



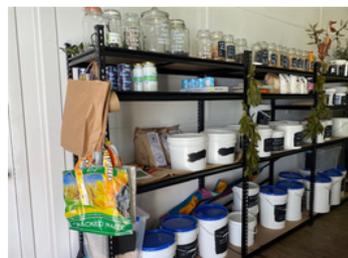
Supporting community-led food access initiatives

A case study from Gateway Health's Health Promotion Team

Aim	To support community-led food access initiatives in identified food desert areas that met local needs and were sustainable.
Rationale	Improving access to affordable, nutritious food is a key factor in supporting our communities' health & wellbeing. A number of 'food desert' areas were identified across the Rural City of Wangaratta (RCoW) in previous mapping conducted - communities in these food desert areas may have poorer access to affordable, nutritious food due to distance, lack of transport or residents being on a low income. Gateway Health has been working with local community members and organisations in several 'food desert' areas to assist in establishing community food initiatives that could increase access to nutritious food locally.
Partnerships	Community members from identified food desert areas, Springhurst Primary School, King Valley Learning Exchange (neighbourhood House), Wangaratta Community Garden, Sustainable King Valley Inc., Rural City of Wangaratta, Open Door Neighbourhood House, Wangaratta Landcare & Sustainability Network
Links to state policy/initiatives	<u>North East Local Food Strategy</u> , <u>Vic Health Food System Strategy - Towards a healthy, regenerative and equitable food system in Victoria</u>
Resources	<u>Healthy Food Connect model</u> , <u>Vic Health Local Government Partnership (Food Systems Module)</u>
Outcomes	For community members to have access to affordable, nutritious food.

Objectives

- To engage with community members and community organisations in identified food desert areas to see if there was interest in establishing a food access initiative.
- To provide support and resources to establish a community food access initiative that met community need and was likely to be sustainable.



The story

Three communities/residential areas that had been identified as being in 'food desert' areas within the RCoW were chosen as 'pilot' communities that the Gateway Health, Health Promotion Team, planned to work with. Communities in these food desert areas may have poorer access to affordable, nutritious food due to distance, lack of transport or residents being on a low income.

Community engagement was undertaken through partnering with local neighbourhood houses, direct contact with a local school, word-of-mouth and letter box flyer drops.

Support was provided to communities in a variety of ways including, providing small grants, assisting with grant applications, connecting them with resources, organisations or communities to share learnings, ideas and resources.

One community member engaged quickly and was connected with the local neighbourhood house, another community group sought support to establish their community food initiative. They were provided a small grant and were able to quickly progress.

A local school was engaged quickly and also provided a small grant to progress. Engagement in the third community took much longer and, in the end, Gateway Health partnered with local council staff to support a Community Garden Open Day in a residential area nearby.

A fourth community (also in a food desert area) then approached Gateway Health (word-of-mouth!) for support to identify and apply for a grant (successfully) to establish a local 'food hub'.

What difference did we make in the community

Moyhu Food Share was officially launched in December 2021. A community Facebook group is continuing to grow and now has 151 members who regularly swap food growing tips, ideas and produce locally. Some group members also provide excess produce to the community food pantry at the local neighbourhood house.

A wicking bed food growing garden was re-established and expanded at Springhurst Primary School. Produce grown in the garden is used in school cooking programs and sometimes shared with school families. Whilst the garden is still operating it has remained a school initiative rather than a community initiative.

The Wangaratta Community Garden held an open day in March 2022 to showcase the garden facilities and encourage new members to join the garden. Over 40 community members attended the Open Day and 12 people signed up to receive more information about getting involved in the garden. Since then, the Wangaratta Community Garden received a Vic Health grant to run food growing workshops for young people and families. This community engagement has led to the establishment of a weekly playgroup at the garden and encouraged more garden members. The Community Garden are keen to hold more community events around growing and sharing local produce.

The Sustainable King Valley Food Hub was established at Cheshunt Hall and launched in March 2022. It began with a storage area and 'store front', it now has 37 memberships servicing 115 people. The food hub is open twice a month to the community to stock up on locally sourced bulk goods/produce and share home grown produce. The food hub has become an important gathering place for community members to connect and has hosted community events such as pasta making, sustainable living workshops, wicking bed workshops and movie nights. The volunteer food hub coordinator is now looking into options to ensure the food hub model is sustainable into the future.

Gateway Health is part of the Wangaratta Community Food For All network which recently collated information about all the local community food initiatives across the RCoW that is now included in a map on the RCoW website. The aim of the maps is to provide up-to-date information to community members about where they can access food in their community, how they can get involved in community food initiatives and to share learnings and resources. The link to the community food maps is [here](#).

Evaluation and lessons learnt

Enablers	Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning about and connecting with other communities that had established something similar (E.g., phone calls/emails to find out how they had gone about it)• Providing small grants or helping to write grant applications to support the initiative – a small amount of money can go a long way!• Having a local community organisation to support the initiative (e.g., neighbourhood house, community group, community garden, school)• Being able to provide support to community members when they needed it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Having only one or two community members involved can impact sustainability and community engagement as they are usually volunteering their time, which may be limited.

Recommendations and next steps

A community event is being organised by the Wangaratta Community Food For All network in October 2023 to celebrate all the local community food initiatives. It will be an opportunity to launch the community food maps, hear from community members/organisations that run these community food initiatives and share knowledge and learnings. The RCoW are planning to establish a local food coalition (as identified in the Food Systems Module in the VicHealth Local Government Partnership) and will be presenting about this and asking for interest at the event. It is hoped that the establishment of a local food coalition will support communities and organisations to all work together in a more connected, coordinated way into the future.

Gateway Health have built into our health promotion planning, the need to continue to support these community-led initiatives. Now that they are established, they often only need irregular support and will make contact as needed. Gateway Health recently held a community workshop around childhood health and wellbeing, many of the community members involved with the food access initiatives attended and are now working with us on other local projects.

Working with our communities in these food desert areas was successful but did not engage some of our community members that we think are also likely to be impacted by lack of access to affordable, nutritious foods. The Gateway Health, Health Promotion team are planning to engage with local housing organisations and residents that live in public/social housing over the next twelve months to identify what food access issues they may face, and if they are interested in working together to co-design community food access initiatives that meet their needs