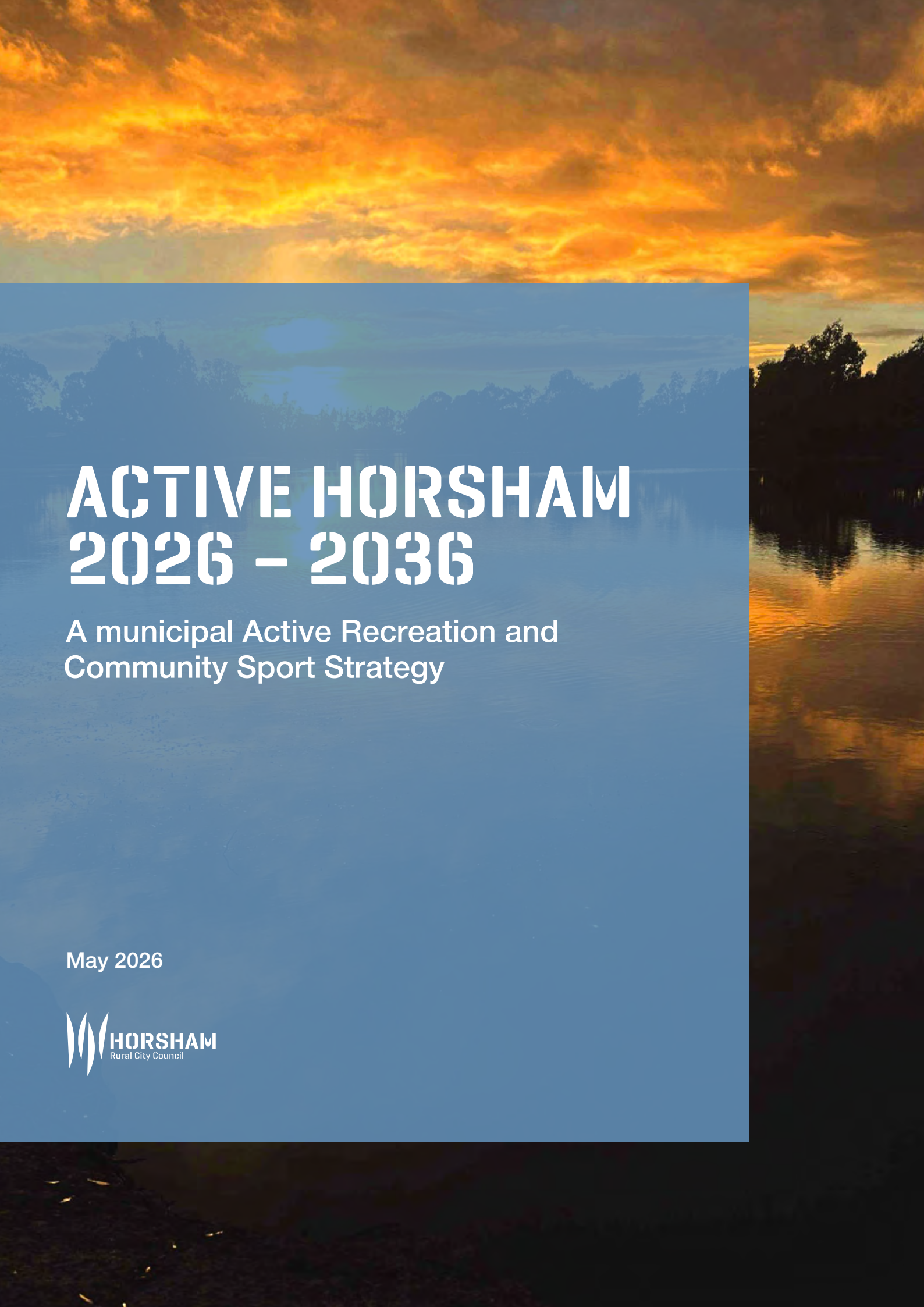




ACTIVE HORSHAM 2026 – 2036

A municipal Active Recreation and
Community Sport Strategy

May 2026



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Active Horsham was developed with the support of the Victorian Government and project partners and was guided and shaped by input and feedback from our community.

The guidance, direction and support provided by many has been invaluable in shaping the outcomes of Active Horsham.



Acknowledgement of Country

The Horsham Rural City Council acknowledges the five traditional owner groups of this land; the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk people.

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

We pay our respects to the 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

INTRODUCTION

Acknowledgements	2
Executive Summary	4
About this Strategy	5
Defining sport, recreation and physical activity	6
Strategic context	7
Strategic priorities	8

ACTIVE HORSHAM STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Vision and guiding principles	11
Strategic framework	12
Strategic priority 1: Access	14
Strategic priority 2: Diversity	16
Strategic priority 3: Information	18
Strategic priority 4: Partnerships	20
Strategic priority 5: Policy and Planning	22
Council's role	24
Decision making process	25
Implementation and monitoring	26

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Why a strategic approach is needed	28
Statistical indicators of activity demand	30
Community profile	33
Community influences on activity demand	35
Glossary	36

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Active Horsham 2026-2036 (“the Strategy”) aims to ensure there are diverse opportunities to participate in active recreation and community sport, so everyone, across all Horsham communities, can move, play, connect and belong.

Active Horsham 2026-2036 is Horsham Rural City Council’s ten-year strategy to support active recreation and community sport across the municipality. The Strategy provides a clear framework to guide planning, partnerships, activation and investment, ensuring people of all ages, abilities, genders and backgrounds have opportunities to be active, healthy and connected.

Horsham is a highly active community, supported by a strong network of facilities, open spaces and natural assets. However, changing demographics, below-average physical activity levels, rising health risks, socio-economic pressures and evolving participation preferences highlight the need for a coordinated and strategic response.

Active Horsham responds to these and other challenges by focusing on participation, inclusion, increased use and optimisation of existing facilities and spaces, and ensuring facilities reflect contemporary expectations regarding access, shared usage and compliance.

Active Horsham has been informed by extensive research, data analysis (including participation trends, health indicators, AusPlay data), community and stakeholder engagement and local consultation.

The Strategy aligns with Council’s broader policy framework, Victorian Government strategic policy directions, Fair Access principles and long term financial and resource planning.

Active Horsham is guided by five principles, informing future decision making:

- Equity and Inclusive Access
- Community Health and Wellbeing
- Smart Investment and Sustainability
- Connected Places and Quality Experiences
- Collaboration and Partnerships.

Active Horsham is underpinned by five strategic priorities, that together support increased participation, improved wellbeing and stronger community liveability:

1. Access
2. Diversity
3. Information
4. Partnerships
5. Policy and Planning

Twenty-six actions and related areas of focus under the strategic priorities provide Council and partners with a framework for delivery. Strategies will be systematically implemented over the 2026 to 2036 period.

Council’s role in strategy implementation is clearly defined, providing a focus on supporting, enabling, partnering and advocating for greater activation, physical activity and wellbeing outcomes across the municipality.

Progress will be monitored through annual reviews, performance measures and a five-year (mid-point) strategy review to ensure Active Horsham remains responsive to community needs, participation trends and available resources.

Together, Active Horsham provides Council and its partners with a practical roadmap to support active lifestyles, strengthen community connections and enhance the liveability of Horsham over the next decade.

ABOUT THIS STRATEGY

Scope

The Horsham Rural City Council (HRCC) has developed Active Horsham – A Municipal Active Recreation and Community Sports Strategy to guide the planning, prioritisation and investment in active recreation and community sport.

Active Horsham provides a framework for planning, activation and partnerships for active recreation and community sport over the 10-year period from 2026 to 2036.

It aims to increase participation and foster a more active and socially connected community across Horsham and its rural townships.

A key focus of Active Horsham is on activating the community and enabling opportunities to maximise the use of existing facilities and spaces.

Facilities play a core role in supporting community sport and active recreation. Ensuring facilities reflect contemporary expectations regarding access, shared use, compliance and being fit-for-purpose is an outcome of the Strategy.

Approach

Active Horsham has been developed in two report volumes:

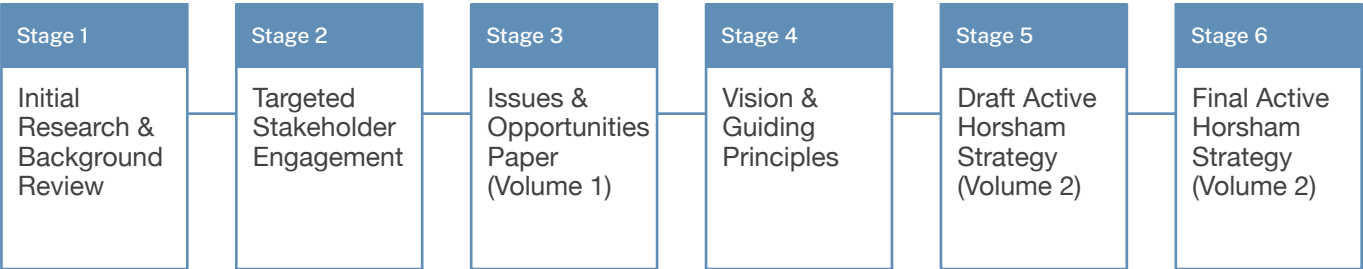
- Volume 1 – Issues and Opportunities Paper
- Volume 2 – Active Horsham Strategy (this document).

Volume 1 - Issues and Opportunities Paper provides a summary of strategy inputs and considerations, including research, analysis and stakeholder and community consultation.

Information presented in Volume 1 includes population and demographic analysis and implications for planning, consultation outcomes, strategy and policy review, and participation trends.

Volume 1 also provides the basis and evidence to support the – Active Horsham Strategy (this document).

Figure 1. Project method

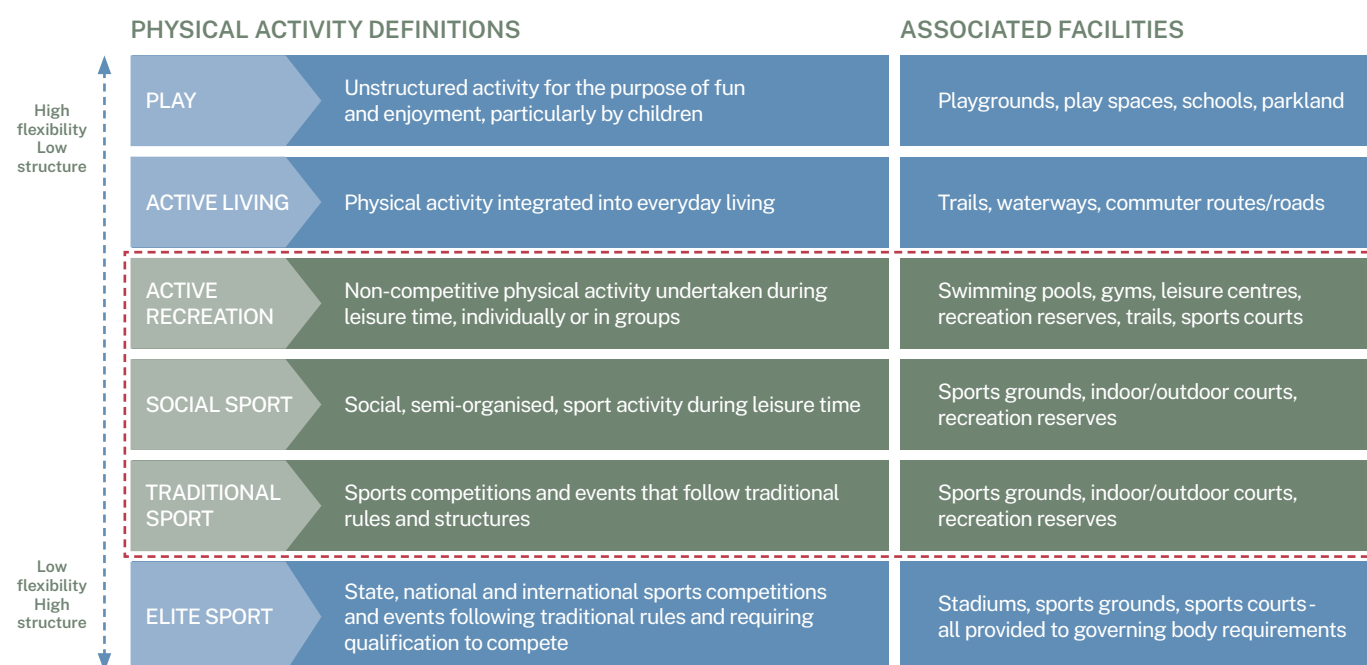


DEFINING SPORT, RECREATION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

To appreciate the range of activities and associated facilities covered within Active Horsham, it is important to define them and identify where they fit in the physical activity spectrum. The focus for Active Horsham is on **active recreation, social sport and traditional sport**, highlighted below.

The diagram and definitions of physical activity presented below have been adapted from the VicHealth “Doing Sport Differently” resource (2020).

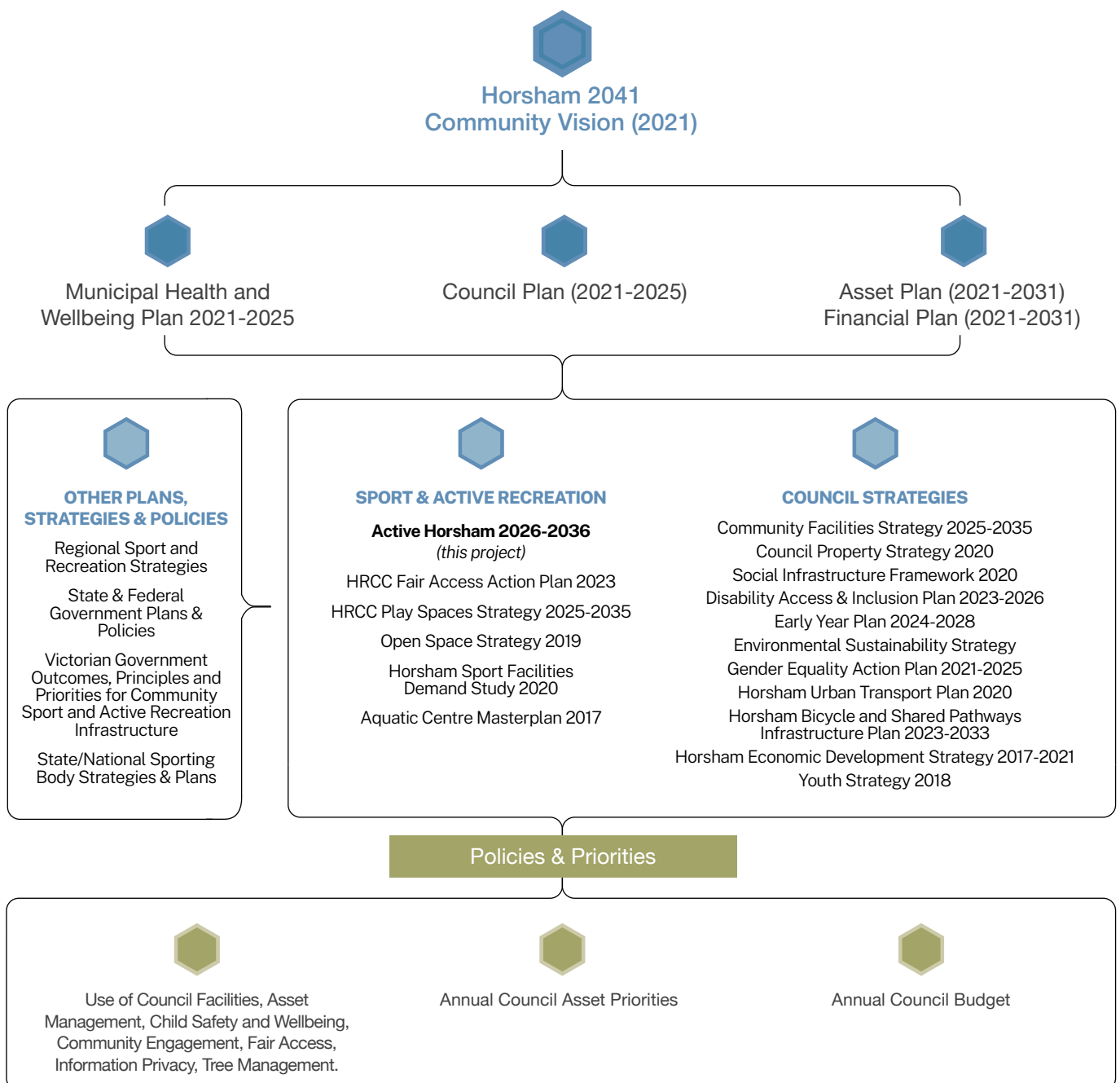
Figure 2. Physical Activity Spectrum



STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Active Horsham complements existing HRCC policies and strategies. Recommendations and actions will be delivered to reflect Council's long-term financial and resource planning and asset management priorities.

Figure 3. Horsham Rural City Council and related policies and strategies



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Communities across Horsham face various issues and challenges relating to active recreation and community sport. The following five themes were presented in Volume 1 – Issues and Opportunities Paper. Opportunities relating to improving participation in active recreation and community sport were identified and have been used to develop the strategic framework within the Active Horsham Strategy.

Access

Gaps in the availability of opportunities to participate across the municipality restrict access to community sport and active recreation. Gaps include both activity provision, as well as access to quality infrastructure in all communities.

Access to existing infrastructure is compounded by limited transport options, impacting participation levels for some residents.

Improving access to quality facilities will require development of a connected, municipality-wide network of sport and recreation opportunities, supported by active transport links and alignment with State Sporting Association facility standards. Embedding co-design processes and reducing real and physical, economic, social and cultural barriers will also be essential.

Strengthening access will support people of all ages, abilities, genders and cultures to participate, increase facility use, improve health and wellbeing, and enhance the liveability across Horsham's rural communities through the provision of high-quality activity environments.

Diversity

Increasing diversity of community sport and active recreation participation opportunities will extend options to meet the needs of the broad population across Horsham's communities.

Addressing the activity diversity gap involves supporting under-represented participants, encouraging new and emerging sports and activities, increasing flexibility and multi-use of public spaces, co-locating community groups, and partnering with health, sporting and other agencies to deliver social and unstructured recreation opportunities.

Enhancing facility access, scheduling and availability will further support participation growth.

Offering a diverse range of physical activity options reflecting changing social, demographic and recreational trends is key to addressing the challenges diversity of need brings.

Information

Improving the visibility and accessibility of community sport and active recreation opportunities across Horsham will enhance participation outcomes.

Opportunities to improve targeted communication to diverse groups (older adults, culturally diverse residents, people with disabilities), enhance partnerships, and improved use of technology to share programs and success stories have been identified.

Providing clear, inclusive information that promotes participation and highlights the availability of a full range of activities and facilities across HRCC (including Council and other providers) will help increase community engagement and participation growth.

Partnerships

Supporting the development of partnerships and connecting stakeholders enhances the potential to achieve shared outcomes and benefits that contribute to the liveability of the Horsham municipality through community sport and active recreation.

Strengthening partnerships with government, sporting associations, regional sport assemblies, community organisations, and land managers will support high-value policy outcomes, help to improve the quality of physical activity environments and contribute to diverse programming opportunities.

Effective collaboration can also increase funding and resourcing, create a sustainable network of infrastructure and programs, align outcomes with government policy, refine Council's role, and provide training and advocacy to support volunteers and community groups.

Planning and Policy

Active Horsham will provide an overarching framework to guide a strategic, outcomes-focused approach to community sport and active recreation in Horsham.

Developing integrated policies supports and enables the activation, upgrading and optimisation of infrastructure, defining key partnerships and extending programming. Opportunities also exist to promote co-design principles in all related site, facility and program development and embed Universal, Inclusive and Environmentally Sustainable Design principles.

A strategic approach will prioritise needs, align with state government policies and use data to guide investment into Council and community priorities. Leveraging grants, tenure agreements and a hierarchy of local, municipal and regional facilities will ensure responsible, sustainable and economically efficient management of facilities and spaces.

A strategic framework will promote equitable access, collaborative partnership and transparent decision-making that contributes to improving community liveability.

ACTIVE HORSHAM STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK





VISION

Across Horsham's communities there are diverse opportunities to participate in active recreation and community sport where everyone can move, play, connect and belong.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Equity & Inclusive Access

Ensure all residents, regardless of age, ability, gender, culture or location, can participate in active recreation and community sport through fair access, diverse opportunities and barrier-reducing initiatives.

Community Health & Wellbeing

Prioritise programs, environments and partnerships that increase physical activity, social connection and mental wellbeing across the municipality.

Smart Investment & Sustainability

Direct resources towards evidence-based priorities that maximise community benefit, improve participation outcomes and support long-term financial and environmental sustainability.

Connected Places & Quality Experiences

Develop, enhance and activate play spaces, trails, facilities and open spaces to provide welcoming, safe and high-quality recreation and sport experiences.

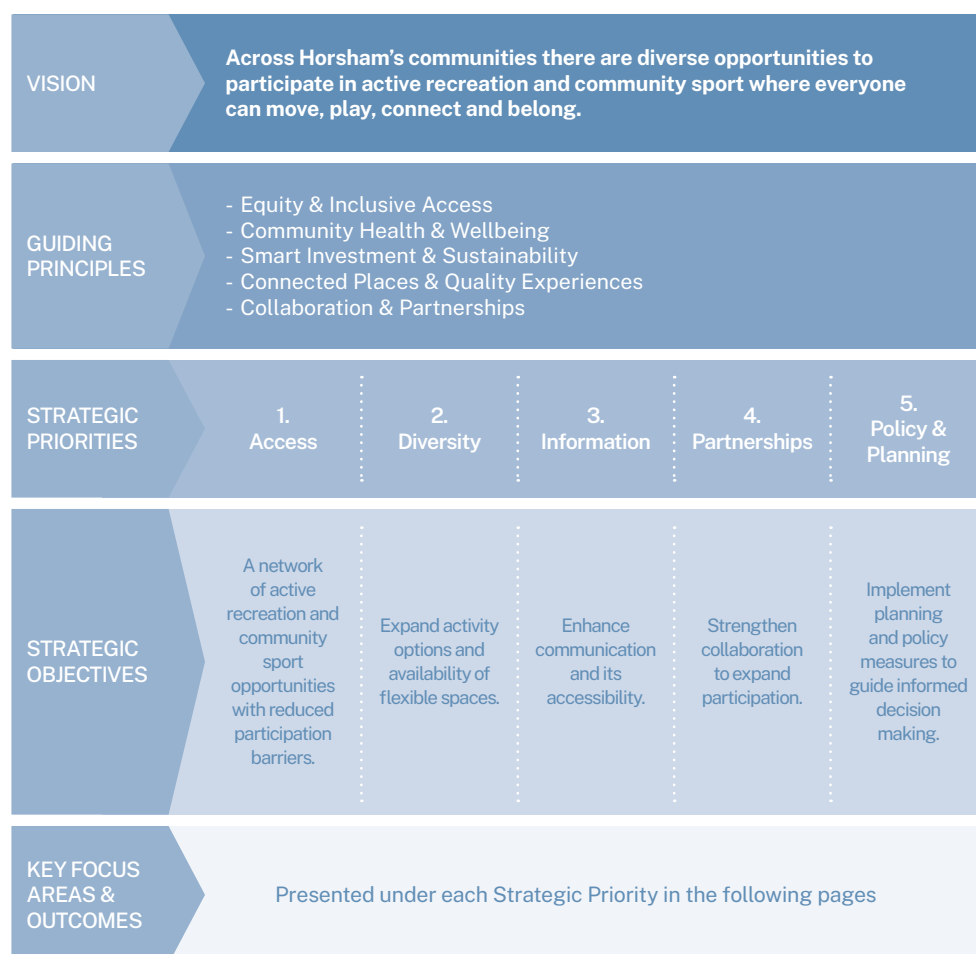
Collaboration & Partnerships

Work with clubs, community organisations, schools, First Nations communities, health agencies and regional partners to strengthen participation pathways.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The Strategic Framework has been developed to guide decision-making and support the implementation of Active Horsham. It responds to community needs, aligns with Council's policy directions, and strengthens access to a diverse range of active recreation and community sport opportunities.

The framework provides a clear vision, guiding principles and strategic priorities, supported by objectives, key strategies and desired outcomes, as well as a process for ongoing monitoring and review.





STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: ACCESS

A network of active recreation and community sport opportunities with reduced participation barriers.

A focus on access will ensure people of all ages, abilities, genders and cultures can access high-quality facilities and programs across the municipality, leading to increased facility use, improved health and wellbeing and enhanced liveability across Horsham's communities.



Walking and cycling trails connecting communities

Council's investment in shared paths, walking and cycling circuits and riverfront trails, guided by the Horsham Bicycle and Shared Paths Plan 2024- 2034, provides free, low-barrier opportunities for physical activity.

These paths and trails support:

- Walking, cycling, running for people of different abilities
- All ages and fitness levels
- Everyday, incidental physical activity.

Trails provide low-cost, informal recreation opportunities, accessible to all ages. Paths and trails enable residents to participate in physical activity regardless of income, ability or sporting experience.

What Council will focus on:

- 1.1 Map core active recreation and community sporting activities and opportunities available by township / location and use a hierarchy of provision (local or municipal) to highlight activity gaps across the network.
 - 1.2 Identify and address participation barriers — physical, social, cultural, and financial.
 - 1.3 Enhance transport links and connectivity (including active transport) and embed transport and active transport considerations in precinct, facility and program development projects and initiatives to improve access to facilities and programs across the municipality. For example: end of trip facilities; bicycle parking.
 - 1.4 Explore ways to activate existing recreation, sporting and open spaces and trail networks for multiple forms of physical activity. For example: low or no cost come and try activities; providing sports equipment in community spaces.
-

What this means for the community:

-  All residents, regardless of age, gender, ability or location can access community sport and active recreation opportunities.
 -  Participation rates increase through improved access and connectivity.
 -  Enhanced health and wellbeing outcomes are experienced across the municipality.
 -  Known barriers to participation are systematically reduced.
-

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: DIVERSITY

Expand activity options and availability of flexible spaces.

Providing diversity in activity opportunities supports increased participation by under-represented groups, encourages new and emerging sports and activities, and increases flexibility and multi-use of public spaces. Co-locating community groups and partnering with others supports the delivery of a broader range of social and unstructured recreation opportunities.

Being able to offer a diverse range of physical activity options that reflects changing social, demographic and recreational trends is key to addressing the challenges diversity of need brings.



Co-location of community groups and shared facilities

Council's approach to multi-use facilities allows a range of user groups to access community infrastructure, including:

- Schools, clubs and community groups sharing pavilions and open spaces
- Flexible use of ovals for training, informal recreation and community events
- Programming that accommodates different age groups and abilities

This approach improves access by reducing duplication, increasing availability and making better use of existing assets. (Horsham Municipal Community Facilities Strategy).

Maximising access through shared infrastructure enables more people to access facilities at different times and for different purposes

What Council will focus on:

- 2.1 Expand participation programs and options for under-represented groups. For example: women, youth, CALD, older adults, First Nations, people with disabilities.
 - 2.2 Support and promote emerging and alternative recreation activities and flexible participation models. For example: Pickleball within suitable existing indoor and outdoor facilities; Volleyball in the park.
 - 2.3 Partner with health, community providers and sporting bodies to deliver structured, unstructured and social recreation options.
 - 2.4 Ensure Council owned and/or operated facilities and related programming is optimised to be inclusive and welcoming for all.
 - 2.5 Continue to work with operators of the Horsham Aquatic Centre to provide a diverse range of community programs and activities (relevant to facility capacity and capability) that meet the evolving needs of the Horsham community.
-

What this means for the community:

-  More residents participating in community sport and active recreation.
 -  Facilities and programs reflect community diversity and evolving and emerging interests.
 -  Greater sense of inclusion and community connection through (social) participation.
 -  The use of existing facilities is maximised, supporting improved local liveability.
-

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: INFORMATION

Enhance communication and its accessibility.

Improving the visibility, accessibility and consistency of information about community sport and active recreation opportunities across Horsham will enhance awareness of activity options.

People want information to answer their questions - what activities are available, where and when do they occur and how can they get involved. Providing timely, easy-to-understand information is essential to supporting participation.

With a wide range of providers, platforms and communication channels, a coordinated approach is required to ensure consistent messaging and the use of trusted, targeted communication pathways. While digital tools offer significant opportunities, it is important to use communication methods that reach all community members, including those with limited digital access.



Partnering with Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly

Horsham Rural City Council partners with the Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly (WRSA) to improve the visibility and accessibility of community sport and active recreation opportunities across the region. Through WRSA's established communication channels, including regular newsletters, local clubs, programs, funding opportunities and events are promoted to a broad network of clubs, volunteers, schools and community organisations.

By supporting these trusted regional platforms, Council helps ensure consistent, timely and easy-to-understand information is shared, strengthening awareness of local opportunities, supporting under-resourced clubs, and improving access for people seeking to participate in sport and active recreation across Horsham and the wider Wimmera region.

What Council will focus on:

- 3.1 Identify a coordinated communications platform to promote participation opportunities.
 - 3.2 Target outreach to diverse cohorts, using accessible and inclusive communication formats – no single format will be appropriate for everyone.
 - 3.3 Partner with local community and health organisations and sporting bodies to extend information reach.
 - 3.4 Expand the use of digital tools to share programs, events and success stories.
 - 3.5 Review and strengthen Council's communication methods for clarity and accessibility.
-

What this means for the community:

-  Clear, accessible information about local opportunities supports informed decision making.
 -  Increased awareness of opportunities across different demographics and related groups.
 -  Increased collaboration and consistency of information in community sport and active recreation.
-

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4: PARTNERSHIPS

Strengthen collaboration to expand participation.

Strong outcomes in community sport and active recreation are already being achieved across Horsham. However, opportunities exist to improve coordination so services aren't delivered in isolation, and shared objectives may be achieved. Strengthening partnerships with government agencies, State Sporting Associations, regional sport bodies, community organisations and land managers will support more coordinated planning and delivery. This will improve the quality and accessibility of physical activity environments, enable more diverse and inclusive programming and maximise the impact of investment.

Effective collaboration will also support increased funding and resource sharing, build a more sustainable network of facilities and programs, clarify Council's leadership and facilitation role, and strengthen support for volunteers and community organisations through training, advocacy and shared services.



Working with State Sporting Associations to improve facilities and participation

Council partners with State Sporting Associations (SSAs) such as AFL Victoria, Cricket Victoria, Tennis Victoria, Football Victoria and Netball Victoria to plan and advocate for facility upgrades and participation initiatives. These partnerships:

- Align local infrastructure with State standards
- Support growth in women's, girls' and junior participation
- Strengthen funding submissions and business cases
- Clarify roles between Council, clubs and governing bodies

This collaborative approach improves the quality, safety and inclusiveness of community sport environments. Aligning local delivery with State policy and standards helps to ensure facilities and programs better support current and future participation needs.

What Council will focus on:

- 4.1 Formalise partnerships with State Sporting Associations (SSAs) to support and deliver localised programming, coach education, regional events and facility investment.
 - 4.2 Collaborate with local schools and health agencies to support broader messaging and delivery of active recreation and physical activity opportunities.
 - 4.3 Build alliances with local sport and recreation organisations to deliver shared programs and related outcomes.
 - 4.4 Collaborate with agencies managing Crown, private and education land to optimise facility use and prioritise shared infrastructure investment.
 - 4.5 Support clubs and volunteers through training, governance and resource sharing via the Regional Sports Assembly network.
 - 4.6 Leverage partnerships for shared funding and coordinated investment in priority action delivery.
-

What this means for the community:

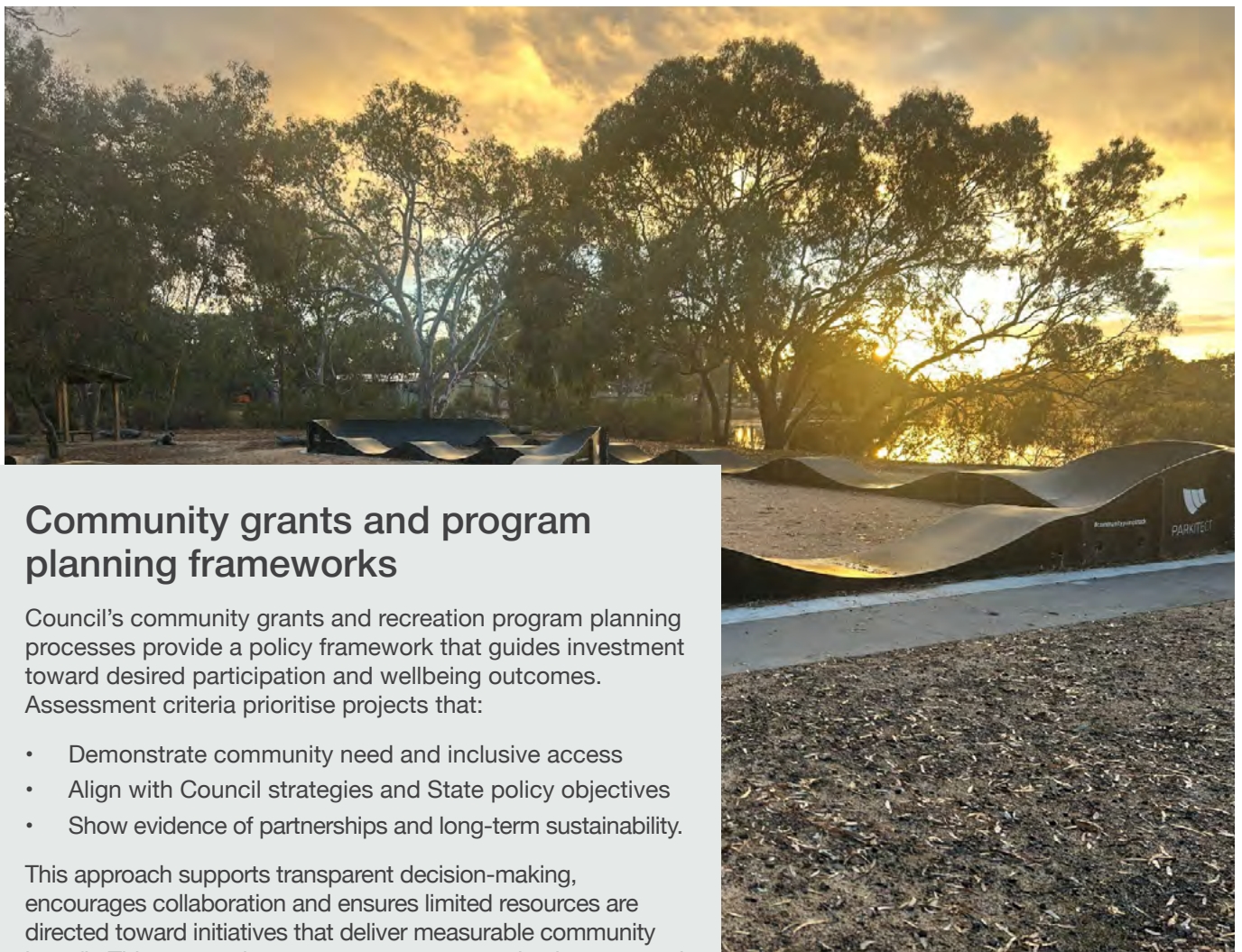
-  A sustainable and optimised network of sport and recreation facilities accessible to deliver a range of programs.
 -  Increased funding and resource-sharing opportunities.
 -  Stronger local delivery through skilled and supported volunteer networks.
 -  An engaged network of stakeholders that are experienced in specific roles and functions.
-

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5: POLICY & PLANNING

Implement planning and policy measures to guide informed decision-making.

A coordinated policy framework will support the activation and upgrade of infrastructure, clarify roles and partnerships, and guide the expansion of programs and services. Embedding co-design principles in site, facility and program planning will ensure outcomes respond to community needs and support inclusive participation.

A strategic approach will align local priorities with State Government policy directions, use data and evidence to guide investment, and promote equitable access, collaborative partnerships and responsible resourcing. Together, this will support improved community liveability and sustainable delivery of active recreation and community sport across the Horsham municipality.



Community grants and program planning frameworks

Council's community grants and recreation program planning processes provide a policy framework that guides investment toward desired participation and wellbeing outcomes.

Assessment criteria prioritise projects that:

- Demonstrate community need and inclusive access
- Align with Council strategies and State policy objectives
- Show evidence of partnerships and long-term sustainability.

This approach supports transparent decision-making, encourages collaboration and ensures limited resources are directed toward initiatives that deliver measurable community benefit. This approach ensures program expansion is supported and is guided by policy, evidence and clear outcomes.

What Council will focus on:

- 5.1 Ensure a strategic approach that links planning, asset management and resource allocation.
 - 5.2 Integrate Universal, Inclusive and Environmentally Sustainable Design principles into all relevant active recreation and community sport delivery.
 - 5.3 Strengthen participation data collection and monitoring to inform policy and prioritisation.
For example: working with SSAs to gather and analyse annual or seasonal registration data.
 - 5.4 Align local policy with state and national sport and active recreation frameworks.
For example: participate in state and regional sport planning projects.
 - 5.5 Apply transparent tenure and access agreements to Council venues to ensure equity and flexibility of use.
 - 5.6 Continue to facilitate planning and investment of a multi-sport indoor stadium within Horsham in order to support a broader range of participation options.
-

What this means for the community:

-  A coherent, evidence driven approach to activity planning and facility renewal.
 -  Efficient, equitable and sustainable management of community assets.
 -  Consistent decision making that supports strategic priorities and community outcomes..
 -  Improved alignment with Victorian Government initiatives and funding opportunities.
-

COUNCIL'S ROLE

Horsham Rural City Council (HRCC) supports our community in different ways and in different roles. Council has a crucial leadership role in supporting the planning, provision, and management of community facilities and public spaces that support options for active living.

In partnership with community providers and stakeholders within the active recreation and community sporting sector, HRCC can support and advocate for services, facilities and management options that increase participation outcomes and that reflect the diversity of our community.

The range of roles Council may deliver are defined below.

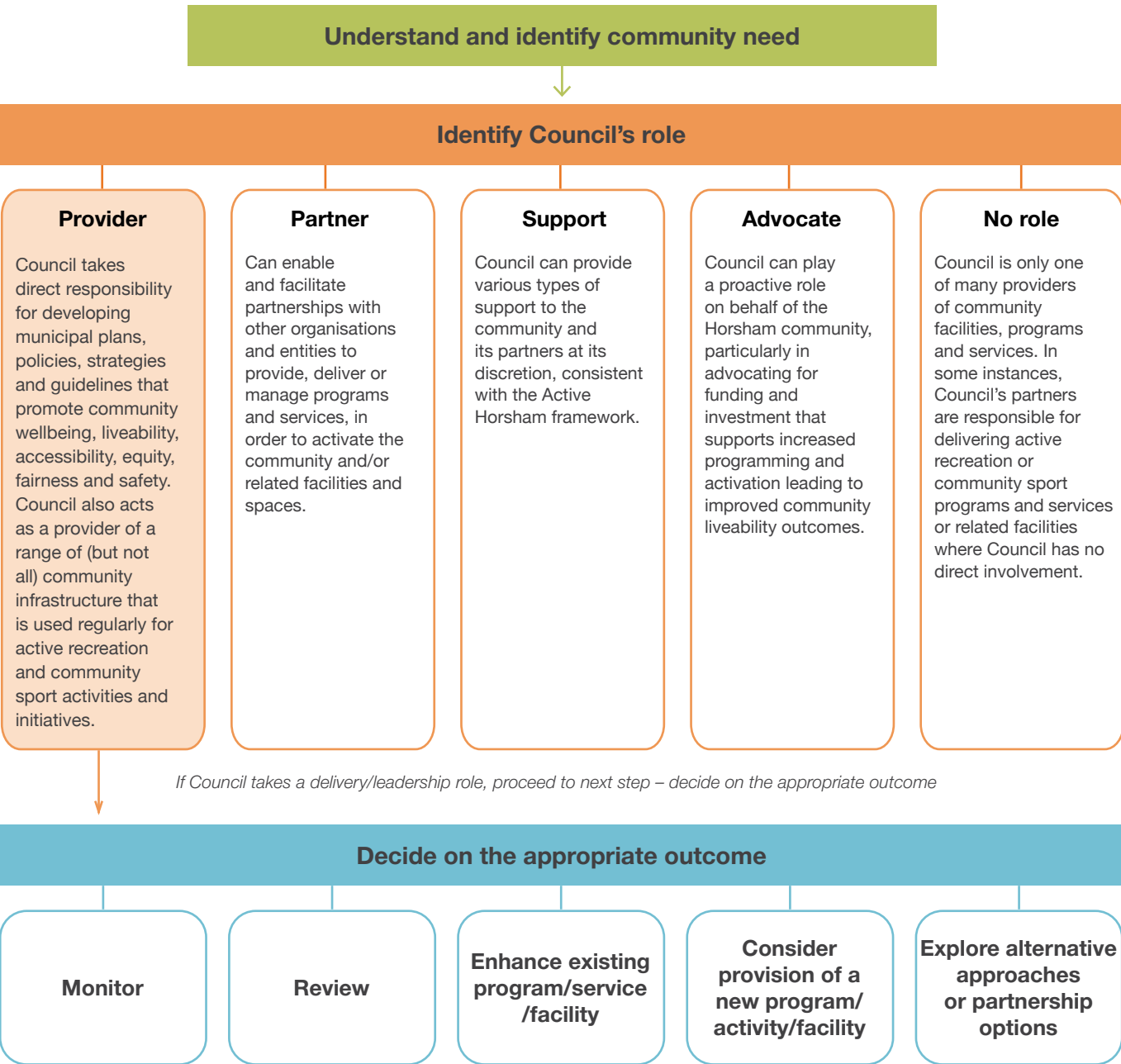
COUNCIL'S ROLE	
PROVIDER	Council takes direct responsibility for developing municipal plans, policies, strategies and guidelines that promote community wellbeing, liveability, accessibility, equity, fairness and safety. Council also acts as a provider of a range of (but not all) community infrastructure that is used regularly for active recreation and community sport activities and initiatives.
PARTNER	Council can enable and facilitate partnerships with other organisations and entities to deliver and manage programs and services that activate the community and maximise the use of facilities and spaces. Partnerships may include government agencies and departments, the not-for-profit sector, private providers, state or other sporting bodies, education providers and social enterprise.
SUPPORTER	Council may provide various types of support to the community and its partners to reflect strategic outcomes consistent with the Active Horsham framework. This may include assistance with promoting specific programs, activities and services, providing funding assistance through grant programs (where possible) or in-principle support of initiatives or making spaces or facilities available that activate or optimise their use.
ADVOCATE	Council may play a proactive role on behalf of the Horsham community, particularly in advocating for funding and investment that supports increased programming and activation leading to improved community liveability outcomes. This may include advocating to government for facility investment and improvements, advocating to local providers for the introduction of new sports or programs or advocating to state sporting bodies to attract local or regional events.
NO ROLE	Council is only one of many providers of community facilities, programs and services. In some instances, Council's partners are responsible for delivering active recreation or community sport programs and services or related facilities where Council has no direct involvement.

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Best practice decision making is grounded in an evidence-based approach and understanding of community needs, however planning for community needs can often be influenced by a range of external factors, many of which may fall outside annual budget and available resources.

To ensure that priorities and future demands arising from these different influences align with the five strategic priorities set out in the Strategy, Council will consider the following decision-making process in determining the best approach(es) to community programming, activation and opportunity creation.

Figure 4. Decision-making process



IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

The Active Horsham Strategy and preceding strategic framework will be underpinned by a series of key operational actions.

Annual action planning will provide Council with direction and guidance to implement the strategic priorities outlined within this document. Action plans will be supported by a prioritised annual plan that aligns with Council’s budgetary processes.

Collaboration across Council and with external partners and stakeholders will be required to confirm that annual priorities align with current policy and shared resources can be allocated.

Planning will focus on an initial short term period 2026-2030. Following a formal 5-year (mid point) review to check progress, planning for the period 2031-2035 will be considered.

The identification of key measures will be developed to identify key areas of success and where areas for further focus might be required. A rating system will identify actions within the annual plan that are complete, on track or delayed.

Annual reviews will be undertaken by Council officers to evaluate the progress made within each of the strategic priority areas.

Annual reporting will consider activity trends, participation levels, population and demographic change, Council spending and investment attraction levels.

Opportunities for improvement will be identified to inform the development of the next action plan cycle to ensure actions remain relevant for continued investment by Council over the life of the Active Horsham Strategy.

Figure 5. Strategy implementation and monitoring timeline



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT



WHY A STRATEGIC APPROACH IS NEEDED

Horsham's changing population, health profile and socio-economic conditions present both challenges and opportunities for increasing participation in active recreation and community sport. A strategic, coordinated approach is required to respond to these influences and ensure all communities can be active, healthy and remain connected.

Changing demographics and participation needs

Population change across the municipality is reshaping demand for sport and recreation. Growth in culturally diverse communities is bringing new expectations and interests, increasing the need for inclusive, flexible and culturally responsive opportunities.

Shifts within the 0–19 age group highlight the need to review introductory sport pathways and ensure competitive structures remain appropriate and sustainable, while growth in the 20–59 cohort is driving demand for social sport, informal recreation and flexible participation options that better align with work and family commitments.

Physical activity levels below state averages

Data from the Victorian Population Health Survey (2023) reveals that nearly one in five Horsham residents (19.5%) undertake less than the recommended 150 minutes of physical activity per week - higher than the Victorian average.

Only 32.5% of residents meet recommended vigorous activity levels, placing Horsham below state benchmarks. While almost half of residents undertake some form of activity, many are not active enough to achieve optimal health outcomes.

These trends highlight the opportunity to broaden inclusive, low-barrier programs that support people to increase both the frequency and intensity of physical activity.

Rising health risks and an ageing population

Horsham's prevalence of long-term health conditions broadly mirrors regional Victoria, but rates of arthritis, cancer, heart disease and stroke are higher than average. Obesity is a particular concern, with Horsham recording the highest Class I obesity rate in the region (22.5%) and elevated Class II obesity levels.

As the population continues to age, these indicators reinforce the importance of strategically promoting physical activity, everyday movement and preventative health through accessible facilities, programs and supportive environments.

Socio-Economic influences on participation

Socio-economic factors play a significant role in shaping participation. While Horsham has a relatively even income distribution compared with neighbouring LGAs, cost remains a key barrier - particularly for families under financial pressure and residents living outside the Horsham township, where travel adds to participation costs.

SEIFA data reveals that pockets of significant disadvantage exist, particularly in Horsham North and the Horsham Central Activity District (CAD). The statewide SEIFA index places Horsham in the 2nd decile of need. Targeted, affordable and locally accessible opportunities are required to support equitable participation.

Settlement patterns and facility distribution

Settlement patterns further influence how community sport and active recreation opportunities should be planned and delivered. Approximately 75% of residents live in the Horsham township, which functions as the municipality's primary service hub, with notable residential growth occurring in both Horsham East and Haven.

These trends, combined with practical 30-minute travel catchments, support a distributed 'hub-and-spoke' approach to facility provision. Under this model, major regional facilities will continue to be primarily based in Horsham, with an extended network of activity provided through partnerships with surrounding LGAs, different land managers and private providers.

Strategic, complementary sport and active recreation opportunities will continue to be delivered by HRCC in surrounding towns and rural communities.

The importance of inclusive activation and strategic investment

AusPlay data reveals that First Nations people, people with disability, people on low incomes and those with lower levels of formal education are generally less active than the broader Victorian population. While participation barriers vary, under-represented groups typically require additional, targeted support to participate in active recreation and community sport.

A strong focus on inclusive activation opportunities is essential to improving participation outcomes. Partnerships with community and health agencies, co-design of public spaces and programs, and targeted engagement with under-represented groups can enhance safety, accessibility and community ownership, supporting more equitable participation across Horsham and the broader municipality.

The case for a strategic response

Together, these influences highlight the need for a clear, evidence-based strategy to guide planning, investment and delivery.

A strategic approach enables Council and its partners to respond to changing community needs, reduce participation barriers, support better health outcomes and ensure facilities and programs are delivered in a coordinated, equitable and sustainable way – in-line with available resources.

STATISTICAL INDICATORS OF ACTIVITY DEMAND

Participation in, or demand for, specific activities is often influenced by a series of factors that guide choice and/or decision making.

Key influences identified on pages 28 and 29 present some localised factors for Horsham residents. The availability of specific programs and activities, quality of and access to facilities, travel distance, cost and many other micro-economic factors also play a role in choosing an activity to participate in.

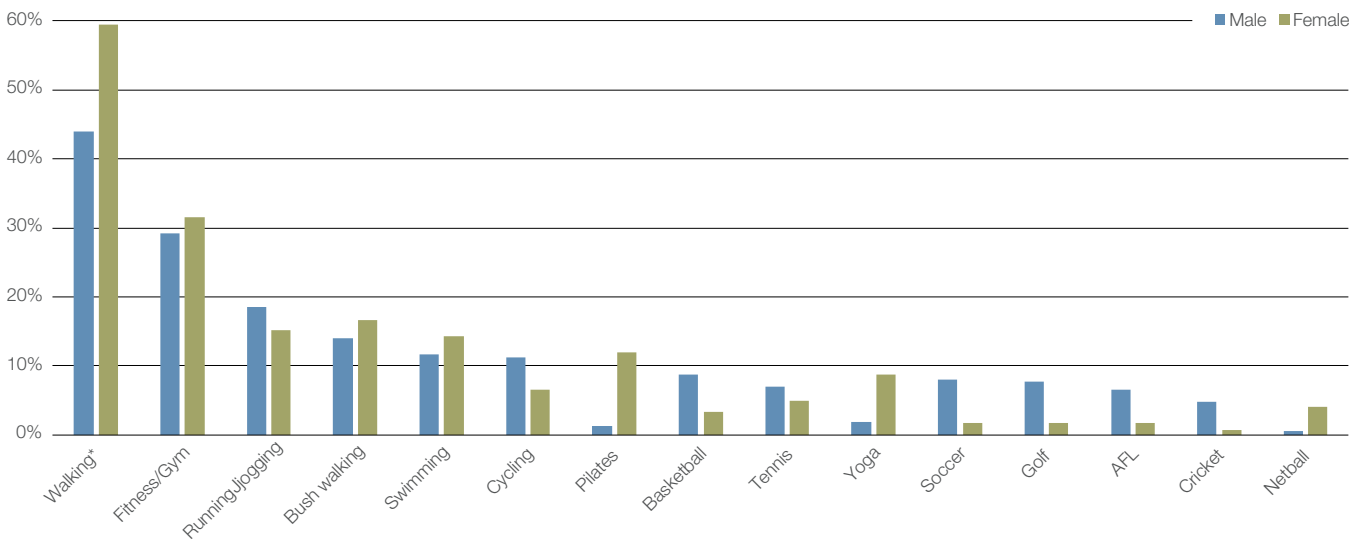
Key indicators of the future demand for specific activities, sports or programs can also be derived from population numbers and projected change, demographic characteristics (such as age or gender) or from historical or broader activity trends.

The Australian Government’s participation survey, AusPlay, collects data on sport and physical activities providing an insight into the patterns of participation across the country.

The following graphs provide a summary of the Top 15 activities undertaken by Victorians from January 2024 to December 2024. The Top 15 activities do not take into account local access to activities or unique geographical features available within HRCC, but are a broad representation of current trends and likely preferences.

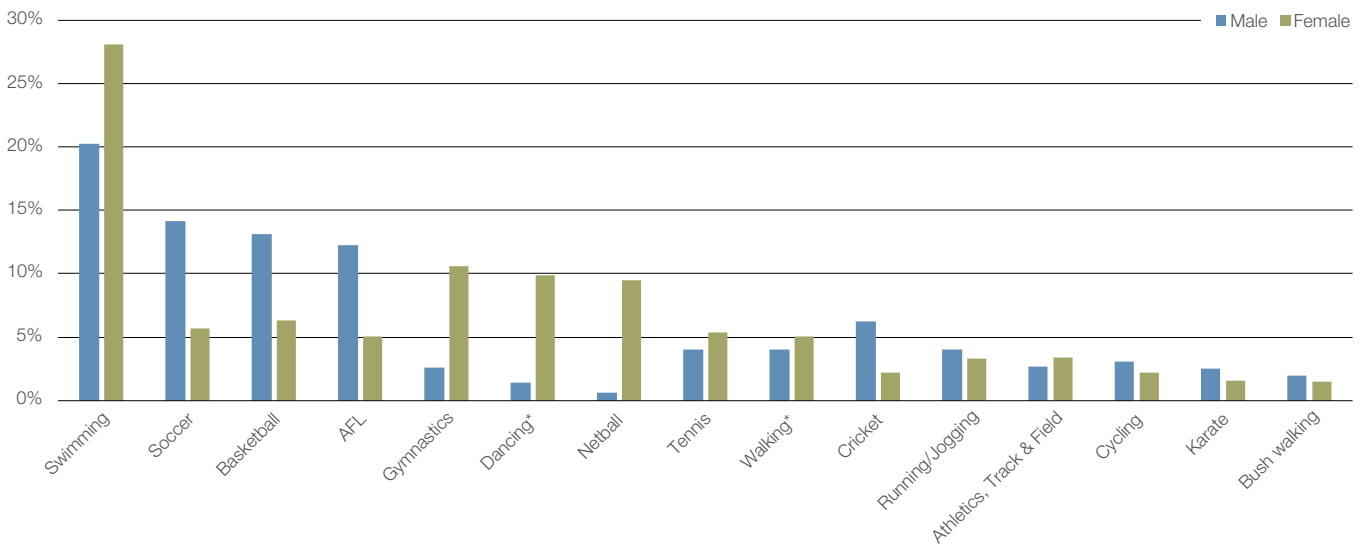
AusPlay participation data highlights clear differences in activity preferences between adults and children, and between males and females. This reinforces the need for a balanced approach that supports people of different ages and genders to participate in active recreation and organised sport across the municipality.

Figure 6. Victorian Participation by Adults (aged 15+) – January 2024 to December 2025 (AusPlay)



*Denotes “recreational format” of activity

Figure 7. Victorian Participation by Children (aged 14 & under) – January 2024 to December 2025 (AusPlay)



*Denotes “recreational format” of activity

Adults (15+ years) participation preferences

Adult participation is dominated by informal, non-club-based activities, particularly walking and fitness/gym activities. Walking is the most popular activity for both males and females, with participation notably higher among women. Fitness and gym-based activities are also highly ranked for both genders, reflecting demand for flexible, self-directed participation options.

Gender differences are evident across several activities. Women participate more strongly in walking, Pilates, yoga, swimming and bush walking, while men show higher participation in traditional club-based sports such as AFL, cricket, soccer and basketball.

These patterns indicate that adult participation is increasingly shaped by lifestyle flexibility, health and wellbeing motivations, and access to informal spaces rather than formal competition.

Children’s (14 and under) participation preferences

Children’s participation shows a stronger emphasis on organised, club-based sport, with swimming, soccer, basketball and AFL featuring prominently. Boys dominate participation in most of the top activities, particularly soccer, basketball, AFL and cricket. In contrast, girls demonstrate stronger participation in swimming, gymnastics, dance and netball, highlighting the current existence of early gender-based preferences and pathways.

Walking and running appear less prominent for children compared with adults, reflecting a greater reliance on structured programs, clubs and facilities during childhood years.

Gender-Based differences across life stages

The contrast between adults and children highlights a shift over stages of life - from structured sport in childhood to more informal and fitness-focused activity in adulthood.

Gender differences exist across both cohorts, with females consistently showing higher participation in wellness and non-competitive activities, while males maintain stronger engagement in traditional competitive sports.

These trends reinforce the importance of age-stage and inclusive planning, ensuring facilities, programs and scheduling support equitable access, fair access opportunities to participate in different sports and activities, and evolving preferences across life stages.

Considerations for Active Horsham

All 15 major sports and activities identified in AusPlay data are available across the HRCC municipality. This foundation provides opportunities to strengthen participation pathways and address gaps in access, programming and activation.

The data reinforces the need to balance investment in traditional sporting infrastructure and spaces that support walking, fitness, swimming and social recreation.

Supporting flexible participation models, inclusive programming and multi-use facilities is critical to responding to these participation patterns and meeting future demand across Horsham's diverse communities.

COMMUNITY PROFILE



Population today

(as of 2025, Profile. Id)

20,171

The population of Horsham Rural City Council in 2025

24.9%

are aged 19 years and under

29.4%

are aged 60+ years

2%

Projected growth from 2025 to 2035, with 54% of growth being in the 70+ age group

50/50

Gender split



Health

(2023 Victorian Population Health Survey; 2021 ABS Census)

Only 32.5%

of residents meet recommended vigorous activity levels, placing Horsham below state benchmarks

22.5%

of people have Class 1 obesity levels (the highest level of all LGAs in the region)

7.6%

of people have a long-term health condition



Settlement

(as of 2025, Profile. Id and 2021 ABS Census)

75%

live within the Horsham township

16%

residential growth experienced recently in Horsham East and 9% in Haven

24.5%

of households include families with children

7.1%

of the population were born overseas (Regional Victorian average is 12.4%)



Socio-economics

(2021 ABS Census)

58%

of employed people work full time

35%

of employed people work part time

13.4%

of Horsham households earn more than \$3,000 per week (considered high-income earners)

26%

of households were low-income households (consistent with regional Victorian average)

COMMUNITY INFLUENCES ON ACTIVITY DEMAND

Community-level data and engagement provide important insights into how, where and why people in Horsham participate in active recreation and community sport. Survey responses, stakeholder input and participation data reveal activity levels with clear preferences for flexible, accessible and health-focused opportunities.

Community survey insights

The community survey (108 responses) conducted as part of Active Horsham development indicated high levels of participation in active recreation and community sport by respondents, with 97% of respondents participating in some form of activity.

Respondents identified preferences for individual or small-group activities, including walking, hiking, running and climbing (rock), followed by social recreation (walking or cycling groups). Organised sport, and structured programs such as gym, dance, yoga and fitness classes were also identified.

Most respondents reported participating between 1-3 times per week, with women more likely than men to be active daily.

Activity patterns broadly align with Victorian AusPlay trends, with climbing emerging as a locally distinctive activity, reflecting Horsham's proximity to the Grampians and Mt Arapiles.

Key locations for activity included outdoor sporting fields and courts, walking and running trails, and cycling networks. Gender-based differences were evident in survey responses: men were more likely to use formal sporting facilities and bike paths, while women showed a stronger preference for exercising at home or in informal outdoor settings such as walking, running and hiking trails.

Motivations for participation were primarily driven by physical health, followed by mental wellbeing and social connection, reinforcing the importance of providing health-focused and socially supportive activity opportunities across the municipality.

Stakeholder analysis

Stakeholder analysis, including findings from the *Wimmera Regional Multi-sport Precinct Feasibility Study (2023)*, identified approximately 4,650 registered participants across 13 sports within Horsham Rural City in 2021. These figures represent around 25% of the municipal population, noting that participation includes non-residents and individuals participating in multiple sports.

Participation across HRCC was reported as relatively stable between 2016 and 2021, with clubs across major sports - including AFL, netball, cricket, tennis, swimming and volleyball - reporting similar trends. While overall stability is positive, stakeholders highlighted emerging challenges, including fluctuating participation in specific age cohorts, the sustainability of higher-level competition pathways, and the need to increase female participation across several sports.

Locational influences

AusPlay data confirms that adults most commonly participate in sport and recreation in public spaces (63%), followed by the home, gym and fitness centres, free community facilities and sports club facilities. These findings closely reflect responses from the HRCC community survey.

Children participate in sport and active recreation in different locations to adults, with greater reliance on sports club facilities, gym and fitness centres, private or commercial premises, and education facilities. Public spaces and home-based activity play a smaller role for children, reflecting the importance of structured programs, clubs and facilities in supporting participation for younger age groups.

Facility influences

Across the Horsham municipality a broad mix of formal and informal recreation opportunities and an extensive network of parks and open spaces is available.

Horsham Council provides and manages a wide range of traditional sporting facilities across major sports, complemented by additional venues on Crown and private land that expand opportunities for activities such as gymnastics, shooting, archery, squash and table tennis.

Natural assets - including the Wimmera River corridor, Green Lake and Taylor's Lake - play a critical role in supporting informal recreation opportunities such as walking, running, cycling, skating, angling and water-based activities.

The Horsham Aquatic Centre functions as a key hub for leisure, fitness and wellbeing, while community halls and school facilities provide additional capacity for community sport and recreation.

Extending the multi-use of facilities, flexible programming and shared access arrangements will create options that respond to changing participation preferences and will optimise the use and maximise the value of existing assets across the Horsham municipality.

GLOSSARY

The following terms, acronyms and phrases have been used throughout this report.

Term/Acronym	Description or definition
Active Recreation	Activities engaged in for the purpose of relaxation, health and wellbeing or enjoyment with the primary activity requiring physical exertion. Active recreation activities can be individually driven or motivated or facilitated by a formalised group or organisation.
AusPlay	The Australian Government's participation survey, AusPlay, collects data on sport and physical activities providing an insight into the patterns of participation across the country.
DEECA	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action –referred to when describing land or facility ownership or management status.
Fair Access (Policy)	The Fair Access Policy Roadmap aims to develop a state-wide foundation for gender equitable access to, and use of, community sports infrastructure for women and girls, to support participation in community sport and active recreation across Victoria.
HRCC	Horsham Rural City Council –acronym use throughout the strategy when referring to Council.
Passive recreation	Passive recreation refers to recreational activities that are generally initiated by individuals and are non-competitive, such as picnicking, bird watching, kite flying etc.
Peak Sporting Organisation	Generally refers to a regional level organisation responsible for the administration of local competition, fixturing, scheduling and player registration. For example: Horsham District Football Netball League.
SEIFA	The SEIFA Index (Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas across Australia) combines ABS Census data such as income, education, employment, occupation, housing and family structure to summarise the socio-economic characteristics of an area.
SSA	State Sporting Association -Generally refers to a state level sporting organisation responsible for the governance of a specific sport within Victoria, including support for club and program development and promotion. For example: Tennis Victoria.



