



# RESPOND Wodonga-Albury Brains Trust

A case study from Gateway Health's Health Promotion Team

<p><b>Aim</b></p>	<p>To establish a flexible governance model that acts as a 'think tank' and is representative of the community, well connected and frank in their feedback and discussion.</p>
<p><b>Rationale</b></p>	<p>By utilising the skills, experience of community connections at key points will lead to changes in thinking and speed up the rollout of RESPOND Wodonga.</p>
<p><b>Partnerships</b></p>	<p>Representatives from financial sector, business, health, disability, education, council, ACCHO, LGBTIQ+ and youth sectors. Including: Albury City Council, Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service, Aspire Support Service, Belvoir Special Developmental School, Border Trust, City of Wodonga, Gateway Health, Gateway Health Gender Service, Hume Bank, Wodonga Senior Secondary College, Wodonga Primary School, Transcend Australia</p>
<p><b>Links to state policy/initiatives</b></p>	<p>RESPOND – Deakin University, Gateway Health CH-HP Plan 2022-2025</p>
<p><b>Resources</b></p>	<p>Gateway Health's Health Promotion team</p>
<p><b>Outcomes</b></p>	<p>Brains Trust members feel confident in providing feedback to GH HP team about RESPOND actions and thinking.          Brains Trust members provide new community connections to RESPOND team.          GH HP team report that meeting/s with Brains Trust has led to changes of thinking, strategy and actions in RESPOND project.          GH HP team report that RESPOND networks have increased due to connections of Brains Trust members.</p>

## Objectives

1. Brains Trust model established by November 2022.
2. Recruitment of members according to established criteria by October 2022.
3. Brains Trust meeting organised at points in time i.e. when key pieces of RESPOND Wodonga-Albury work requiring brains trust feedback and recommendations are required.

## Overview: RESPOND project

RESPOND (Reflexive Evidence and Systems interventions to Prevent Obesity and Non-communicable Disease) is a National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) funded Partnership Project Grant from 2018 to 2023 (5 years), led by Professor Steve Allender.

RESPOND is a shared community approach to healthy children. Gateway Health is a lead partner in the RESPOND Albury Wodonga, RESPOND Alpine and RESPOND Wangaratta initiatives. RESPOND aims to create a shared community response to support and maintain children's health and wellbeing through two key strategies:

- Engage with community to identify factors that impact children's health and wellbeing;
- Empower the community to lead actions which improve the health and wellbeing of children and the wider community.

The RESPOND initiatives use a systems-based approach, and utilises a governance structure made up of key local stakeholders.

### The story

In 2019 RESPOND Wodonga Albury was a step 1 community in the rollout of RESPOND. Both Bushfires and COVID-19 lockdowns, along with schools implementing online learning and many workplaces moving to work from home, severely restricted the capacity to progress the community actions, including a governance model.

In 2022, informed by reflecting on the work so far, the anthropometric data collected as part of RESPOND and using an equity lens, it was decided that instead of establishing a formal ongoing structure we set up a 'Brains Trust'.

A Brains Trust would be an informal group of community champions who had been involved in the project, or could be involved in the future, to meet occasionally to provide frank and fearless advice and recommendations to the health promotion team who are guiding RESPOND Wodonga.

By utilising the skills, experience and community connections of the community champions at key points of the initiative, we could reenergise RESPOND Wodonga-Albury and ensure that community voices were guiding the direction and implementation of the initiative.

## What did we achieve?

Developed a program logic for the brains trust model (purpose, rationale, selection and recruitment of members, resources, activities, expected outputs, outcomes and impacts)

Identified a group of prospective members from key organisations who had demonstrated an ongoing interest in the project and its outcomes, had a high level of decision-making capacity in their current roles, were well connected in the community beyond their jobs, had connected to other Gateway Health – health promotion activities, and had demonstrated they were confident and capable of providing frank and fearless advice

Recruited eight Brains Trust members who represented the following sectors: disability, schools, business, community foundation, Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations, councils, youth and LGBTIQ+

The first meeting of the RESPOND Brains Trust was held in late 2022. Issues discussed included community advocacy training and recruitment, sleep health seminars- planning, promotion and selection of local experts.

## What difference did we make in the community?

The make-up of the brains trust is more reflective of the community than previous engagement as part of RESPOND. We were able to utilise the GH HP teams professional and personal networks to identify and recruit with a broader equity lens

The feedback of the RESPOND Wodonga Brains Trust has led to changes in RESPOND program design, community engagement strategies, promotion and marketing of activities and access to new networks. It has also led to a better understanding between Brains Trust members of each other's organisation's activity and programs and potential partnerships.

Specific activities that have been improved by the input of the RESPOND Wodonga Brains Trust include the PLAY, community advocacy workshop and sleep health events.

The Brains Trust played a critical role in shaping the direction and targeting of the Advocacy Workshops. The group helped define the parameters of the workshops, the target audience, a 'triage' process, to ensure we had the right people attending, as well as helping to recruit participants to the training.

Strong feedback from the group emphasised how important the lived experience voice was, and in response to this, a series of local advocate expert panels are planned to compliment the ongoing mentoring component of the advocacy training.

## Lessons learnt

Feedback from the Brains Trust has been positive, citing the benefit of coming together and learning more about what organisation locally are doing as well as contributing to RESPOND Wodonga-Albury community led initiatives.

For Gateway Health as project lead for RESPOND Wodonga the approach to a less traditional governance model has meant that new voices and thinking have given new impetus to the roll out of the RESPOND Wodonga-Albury action plan.

A more formal model with a term of reference and an MoU may in the future be the right governance model for RESPOND Wodonga-Albury but at this point in time the Brains Trust model is ideal.

The Brains Trust model's flexibility and adaptability means that members meet on a needs basis only and recognises and facilitates members individual experience, knowledge, connections and skills not just their organisations. In the life of RESPOND Albury Wodonga this approach better suits our local environment.

"I have really enjoyed being involved and hearing about what others are doing locally, so thank you."

Brains Trust Member

## Recommendations and next steps

We will continue to meet and partner with the Brains Trust as needed. The next meeting is planned for October 2023 and will include discussion on the next stage activities: RESPOND Wodonga activity funding model, community advocacy mentoring program and school-based group model building workshops. We will also be using a partnership analysis tool to map existing connection and new connections made as a result of the Brains Trust.