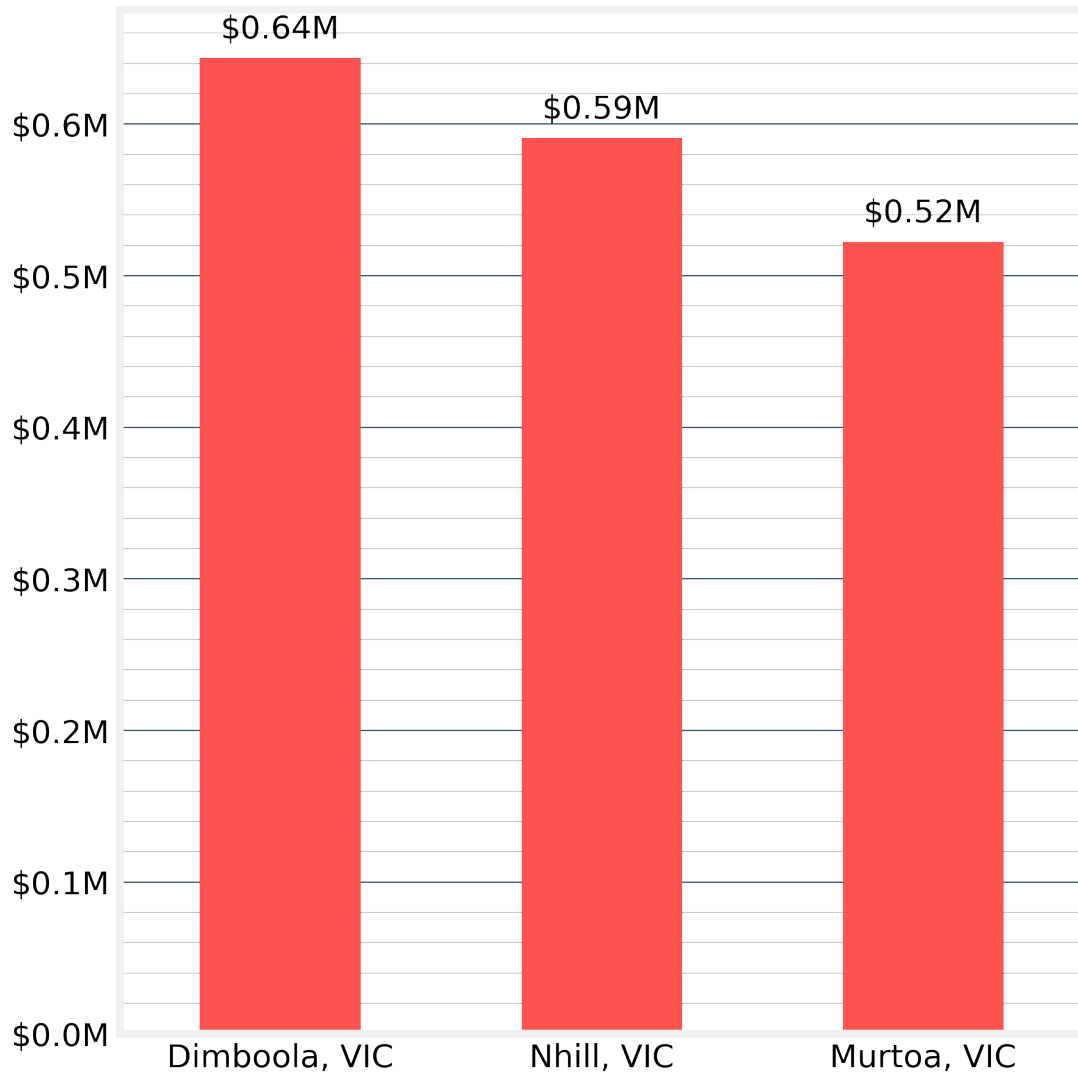Total Local Spend by Suburbs of destination (i.e. where the spending occurs)

The Top 3 Suburbs by Resident Escape Spend for November 2022

Resident Escape Spend by destination Suburbs (i.e. where the spending goes to).

## The Top 3 Suburbs by Visitor Local Spend for November 2022

Visitor Local Spend by Suburbs of origin (i.e. where the visitors originate).

Night Time Economy

Night Time Economy for November 2022

The biggest spending night of the month of November 2022 was Friday 25 November with Total Local Spend of $0.3M.This was made up of $0.1M in Dining and Entertainment spending and $0.2M spending in all other categories.
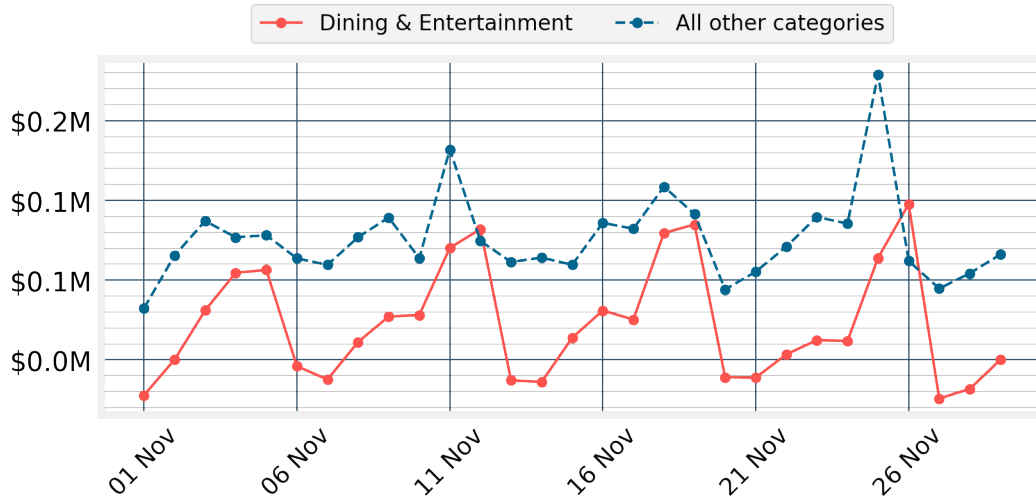
MINUTES OF INFORMAL MEETINGS OF COUNCILLORS
COUNCIL BRIEFING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS
ON MONDAY 23 JANUARY 2023 AT 4.23PM

Attendance:	Cr Robyn Gulline, Mayor; Cr D Bowe, Cr B Redden (virtual attendance), Cr L Power, Sunil Bhalla, Chief Executive Officer; Kim Hargreaves, Director Corporate Services; Kevin O'Brien, Director Communities and Place; John Martin, Director Infrastructure, Stephanie Harder (Item 3.1 only), Fiona Gormann (Item 3.1 only), Heather Proctor (Item 4.10 only)
Apologies:	Cr P Flynn, Cr I Ross, Cr C Haenel, Jude Holt (Municipal Monitor)

1.   WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2.   DISCLOSURE OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST SEC 130 and 131, LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2020 AND HORSHAM RURAL CITY COUNCIL GOVERNANCE RULES

Nil

3.   PRESENTATIONS

3.1   Horsham South Structure Plan – Presentation from Mesh Consultant

Attending: Leah Wittingslow (Mesh), Nicole Tan (Mesh), Stephanie Harder,
        Fiona Gormann *(Mesh Consultants attending virtually)*

Mesh Consultants provided a presentation.

4.   COUNCIL MEETING REPORTS FOR DISCUSSION

4.1   Conflict of Interest (Jude Holt) **Appendix 4.1**

Jude Holt was unable to attend due to ill health, report to be presented following Council meeting next week.

4.2   Audit & Risk Committee Report (Kim) **(Appendix 4.2)**

Discussed.

4.3   Procurement Policy (Kim) **(Appendix 4.3)**

Discussed.

4.4   Establishment of Electoral Advisory Panels (Kim) **(Appendix 4.4)**

Discussed.

4.5   Johnson Asahi – Power supply arrangements (John) **(Appendix 4.5)**

Discussed

4.6   VicRoads Maintenance Contract Extension (John) **(Appendix 4.6)**

Discussed

4.7   Waste Tenders (Recycling, FOGO, Transfer Station) (John) **(Appendix 4.7)**

Discussed

4.8   Future Childcare Provision (Kevin) **(Appendix 4.8)**

Discussed

4.9   Disability Access & Inclusion Plan (Kevin) **(Appendix 4.9)**

Discussed

4.10   Finance Report December (Kim) **(Appendix 4.10)**

Discussed

5.   REPORTS FOR INFORMATION ONLY

5.1   VCAT/Planning/Building Update (Kevin) **(Appendix 5.1)**

Discussed

5.2   Investment Attraction & Growth Report (Kevin) **(Appendix 5.2)**

Discussed

6.   GENERAL DISCUSSION (Sunil Bhalla)

- Horsham North Underpass
- Branding
- Gender Equality Commissioner

7.   CLOSE

Meeting closed 7.20pm

MINUTES
Horsham Regional Livestock Exchange Board of Management Meeting
Held on Thursday, 21 December 2022 at 5.00pm
At the Canteen, HRLE

Present: Mathew McDonald - Horsham Stock Agents Association (AWN)
Kevin Pymer - Victorian Farmers Federation Representative
Ray Zippel - Community Representative
David Grimble – Community Representative – Chair
Paul Christopher – HRLE Superintendent
John Martin – Director Infrastructure

1.   Welcome / Apologies

Apologies
- Richard Bansemer
- Robyn Evans
- Tim Martin

2.   Disclosure of Conflicts of Interest

Nil

3.   Minutes of previous meeting – 29 September 2022

Moved Ray Zippel / Mat McDonald, that the minutes of the meeting of 29 September 2022 be accepted as presented. Carried.

4.   Business arising from previous minutes
- Burnt Ck developments – planned works
- Gordon Fischer replacement
- Stuart McLean letter
- Terms of Reference
  - JM to circulate the last copy that was done
  - Board may provide input

5.   Correspondence
- Letter to Stuart McLean in recognition of his service to the Livestock Sales industry

6.   Reports
6.1   Chair's Report

- Thanks to Board for input throughout the year. Also thanks to the staff for their work.
- Has been a challenging year.
- The threat of Foot and Mouth Disease remains a concern.
- Warrnambool saleyards are closing. Chair had been keeping an awareness on this situation. Recognises that we are well placed by maintaining our yards in a sound condition, and improving them.

6.2 Infrastructure Director Report

- Staff consolidation has been a good thing to establish a solid core staff group.
- Challenge with sales numbers. Recognise that this is cyclic.
- Need to present a detailed view of this at next meeting, including options to improve viability.

Action - We should review our numbers compared to others in recent years – are there trends in there that differentiated the sites? Has ALSA got the numbers? Ask Paul to find this out.]

- Led to a general discussion about patterns of selling
- Recognition that numbers may take a little while to recover. High confidence that the cycle will continue, leading to recovery in sales.
- Time to explore other options, e.g. is there a potential for solar panels. **Action** – To investigate.

6.3 Operations of Exchange – Paul Christopher

- Figures have been modest
- Only one sale above 20,000, in November.
- Plenty of water harvested over winter, and have been using that to wash down our yards, including from the fresh water dam.
- Agistment paddocks have been getting used, Fletchers and Cedar.
- Paul – now a "Red Meat Ambassador"

6.4 Manager Operations – Robyn Evans – Apology

6.5 Horsham Stock Agents Association – Mathew McDonald

- Reflected on the issues with sales numbers.
- A good number of SA stock have been coming through. Likely to be more in early 2023. Agents have been asking for animal health statements on any SA sheep.
- Some concern that sheep in the general Stawell area are heading to Ballarat.

6.6 VFF Representative – Kevin Pymer

- Late season is a challenge for getting lambs up. Also transport a challenge with wet roads and paddocks.
- The passing of Tom Blair was acknowledged by the Board. The Board recognised Tom as a strong supporter of the Exchange over many years.

6.7 Transport – Vacant
6.8 DJPR – Amy Sluggett / Brittany Price - apologies
6.9 Throughput

- YTD 156,000, well down on last year's previous record low of 192,000 and the long term average of 272,000 for this time of year.

Motion: That the reports be received. Moved Ray Zippel / Mat McDonald. Carried.

7.   General Business

    7.1   Economic Analysis / Herd's Paddock – Robyn Evans - deferred
    7.2   Items raised by members
- Opportunity to upgrade Mackies Rd with flood funding?
  - Flood recovery only allows for like for like reinstatement, not betterment.
- RFID
  - Will become national soon
  - SA relatively soon
- Election of office bearers
  - April meeting proposed for this.

8.   Next Meeting
- Dates to be discussed

9.   Meeting Close

The Chair wished everyone a safe and merry Christmas

David Grimble
Chair
Horsham Regional Livestock Exchange Board