



## Bringing food system stakeholders together using a collective impact approach

A case study from Gateway Health's Health Promotion Team

<b>Aim</b>	For community members/groups and local agencies to work more collaboratively in the food systems space across the Rural City of Wangaratta.
<b>Rationale</b>	<p>Gateway Health has worked with many different community members, community groups and organisations working in the food systems space in different ways across the Rural City of Wangaratta. Whilst positive impacts have been achieved in different geographical locations and in different settings, many of the initiatives aren't aware of each other or of opportunities to work together. Engagement with some settings had also been heavily impacted by COVID-19, such as schools and some community groups. We recognised the need to bring all the stakeholders together using a collective impact approach and worked in partnership with our local Council to work towards this.</p> <p>Collective impact can be defined as 'a network of community members, organisations, and institutions who advance equity by learning together, aligning, and integrating their actions to achieve population and systems level change'. <a href="https://collectiveimpactforum.org/what-is-collective-impact/">https://collectiveimpactforum.org/what-is-collective-impact/</a></p> <p>The collective impact framework identifies five conditions including starting with a common agenda, establishing shared measures, fostering mutually reinforcing activities, encouraging continuous communication and a strong backbone support (as well as incorporating equity practices throughout). The collective impact framework and dimensions have proven useful tools to guide the process of bringing community and stakeholders together in the food system space.</p>
<b>Partnerships</b>	<p>Rural City of Wangaratta  Open Door Neighbourhood House  Wangaratta Landcare &amp; Sustainability Network  Members of the RCoW Sustainable Food Alliance</p>

<b>Links to local policy/ initiatives</b>	<p>Wangaratta Community Food Maps  <a href="https://www.wangaratta.vic.gov.au/Residents/Community-Projects/Community-Food">https://www.wangaratta.vic.gov.au/Residents/Community-Projects/Community-Food</a></p> <p>Gateway Health Case Study <a href="https://gatewayhealth.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/GH_Community-led-food-access-initiatives.pdf">https://gatewayhealth.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/GH_Community-led-food-access-initiatives.pdf</a></p>
<b>Resources</b>	<p>VicHealth Food System Module  <a href="https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/20210803_CoreModule-Building_Better_Food_Systems.pdf">https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/20210803_CoreModule-Building_Better_Food_Systems.pdf</a></p> <p>North East Local Food Strategy <a href="https://gatewayhealth.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/NE_Local_Food_Strategy_2018_2022.pdf">https://gatewayhealth.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/NE_Local_Food_Strategy_2018_2022.pdf</a></p> <p>Victorian Consensus Statement (Vic Food Systems working group)  <a href="https://vicfoodsystem.org.au/Vic_Kids_Eat_Well">https://vicfoodsystem.org.au/Vic_Kids_Eat_Well</a></p>
<b>Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To collate and share information about all the community food initiatives across the Rural City of Wangaratta to increase awareness, engagement and potential partnerships.</li> <li>• To bring together community and stakeholders working in the food systems space using a collective impact approach.</li> </ul>
<b>Outcomes</b>	<p>Community Food Mapping undertaken and information published on the Rural City of Wangaratta website.</p> <p>Wangaratta Community Food Forum held to facilitate communication, knowledge and relationships between stakeholders working in the food systems space.</p> <p>Rural City of Wangaratta Sustainable Food Alliance (RCWSFA) established, a Terms of Reference (including a common agenda, objectives and expectations) developed and working together to undertake a food access needs assessment.</p>

## The story

Gateway Health has worked closely for many years with community groups, neighbourhood houses, emergency food relief agencies, local government and other settings to support access to nourishing food for communities who are more likely to be at risk of food insecurity (see case study).

Gateway Health has also worked with stakeholders in settings (schools and outside school hours care) to support nourishing food choices through initiatives such as school canteen policies and Vic Kids Eat Well.

Bringing all these stakeholders together was important to be able to share knowledge, skills and information for everyone working in the food system space but also to identify opportunities to work more collaboratively.

Over the last 18 months, the Health Promotion team at Gateway Health has worked closely with staff from the Rural City of Wangaratta Council, Open Door Neighbourhood House and the Wangaratta Landcare and Sustainability Network (existing members of the Wangaratta Community Food For All steering committee) to bring these stakeholders together through undertaking mapping, organising a community food forum and more recently the establishment of the Rural City of Wangaratta Sustainable Food Alliance.

The first step was gathering information from the various food access initiatives to conduct a community food mapping exercise and to publish that information on the Council website in mid-2023 (for community and each other), the link to the community food maps is here: <https://www.wangaratta.vic.gov.au/Residents/Community-Projects/Community-Food>

The Wangaratta Community Food Forum was held in October 2023 and brought many of the stakeholders together to present the online maps and to have each community food initiative talk about their initiative and share information. Twenty- two people from across the community attended and there were many positive comments about the opportunity to share and hear what others were doing. At the community food forum, Council staff presented information about their involvement in the VicHealth Local Government Partnership, the purpose of a local food coalition and how the community could get involved. Information about the local food alliance was also promoted through email contacts and social media. In March 2024 the first meeting of the Wangaratta local food coalition was held and the group renamed themselves the Rural City of Wangaratta Sustainable Food Alliance. There are a broad range of stakeholders involved including many that had been engaged though the community food mapping and community food forum.

At the first meeting the Rural City of Wangaratta Sustainable Food Alliance reviewed and updated a Terms of Reference (TOR) that identifies a common agenda, shared objectives and expectations regarding commitment and communication. These TOR reflect the collective impact dimensions:- a common agenda, shared measures (aligned to shared objectives) and continuous communication.



The Alliance will now be working collaboratively to undertake a local food access needs assessment across the Rural City of Wangaratta. This will help to identify opportunities for mutually reinforcing activities - another dimension of the collective impact framework. Gateway Health and the Rural City of Wangaratta have committed to work in partnership to provide the backbone support to the Alliance – including organising and facilitating meetings, meeting administration and ongoing communication.

The food systems work in the Rural City of Wangaratta is a local approach that aligns with regional and state-wide food policy/strategy areas. Gateway Health has been a key stakeholder in the development of the North East Local Food Strategy and a member of the Victorian Food Systems working group that developed the Consensus Statement – Towards a Healthy, Regenerative and Equitable Food System in Victoria (see links in resources).

## What did we achieve?

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Nine community food initiatives were mapped and included on the Rural City of Wangaratta website so they can be easily accessed. The community food maps are being shared broadly throughout the community through various networks and social media.

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Twenty-two participants from a range of community groups/agencies and settings attended and shared information about local initiatives at the Wangaratta Community Food Forum.

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The Rural City of Wangaratta Sustainable Food Alliance has been established – currently nine people have joined (and are committed to being involved long term), a vision and TOR have been developed and undertaking the food access needs assessment.

## What difference did we make?

Throughout the community food mapping process, at the community food forum and the first meeting of the Rural City of Wangaratta Sustainable Food Alliance we have heard from participants about how useful it has been to meet other people with a shared interest in supporting community food initiatives. The many stakeholders involved have a real passion for wanting to work together to create a food system that enables access to nourishing, affordable, culturally appropriate food for everyone in our community.

We have observed the value in providing a space for people to network and the interest that participants have in wanting to work together and support each other as evidenced in this quote:

*“Open Door Neighbourhood House is very appreciative of the support and work we do with GWH - Health Promotion Team. We are located within Yarrunga, an area in Wangaratta which has a SEIFA Index 1 and sit in the bottom 1-7% of relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage in Australia.*

*We get great value from working with such a community minded and committed organisation. They recognise the barriers faced by our community and always provide support and advice when asked. They are innovative, receptive and clearly passionate. We work with many people who are unable to access healthy food due to hardship, and GWH - HPT are always looking for ways to support at a community level as well as a systems level. We are not in the position to undertake this work, so are very grateful to have others in our community be able to advocate at a state and federal level on our communities and our behalf.”*

Establishing the Alliance and utilising the collective impact dimensions has provided the opportunity for a wide range of stakeholders to come together in a structured way that will support change at the population/systems level in the food space.

## Evaluation & lesson learnt

Having good relationships with stakeholders is critical for positive engagement and getting participation in community initiatives and partnerships. Many of the stakeholders that Gateway Health had worked with before have continued to be involved in the food system work because they knew us and we had built trusting relationships.

We do need to work on building some new relationships in the food systems space, particularly with food producers, retailers and distributors. We also had some stakeholders that felt like they hadn't been heard in the past, we've taken this on board and have spent time responding and re-engaging.

We have recognised the need to also engage with other stakeholders that we have not worked with before including food producers, retailers and distributors.

The collective impact framework and dimensions have been useful to guide the process of bringing community and stakeholders together in the food system space.

## Recommendations & next steps

Gateway Health and Rural City of Wangaratta are committed to providing the ongoing backbone support needed for the alliance and recognise this as an important step in working towards the development of a future Community Food Strategy/Action Plan for the Rural City of Wangaratta.

As part of undertaking the food access needs assessment we will utilise the members of the alliance and other stakeholders we have engaged with to get a really thorough understanding of the current food system and plan for mutually reinforcing activities.

We will continue to use the collective impact framework and dimensions to work towards a community food action plan/strategy for the Rural City of Wangaratta that makes change at the population/systems level.

