

Maroondah COVID-19 Secondary Impact Assessment November 2021



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Acknowledgment of Country

We, in the spirit of Reconciliation, acknowledge the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation as traditional custodians of the land now known as the City of Maroondah, where Indigenous Australians have performed age-old ceremonies. We acknowledge and respect their unique ability to care for Country and their deep spiritual connection to it. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

Executive Summary

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been nationwide, deep and profound. To update our understanding of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Maroondah community, and the subsequent supports needed, Council engaged with the community to undertake this *Maroondah COVID-19 Secondary Impact Assessment*, completed in November 2021.

This Secondary Impact Assessment focused primarily on understanding the medium-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Maroondah community, as well as support needs and planning considerations into the future.

It has been informed by community consultation and research primarily spanning the 'medium-term' of the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia (loosely defined in this report as January to September 2021), including data from a range of local community consultations undertaken by Council between May and September 2021.

The report first highlights overall key findings from the local community consultations, then sets out key findings and future considerations against each of the seven Recovery Capitals used as the underpinning framework for the *Maroondah COVID-19 Recovery Plan*.

By examining medium-term impacts on the community as well as projected long-term impacts and future support needs, it aims to provide current and relevant insights to inform future planning in Maroondah.

Key Findings

The top **medium-term impacts** on the Maroondah community were identified by local community organisations as:

- Social isolation
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Managing changes due to COVID-19 restrictions
- Education
- Reduced access to services/ supports

The top **projected long-term impacts** on the Maroondah community were identified by local community organisations as:

- Mental health and wellbeing
- Reduced engagement and access to services/ supports
- Education
- Financial instability/ hardship
- Social isolation
- Health and safety

The top **supports needed** by the community over the next 12 months were identified by local community organisations and Maroondah community members as:

- Community connectedness, including local events, re-engagement with community activities and clubs, social support groups, and building community connection and spirit
- Safety/ health and wellbeing, including community wellbeing activities, health lifestyles education, opportunities to increase physical activity, support for basic needs to be met, and education about COVID-safe measures

- Business aid, including supports for businesses such as financial support, promotion and tailored support for those most impacted, encouraging the community to shop locally, festivals and markets for local traders, and networking and education sessions
- Social connection, including opportunities to connect with others online and face-to-face, and assisting the community to build confidence to reconnect with social and sporting groups, activities and events
- Mental health, including affordable and accessible mental health services and counselling, education and awareness sessions on mental health and wellbeing, and support groups or spaces where people can connect

Conclusion

The duration of the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia and its associated lockdowns and restrictions has been longer than many anticipated. This has meant that as of November 2021, in many ways the situation has not changed significantly since 2020.

What has changed, however, is the now strong vaccination uptake across Australia, and an understanding from Victoria's previous lockdown experiences of our capacity to recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

With this context in mind, it is unsurprising that when reviewing the medium-term impacts of the pandemic within the Recovery Capitals Framework, the impacts on the Maroondah community continued to be spread across all Recovery Capitals.

Medium-term impacts in Maroondah were, however, especially significant in the following four Recovery Capitals:

- Human Capital, particularly -
 - Mental Health and Wellbeing
 - Health and Safety
 - Education
 - Resources and Support
- Social Capital, particularly -
 - Social and Community Connection
 - Community Organisations (including volunteering)
- Financial Capital, particularly -
 - Businesses
 - Employment
- Cultural Capital, particularly -
 - Arts and Culture
 - Creative Industries

Next Steps

To assist with future planning regarding COVID-19 relief and recovery work across Maroondah, Council recommends that local organisations and agencies reflect on the impacts, support needs and future considerations outlined within this report, and what these may mean for their organisation, their clients and the Maroondah community.

1. Introduction

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been nationwide, deep and profound. The Maroondah community, along with the rest of metropolitan Melbourne, has been particularly impacted by an extended series of staged restrictions in response to the number of active positive cases.

Impact assessments are conducted in the aftermath of an emergency event to assess the impact to the community and help determine immediate and longer-term recovery needs. Assessment of impacts resulting from emergency events is a complex process, encompassing data and information drawn from several different sources at all tiers (incident/local, regional, Victorian and national). Unlike more common disasters such as fire and flood, there is no physical damage with COVID-19. The absence of a disaster 'footprint' means that many of the impacts play out in the psychosocial and economic domains. Impact assessment must be community-focused to ensure the data/information will assist decision making on how to best support impacted communities.

To better understand the initial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Maroondah community, Council completed the *Maroondah COVID-19 Initial Impact Assessment* in May 2020. This focused on the initial impacts, response and immediate relief needs as the pandemic progressed between March and May 2020.

Council then undertook further extensive community consultation and research across 2020 to ensure that Council's planning was informed by a thorough and current understanding of the needs of Maroondah community. This work informed the development of the *Maroondah COVID-19 Recovery Plan* which was adopted by Council in March 2020.

This Secondary Impact Assessment updates this work, focusing primarily on the medium-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Maroondah community, as well as support needs and planning considerations into the future.

For the purposes of this report, 'medium-term' is loosely defined as the first 9 months of 2021. For much of this time, Victoria was living with minimal restrictions following the conclusion of 2020's lockdowns and extensive restrictions (though with international borders still mostly closed) and was moving in and out of shorter periods of lockdown in response to small outbreaks. Australia's vaccination program had commenced, albeit slowly, and the commonly held belief was that Australia was past the worst of the pandemic. However, the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly the emergence of the highly infectious Delta strain, turned that situation on its head. Following incursions of the virus from New South Wales, Victoria was propelled into a third wave of infections and returned to lockdown with significant restrictions in August 2021. Case numbers in Victoria during this third wave significantly exceeded those experienced at any earlier point in the pandemic, and continue to be high at the time of finalising this report (November 2021).

This Secondary Impact Assessment is informed by community consultation and research undertaken primarily during January to September 2021, however it has been developed with the current and continually evolving context in mind. By examining medium-term impacts on the community as well as projected long-term impacts and future support needs, it aims to provide current and relevant insights to inform future planning in Maroondah.

Purpose

The purpose of the *Maroondah COVID-19 Secondary Impact Assessment* is:

1. To identify and understand the medium-term impacts and projected long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Maroondah community
2. To identify any new, changed or arising community needs resulting from the pandemic and provide recommendations to address them
3. To inform long-term community recovery planning in Maroondah
4. To inform the development of a reporting framework for the consistent measurement of community impacts in Maroondah over time, aligned with the strategic framework of the Maroondah COVID-19 Recovery Plan

2. COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 was first identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019. As of 19 November 2021, globally there have been over 255 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, and over 5.1 million deaths reported to the World Health Organisation, as well as a total of over 7.3 billion vaccine doses administered¹.

Compared to most other countries, Australia has been relatively successful in containing the spread of COVID-19, due to prolonged national border closures (since March 2020) and localised state and capital city lockdowns and restrictions. However, the highly infectious Delta strain is testing Australia's ability to control COVID-19.

Since COVID-19 was first detected in Australia on 25 January 2020, there have been a total of 198,445 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 1,942 lives lost due to COVID-19 across Australia as of 21 November 2021².

In Victoria, there have been a total of 112,942 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and a total of 1,280 lives lost due to COVID-19 as of 21 November 2021³.

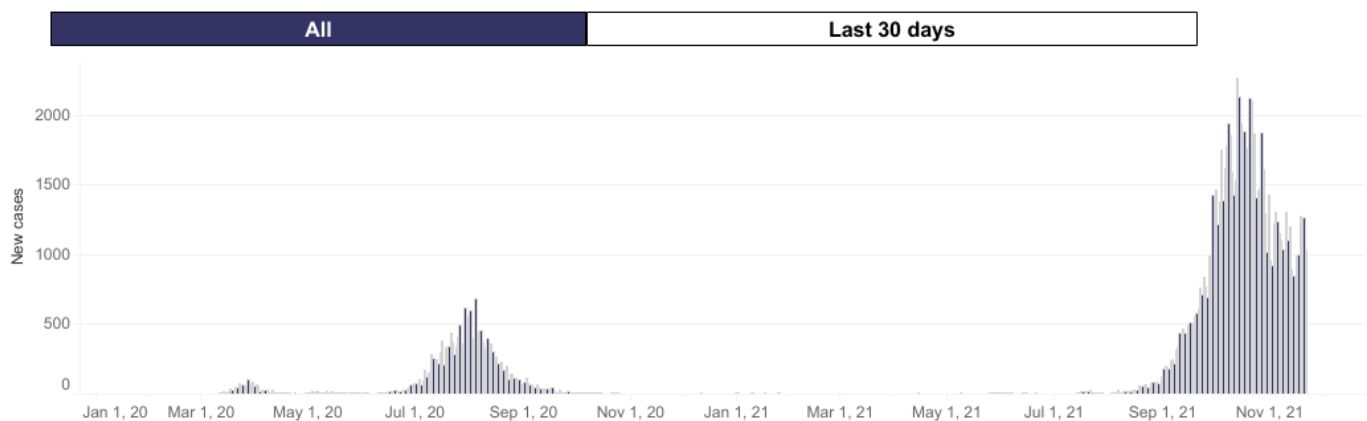


Figure 1. Daily new cases of COVID-19 in Victoria (All)⁴

Victoria has fared far worse than any other Australian state, and Melbourne has been especially impacted. Melbourne recently became 'the most locked down city in the world' when it exceeded the Buenos Aires' previous world record of 234 days spent in COVID-19 lockdown⁵.

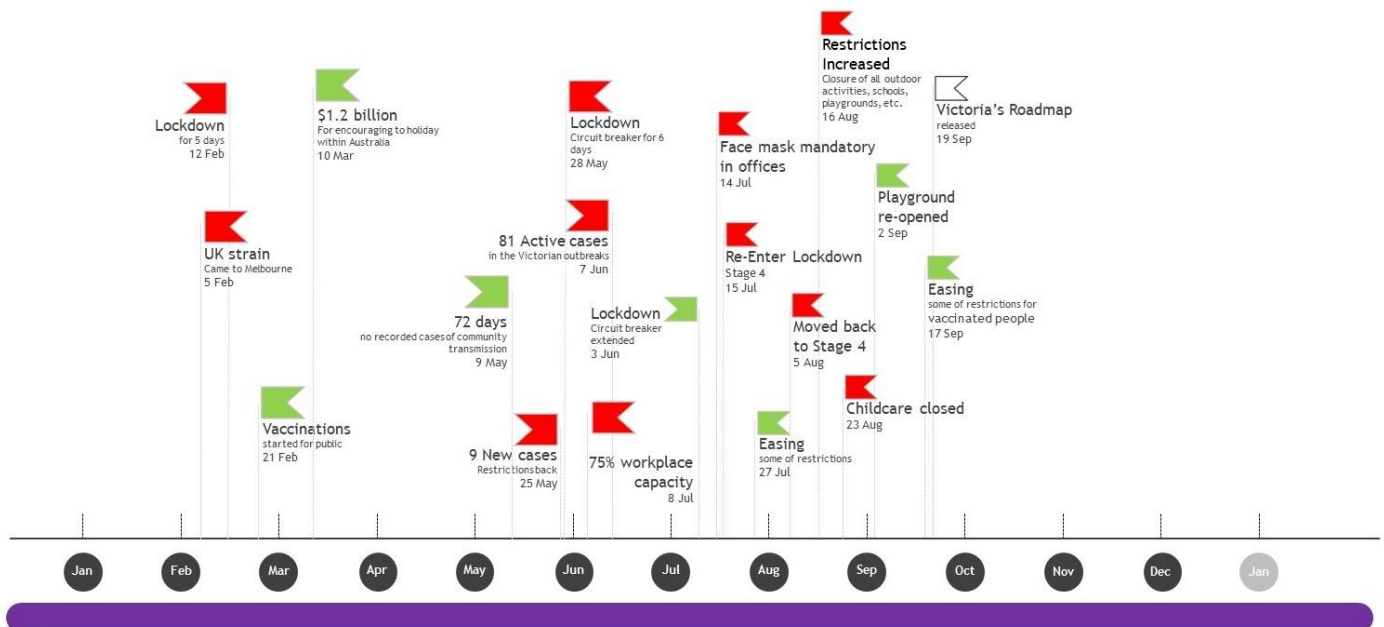
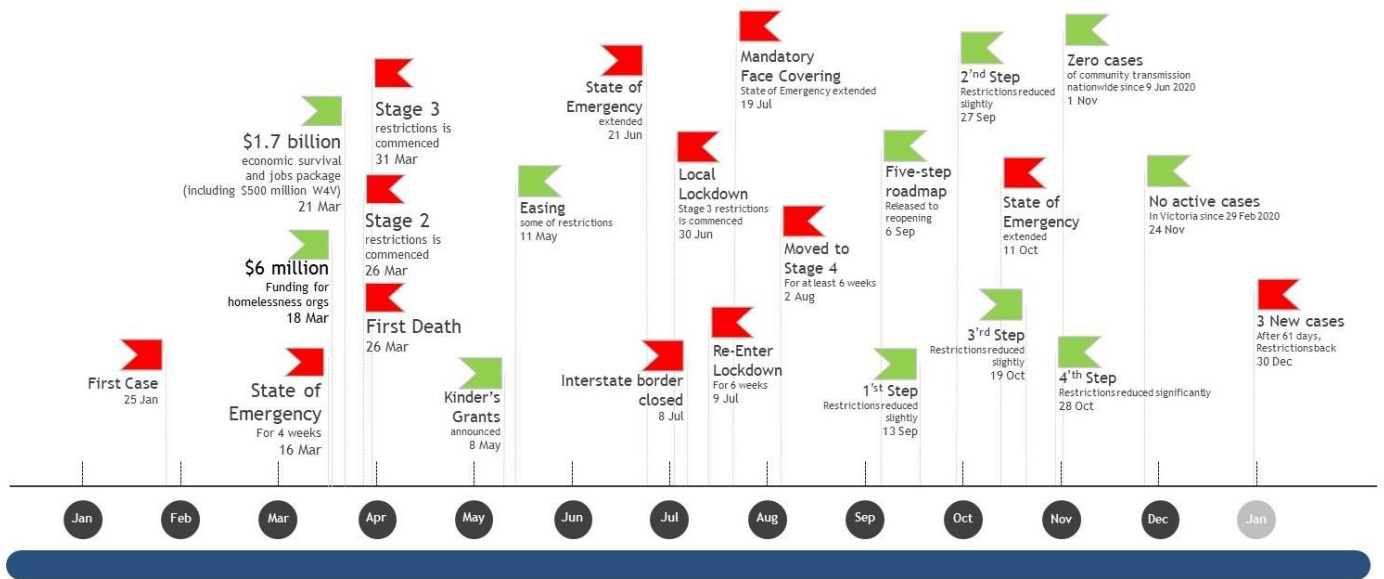
The City of Maroondah has had relatively few COVID-19 cases, with only 843 confirmed cases since the pandemic began, as of 19 October 2021⁶.

After a slow start, Australia's COVID-19 vaccine rollout is now well underway. As of 19 October 2021, over 38.4 million COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered to Australians⁷.

As per Victoria's Roadmap⁸, Melbourne's sixth lockdown was planned to end when 70% of eligible Victorians were fully vaccinated, with further restrictions easing once 80% of Victorians aged 16+ were fully vaccinated, and again once 90% of Victorians aged 12+ were fully vaccinated (anticipated in late November 2021). At the time of writing this report (November 2021), a larger number of restrictions apply in Victoria to unvaccinated people compared to fully vaccinated people.

COVID-19 Timeline

Key milestones in Victoria's COVID-19 journey are outlined below:



Melbourne lockdowns:

- Lockdown 1: March 30 to May 12, 2020
- Lockdown 2: July 8 to October 27, 2020
- Lockdown 3: February 12 - 17, 2021
- Lockdown 4: May 27 - June 10, 2021
- Lockdown 5: July 15 - 27, 2021
- Lockdown 6: August 5 - October 21, 2021

3. Evidence Base

This Secondary Impact Assessment has been informed by community consultation and research primarily spanning the ‘medium-term’ of the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia (loosely defined in this report as January to September 2021).

It draws on evidence from a wide range of sources, including a number of community consultations undertaken by Council between May and September 2021, which are summarised in the table below.

Consultation Methods	Timeframe	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consultation with volunteer organisations via the Maroondah Community Volunteering Survey	May – Jun 2021	89 responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consultation with community organisations via Stakeholder Consultation interviews, surveys and focus groups	Jul – Aug 2021	84 responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check-in with community members via:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Other planned Council surveys / engagement activities• Ideas board on Your Say Maroondah website COVID page	Jun – Sept 2021	413 total <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 393 responses• 20 interactions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consultation with businesses via:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Women On The Go survey (female small business owners)• Maroondah Business Advisory Committee	Aug - Sept 2021	31 total <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 18 responses• 13 participants
Total:		599

Key results from these community consultations are highlighted below. Detailed results can be found in the following consultation reports, available on www.maroondah.vic.gov.au:

- Maroondah Community Volunteering Survey Report (June 2021)
- Maroondah COVID-19 Secondary Impact Assessment: Stakeholder Consultation Report (August 2021)
- Maroondah COVID-19 Secondary Impact Assessment: Community Check-In Report (September 2021)

Medium-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

Consultation undertaken with local community organisations in July-August 2021 identified the following top medium-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on clients / community members:

Top medium-term impacts on the community, according to community organisations	
1. Social isolation	Moving in and out of COVID restrictions, there were reports across all demographics of feeling disconnected from friends, family and loved ones. Social isolation is particularly hard for those with low tech literacy, living alone or retired.
2. Mental health and wellbeing	Mental health deterioration has been reported, with anxiety, depression and severe stress mentioned significantly. Some instances of self-harm have been reported as well as separation anxiety for children.
3. Managing changes due to COVID-19 restrictions	During early 2021, restrictions were connected to increased feelings of being stuck at home, wearing masks, constant cancellations and changing routines/ lack of routine. The transitions are very difficult especially during this time period where restrictions were put into place and eased frequently. Many found it difficult to keep up with changes and access updated information.
4. Education	There have been significant disruptions to education due to courses moving online, being discontinued and schools closing and reopening due to restrictions. School refusal from students has been occurring. Home schooling/ remote learning is difficult for many, especially carers who are working. Academic learning for some students has been affected/ or slower and many students are experiencing a lack of motivation. There has also been reduced uptake of adult education.
5. Reduced access to services/ supports	Services have been disrupted or closed, wait lists have increased significantly and telehealth is still a barrier at first for many community members. The function of some services are also altered or decreased due to moving online. In transitional periods, there is also confusion about what is open, continuing or cancelled.

Projected long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

Consultation undertaken with local community organisations in July-August 2021 identified the following top projected long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on clients / community members:

Top projected long-term impacts on the community, according to community organisations	
1. Mental health and wellbeing	Mental health issues including social anxiety and depression are prevalent. A positive light has been shone on the importance of community connection and wellbeing which is valuable. For some, the fear and lockdown can replicate the experience of trauma which links to feelings of powerlessness and being trapped. Long term mental health and wellbeing impacts may be particularly significant for vulnerable people (i.e. isolated or living alone).
2. Reduced engagement and access to services/ supports	During the pandemic some community members have engaged more frequently with services and value the increased flexibility of service provision. Despite this, there has been a reduced uptake of services, loss of members and volunteers and hesitancy to participate. Lockdowns also reduce engagement and confidence in services. Increases in referrals and demand, alongside reduced staff capacity/ resources has meant limited access to some supports or services.
3. Education	Education has been impacted by disruptions to learning. A number of survey responses note more children/ young people are disengaged with school. For those who missed out on early years education; social, language and independence skills are inhibited. Educators also need support to manage this effect. Disruptions to education also inhibit options for work experience. There is a concern that older students may not have time to catch up on what was missed during phases of lockdown.
4. Financial instability/ hardship	Reports of unemployment, instability in future employment and continued financial stress. Delays in education opportunities also impact employment opportunities. Many local businesses stopped trading or were forced to close permanently. Financial literacy is noted as important.
4. Social isolation	Isolation is widely acknowledged as an impact that may have long-term effects for community members, particularly those disconnected from peers and support networks.
5. Health and safety	There is a concern that higher levels of drug and alcohol use as coping mechanism will result in addiction and long-term problematic use. Health decline for older people due to lack of mobility and in-home support also connects to concerns of increased frailty and health conditions. Lack of exercise in general is seen to impact future physical health for many. Fear of infection from the virus is also an ongoing issue. The increase of awareness around health and hygiene however, is seen as a positive outcome of the pandemic.

Supports needed over the next 12 months

Consultation undertaken with local community organisations in July-August 2021, and with Maroondah community members in June-September 2021, identified the following top supports needed by the community over the next 12 months in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic:

	Top supports needed, according to Community Organisations	Top supports needed, according to Community Members
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety/ health and wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community connectedness
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community connectedness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social connection
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business aid
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vulnerable/ living alone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety/ health and wellbeing
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children/ youth/ families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be better prepared for future • Business aid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced fees/ financial assistance
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Testing sites/ vaccination • Outdoor areas/ places to meet people
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Testing sites/ vaccination • Regular updates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elderly/ disabled people • Beyond Council's ability/ good work done
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social connection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sports/ recreational/ exercise facilities • Employment
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sports/ recreational/ exercise facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vulnerable/ living alone

When the results of both sets of consultation data above are combined, the top supports needed by the community over the next 12 months in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic were identified as follows:

Top supports needed - Combined results	
1	Community connectedness Including local events, re-engagement with community activities and clubs, social support groups, and building community connection and spirit
2	Safety/ health and wellbeing Including community wellbeing activities and workshops, health lifestyles education, opportunities to increase physical activity, support around family violence and abuse, support for basic needs to be met, and continued education about COVID safe measures
3	Business aid Including supports for businesses such as financial support, promotion and tailored support for those most impacted, encouraging the community to shop locally, festivals and markets for local traders, and networking and education sessions
4	Social connection Including opportunities to connect with others online and face-to-face, and assisting the community to reconnect with social and sporting groups, activities and events and to build confidence to move away from social isolation
5	Mental health Including affordable and accessible mental health services and counselling, education and awareness sessions on mental health and wellbeing, and support groups or spaces where people can connect

Long-term recovery priorities for Maroondah

Consultation undertaken with local community organisations in July-August 2021 identified the following top long-term priorities to help the Maroondah community recover from the COVID-19 pandemic:

Top long-term recovery priorities for Maroondah, according to community organisations	
1. Community connectedness and participation	Strengthen community connection, building and participation for all community members, particularly through events and activities. 'Think locally', re-establish social connections and support community groups. Long-term commitment to social inclusion.
2. Mental health	Long term, accessible mental health support (free or low-cost). Understand the trauma response of COVID-19 on the community, particularly for those with previous trauma. Peer-based networks and awareness of mental health services available to the community. Support children and young people to cope with anxiety. Mental health workshops.
3. Access to resources/ information	More visibility of services and what's on offer to the community. including good communication channels that are accessible to vulnerable people.
4. Health and safety	Health promotion and messaging about health and safety in the community. Support physical health of individuals, along with community groups that supports these outcomes. Food and housing security for families due to loss of work and income. Support services for family violence. Early intervention and primary prevention initiatives that work to address the drivers and/or intervene early in order to prevent individuals experiencing crisis. A recovery plan that incorporates prevention and health promotion as well as adequate responses to the immediate needs arising from the pandemic.
5. Support for parents/ carers/ families	Supporting families both mentally and financially. Support groups and networks to connect with other families. Parenting workshops to assist children with the return to the classroom and promotion of child care services.

Impacts on community organisations in Maroondah

Consultation undertaken with local community organisations in July-August 2021 identified the following top challenges facing Maroondah's community organisations as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic:

Top challenges for community organisations

- Reduced capacity to deliver services as usual/ deliver remotely
- Establishing and/or maintaining engagement
- Reduced staff and volunteers/ staff turnover and recruitment
- Loss of revenue/ financial constraints
- Staff burnout/ decreased wellbeing
- Planning/ disruptions due to uncertainty and instability

Consultation undertaken with local volunteer-based community organisations in May-June 2021 about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on community volunteering in Maroondah found the following:

Key findings on the impacts of COVID-19 on community volunteering

Impacts on volunteer-based community organisations included:

- Volunteering workforce
- Financial
- Organisation's membership
- Reduction or ceasing of organisation's activities
- Governance and management
- Planning and resourcing
- Mental health and wellbeing of members

Volunteering decreased by 25-50% in a quarter of the organisations who responded

25% of respondents indicated that the future viability of their volunteer-based organisation was at risk

All respondents indicated a desire for further training and support - 25% indicated that they require training on Grant and Tender writing

4. Recovery Capitals Framework (ReCap)

Council officers have had the opportunity to work with leading recovery experts from the University of Melbourne and Australian Red Cross to pilot the Recovery Capitals Framework (ReCap)⁹ as the underpinning framework for the Maroondah COVID-19 Recovery Plan.

The concept of ‘capitals’ illustrates the ways that many factors interact and influence recovery from disasters, and how resources and strengths already existing in our community can be identified and drawn upon to support community wellbeing.

The Maroondah COVID-19 Recovery Plan adopts this framework and contextualises each capital in relation to the COVID-19 recovery context for Maroondah by including priority areas under each capital that were informed by local evidence of impact and need.

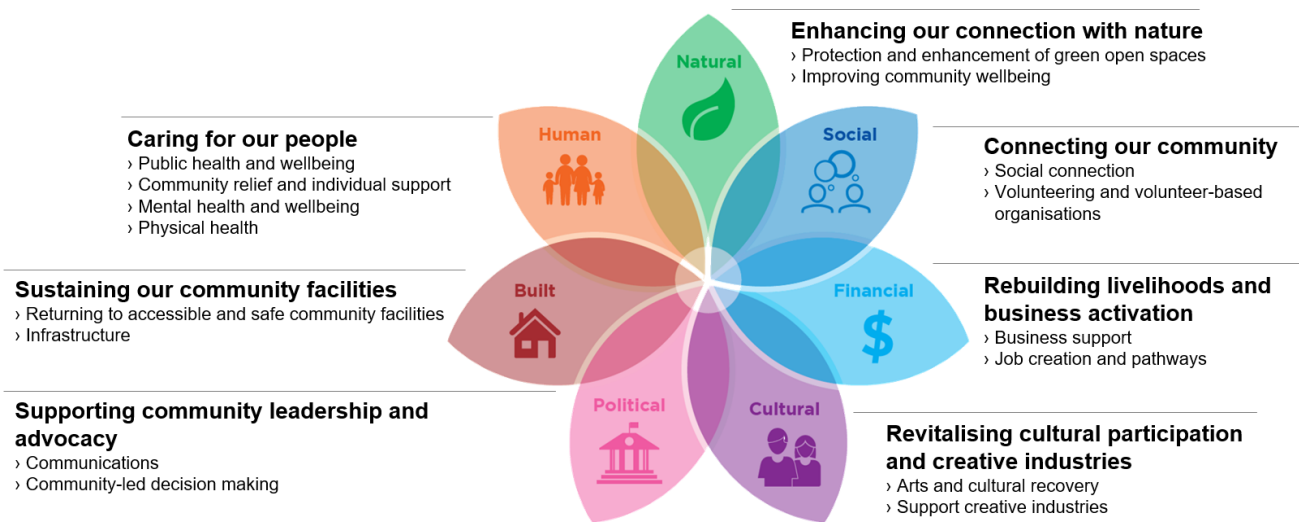


Figure 1. Based on Community Capitals Framework¹⁰, as adapted by the Recovery Capitals (ReCap) project (www.recoverycapitals.org.au) Diagram is an adaptation of ReCap design combined with elements of the Maroondah COVID-19 Recovery Plan

This Secondary Impact Assessment continues the use of this localised framework as a structure for both understanding impacts on the community and for guiding future recovery planning in Maroondah.



5. Human Capital

‘Human capital’ refers to people’s skills and capabilities, including the ability to access resources and knowledge. It includes education, physical and mental health, physical ability, knowledge from lived experience and leadership capabilities.

Maroondah COVID-19 Recovery Plan	
Recovery Capital	Key Council responses to date
<p>Human Capital - Caring for our people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public health and wellbeing • Community relief and individual support • Mental health and wellbeing • Physical health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoted physical distancing, hygiene measures and COVIDSafe behaviour as people return to public life • Supported agencies in the rollout of the COVID vaccination program • Supported community relief agencies through the Maroondah Emergency Relief Network to meet increased demand from vulnerable individuals and households • Developed and delivered the MaroondahConnect support service • Facilitated mental health and wellbeing promotion activities • Provided support and guidance for sporting clubs and associations to facilitate return to sport in a COVIDSafe manner

Medium-term Impacts

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Mental health and wellbeing was identified by local community organisations as the second highest medium-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on clients / community members, and the highest projected long-term impact.

Local community organisations reported significant negative impacts on mental health, including increases in anxiety, stress and depression in particular.

They also noted the struggles community members have faced from dealing with uncertainty and constant change in relation to lockdowns and restrictions, and the impacts of this on their wellbeing and functioning.

Mental health services reported facing significant challenges including large increases in referrals and long waitlists and/or an inability to meet high levels of demand, as well as impacts on staff wellbeing.

One youth-focused service noted *"I've been in mental health services for 20 years, I've never seen this before"*.

The mental health and wellbeing of some groups within the community appear to be more affected than others, for example:

- *Young People:* Mental health and wellbeing was identified as both the top medium-term impact and the top projected long-term impacts by community organisations in the child, youth and family sector. Key local youth mental health services reported very large increases in the number of referrals for young people, along with increased severity, complexity and risk in the young people they are working with.
- *Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities:* Mental health and wellbeing was identified as a top medium-term impact and the top projected long-term impact for people from CALD communities, with all five participating CALD organisations identifying mental health as one of the main projected long-term impacts for their clients / communities.

These local results are supported by mental health and wellbeing data at both national and state levels.

The most recent ANUpoll in August 2021¹¹ (which surveyed Australians aged 18 and over) found that:

- The average level of psychological distress for Australians in August 2021 was similar to pre-pandemic levels, however there was a distinct pattern by age -
 - For younger people (18–44), average levels of psychological distress were higher in 2020 and 2021 (including August 2021) than they were before the pandemic, especially for those aged 18–24.
 - While those aged 45 and above experienced either little change or improvements in their level of psychological distress.
- The proportion of adults experiencing levels of severe psychological distress that would identify them as being at risk of a serious mental health issue in August 2021 (10.1%) were “significantly and substantially” above those observed pre-COVID in February 2017 (8.4%).
- 1 in 2 (48.5%) adults said COVID-19 had a small negative impact on the mental health of children in their household; 9.5% reported that there was a large negative impact.
- The average life satisfaction of Australians in August 2021 was lower than pre-COVID - life satisfaction declined substantially since April 2021, and in August 2021 it had fallen to similarly low rates of life satisfaction observed at the peak of the first wave of COVID-19 in Australia in April 2020.

Life satisfaction, October 2019 to August 2021

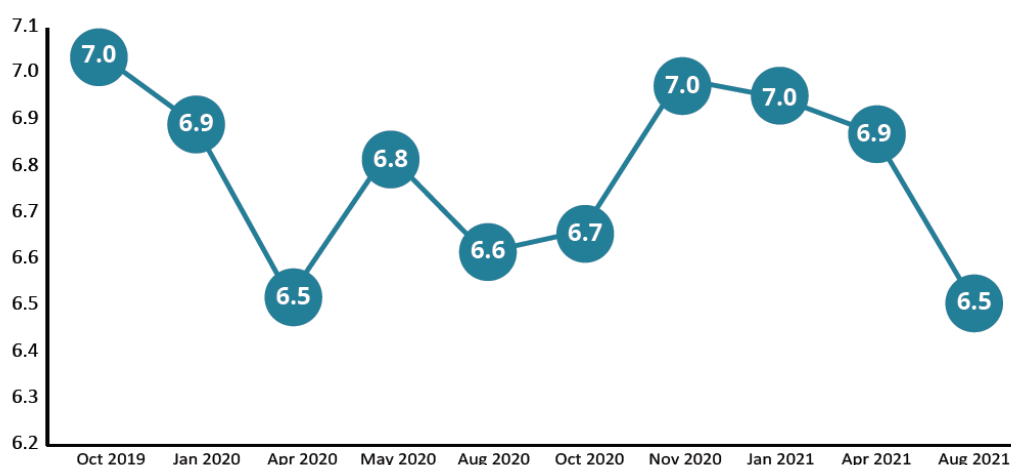


Figure 2: Life satisfaction in Australia, October 2019 to August 2021¹²

- By August 2021, almost 2 in 3 Australians (65.7%) thought their life had gotten worse since the spread of COVID-19, including 17.0 % cent who thought it had gotten much worse.
- Australians were more likely to say that they felt more negative about the future since the spread of COVID-19 in August 2021 (56.1%) than they were in May 2020 (39.9%).

Similarly, the most recent ABS 'Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey' in June 2021¹³ (which surveyed Australians aged 18 and over) found that:

- In June 2021, at least some of the time:
 - 28% of people aged 18 years and over felt nervous
 - 26% felt everything was an effort
 - 24% felt restless or fidgety
 - 16% felt hopeless
 - 13% felt worthless
 - 11% felt so sad that nothing could cheer them up.
- 1 in 5 (20%) experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress in June 2021, similar to March 2021 (20%) and November 2020 (21%).
- Almost 1 in 3 (30%) younger Australians (aged 18 to 34 years) experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress, compared with 18% of people aged 35 to 64 years and 10% of people aged 65+ years.
- Almost 1 in 4 (23%) women experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress compared with 17% of men.
- More than 1 in 4 (29%) people with disability experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress compared with 17% of people without disability.
- Around half (48%) of all people who reported having a mental health condition experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress compared with 16% who did not have a mental health condition.
- More people living in Victoria (27%) experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress compared with the rest of Australia (18%).
- People in Victoria (34%) were more likely than the rest of Australia (23%) to report it will take more than a year for life to return to normal.

The Victorian Population Health Survey 2020¹⁴ (undertaken between 30 September 2020 and 28 February 2021) found that:

- The proportion of adults across Victoria who experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress increased significantly from 18.1% in 2019 to 23.4% in 2020.
- This proportion was significantly higher in younger adults - 35.0% of adults aged 18-24 years and 27.8% of adults aged 25-34 years.
- The proportion of adults (across all age groups) in Maroondah who experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress was slightly higher at 24.4%.
- The proportion of adults across Victoria who rated their satisfaction with life as low or medium in 2020 was 22.3% - results were similar in Maroondah at 22.9%.

Health and Safety

Many local community organisations reported fears and concerns about health and safety in the Maroondah community in regards to COVID-19 itself, including:

- Fear of contracting or transmitting COVID-19, and fear of the extended health implications of contracting COVID-19, particularly for older demographics
- Access to vaccines, particularly for ineligible demographics
- Hesitancy and fear around vaccines and where to get the best information
- Reluctance to be out in the community due to fear of coming into contact with the virus

Similar issues have been identified at the national level. The August 2021 ANUpoll¹⁵ found that:

- There has been a large increase in anxiety and worry due to COVID-19 between April and August 2021, from 49.8 per cent to 60.9 per cent. The increase in New South Wales was from 50.7 per cent to 67.9 per cent, the largest increase amongst the states and territories.
- The proportion of Australians who thought it was likely they would be infected by COVID-19 in the next 6 months almost tripled from 10.7% in April 2021 to 30.8% in August 2021. This increase was highest in NSW (40.8%), however there was still an increase to 26.5% for the rest of Australia.
- Between April and August 2021, there was a “significant and substantial decline” in the proportion of Australians who thought that the vaccine rollout was very fair (from 32.4% down to 19.6%)

In addition to the direct health impacts of contracting COVID-19, local community organisations also noted a number of indirect medium-term impacts relating to health, including:

- Poorer mobility and health for some due to lack of exercise
- Nutrition
- Increase in substance (e.g. alcohol) use and abuse
- Lack of understanding of where, when, how to receive the vaccine
- Decreased transport and access to medical appointments
- Challenges of telehealth
- Impacts from the implementation of strict health procedures, particularly for families with children

Local community organisations also report significant indirect medium-term impacts relating to threats to personal safety that have worsened as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

- Increases in family violence, in terms of case numbers, complexity and severity - noting that clients experience more difficulty in seeking help as they may be locked down with perpetrators, or focussing on other issues that have arisen due to the pandemic (supporting children at home, financial issues, etc)
- Increases in reports of child abuse, and less opportunities for observation of children during lockdowns
- Increases in elder abuse
- Increased disclosures of sexual assault

At a national level, recently released results from an ANROWS survey about intimate partner violence (IPV) during the COVID-19 pandemic (conducted in February to April 2021)¹⁶ found that:

- 1 in 10 respondents (9.6%) had experienced physical violence from an intimate partner since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Nearly 1 in 12 (7.6%) had experienced sexual violence from an intimate partner since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic
- 1 in 3 (31.6%) had experienced emotionally abusive, harassing or controlling behaviours from an intimate partner since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic
- In terms of the onset or increased frequency/severity of IPV during COVID-19, for all three forms of violence over half of the respondents who had been in a relationship longer than 12 months and experienced this form of IPV in the 12 months prior to the survey said that it was the first time or that it had increased in frequency or severity (57.1% for physical violence; 61.1% for sexual violence; 66.2% for emotionally abusive, harassing or controlling behaviours)
- Changes to the mental and physical health and wellbeing of the respondent and their partner were the individual-level factors most frequently identified as contributing to both increases and reductions in intimate partner violence during the pandemic, followed by changes to the respondent’s and their partner’s financial status and employment status.

- The most common relationship-level change reported by women who experienced the onset and/or escalation of intimate partner violence was family stress, followed by spending more time together, relationship conflict and the level of social contact.

Victorian recorded crime statistics relating to Family Violence for the year ending 30 June 2021 show that:

- Across Victoria, family incidents increased 5.9% in the last 12 months to 93,440 incidents, and the rate of family incidents increased by +6.2% to 1,399.1 incidents per 100,000 population¹⁷
- In Maroondah, family incidents increased by +7.7% in the last 12 months to 1,406 incidents, and the rate of family incidents increased by +8.1% to 1,182.1 incidents per 100,000 population¹⁸

In the 2020/21 financial year, EDVOS (the specialist family violence service in the eastern metropolitan region of Melbourne) received more than 13,500 referrals and requests for service from victim survivors across a wide range of referral sources, compared to 9,410 in the 2019/20 financial year^{19 20}.

In their latest Annual Report 2020-2021, EDVOS note: *“Throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic and extended Melbourne Lockdowns many clients experienced an increase in the frequency and severity of family violence, combined with greater complexities of their situation, as victim survivors and perpetrators were forced to spend more time together”*²¹.

Education

Education was identified by community organisations connected with Maroondah as the fourth highest medium-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on clients / community members and the third highest projected long-term impact, particularly in relation to children and young people. Although the education sector also had the highest number of participating organisations, at least half of the organisations who identified this impact were from other sectors.

Local community organisations identified the following medium-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on community members in relation to education:

- Developmental milestones impacted from early childhood through to adolescence
- Significant disruptions to education due to schools closing and reopening due to restrictions, and courses moving online or being discontinued
- Many challenges around remote/online learning – disrupted learning, disengagement, academic impacts, technology, lack of motivation, support needs, language barriers, etc
- Increases in school refusal
- Reduced uptake of adult education, with some delaying further education due to classes running online
- Challenging for parents/carers to balance supporting remote learning with their own work
- Loss of applied learning opportunities and workplace learning placements

Resources and Support

Local community organisations also identified a number of medium-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on clients / community members in relation to resources and support, including:

- More and/or targeted support is needed by certain population groups, including:
 - Parents, carers and families
 - Children
 - Young people

- Older people
- People with disabilities
- People from culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- People on low incomes
- People living alone or isolated
- People who are vulnerable or in unsafe situations
- Many community services have been disrupted or closed, and for some waitlists have increased significantly
- Inability for people to engage face-to-face with supports - online or tele services are still a barrier for many
- Lack of access to digital technology / internet connection exacerbates impacts and issues for some
- Loss of income due to unemployment or underemployment, and concern for employment stability
- Increased demand for emergency relief after JobKeeper and JobSeeker ceased - one service reported an increase of over 400% demand for food relief
- Increased support requests for school expenses
- Reduced housing options, including couch surfing

Key supports needed by the Maroondah community

Consultation with both community organisations and individual community members identified the following key supports needed by the Maroondah community over the next 12 months within this capital area:

- Providing social support and group activities, particularly for vulnerable people
- Affordable and easily accessible mental health services including for children and adolescents
- Safe avenues to report domestic violence and abuse
- Mental health awareness and education sessions
- Assistance with shopping and groceries, home maintenance such as gardening and cleaning, delivered meals, transport, and personal care (mentioned specifically by Aged and Disability Services client survey respondents)
- Wellbeing activities (welfare check-ins mentioned specifically by Aged and Disability Services client survey respondents)
- Opportunities for people to increase physical activity
- More education and enforcement of mask wearing, QR check-ins and hygiene
- Education sessions/ information on healthy lifestyles
- *“Increased resources in Family Violence Response Services and also additional recovery based services such as specialist family violence counselling will be needed. Plus, a renewed focus on prevention of family violence in light of the pandemic with good plans in place for the future”*
- *“Increased awareness and support for mental health work and the importance of mental wellbeing. Healthy individuals lead to healthy communities”*

Future Considerations

- There are still a significant amount of impacts and support/recovery needs within this Capital, both now and continuing into 2022 and beyond
- Mental health and wellbeing in particular is a clear ongoing focus area for both COVID-19 response and recovery efforts - it is a clear impact now, and the top projected long-term impact. Mental health was also identified as a high support need over the next 12 months, and the second highest long-term priority to help the Maroondah community recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Education was also a clear area of impact now and in the long-term, especially for children and young people
- Our understanding of the full and future impacts of a number of issues within this Capital is likely to develop over coming months and years, as more information comes to light. Key issues to monitor include:
 - Vaccination uptake and hesitancy
 - Family violence, child abuse and elder abuse
 - Impacts on child and adolescent development
- Opportunities to bolster our understanding of the experiences and the current and future needs of vulnerable communities in Maroondah arising from the COVID-19 pandemic would be valuable.
- Going forward, it will also be important to monitor new investments and reforms in the areas of mental health, family violence, child safety and education (particularly following both the Royal Commission in Victoria's Mental Health System and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse), and what opportunities these may present to support the Maroondah community into the future.



6. Social Capital

‘**Social capital**’ refers to the connections, reciprocity and trust among people and groups. There are three types of social capital: bonding (strong ties between similar people e.g. family and friends), bridging (looser ties between a broader range of people, often cutting across race, gender and class) and linking (ties connecting people with those in power, such as decision-makers). Social capital can be thought of as a resource at both an individual and community level.

Maroondah COVID-19 Recovery Plan	
Recovery Capital	Key Council responses to date
<p>Social Capital - Connecting our community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social connection • Volunteering and volunteer-based organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivered a range of Be Kind Maroondah initiatives to respond to community inclusion needs in local neighbourhoods • Delivered programs to facilitate community connections, reduce isolation, enhance mental wellbeing and connect with vulnerable residents • Delivered a series of community and cultural events and activities • Facilitated a Special COVID-19 Community Grants Program, including community wellbeing and emergency relief schemes • Facilitated support for volunteer-led organisations and partner with Eastern Volunteers

Medium-term Impacts

Social and Community Connection

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges to social and community connection.

Public health measures such as social distancing and lockdowns have been implemented to protect the community and mitigate more serious COVID-19 outbreaks. However, these necessary measures have also presented significant challenges to social and community connection, including the repeated temporary closures of key social infrastructure which provides important spaces for meeting, connecting to services, and interacting with others in the community.

Loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic is an issue occurring across the nation. The ANUpoll found that in August 2021 more than 1 in 3 Australians (37.6%) reported feeling lonely in the past week²². They also concluded that their results across time and locations confirm the effect of lockdown restrictions on loneliness²³.

The Victorian Population Health Survey 2020 (undertaken between 30 September 2020 and 28 February 2021) found that 4.7% of adults across Victoria don't have close friends or family to regularly - results were slightly higher in Maroondah at 5.8%²⁴.

In Maroondah, local community organisations identified a number of medium-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on clients / community members in relation to social and community connection:

- Social isolation was identified as the top medium-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on clients / community members. Feelings of loneliness and disconnection from friends, family and loved ones were widely reported. Social isolation was noted as particularly hard for those with low tech literacy, living alone or retired.
- For some, their ability to access social support either in-person or through social networks/groups was impacted. For example, many NDIS clients lost access to support workers for periods, impacting their access to community.
- Online alternatives have been used extensively in place of in-person connections, however local community organisations reflected that some people can't participate online; some don't engage with online; and in some cases online doesn't fully substitute for in-person connection and support.
- Unfortunately, for some people the close proximity to household members during lockdowns has been difficult and at times dangerous. Some local services reported increases in family conflict, family violence and reports of child abuse.

Community connectedness was identified as the top support needed by the Maroondah community over the next 12 months in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic (from the combined consultation results from both local community organisations and community members), and community connectedness and participation was identified as the top long-term priority for recovery for the Maroondah community by local community organisations.

On a more positive note, COVID-19 has also been associated with improvements in social cohesion. The ANUpoll found that between February and May 2020, there was a significant increase in social cohesion (people's perception of whether most people can be trusted, are fair and most of the time try to be helpful), and that as of August 2021 this measure of trust remains notably higher than it was prior to the onset of COVID-19²⁵.

Index of perceived social cohesion, February 2020 to August 2021

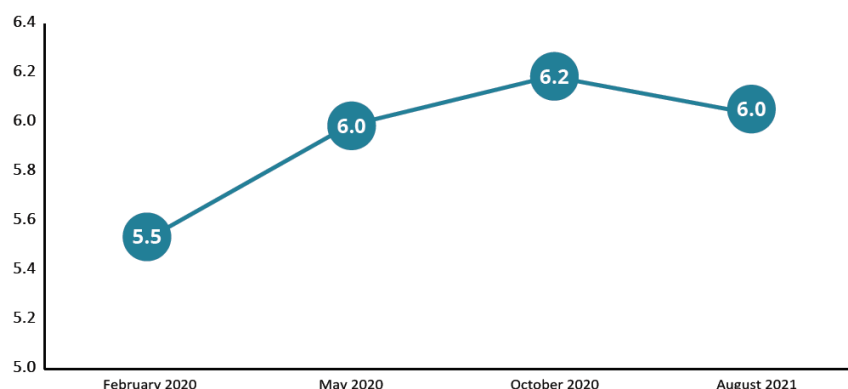


Figure 3: Index of perceived social cohesion, February 2020 to August 2021²⁶

At the local level, the Victorian Population Health Survey 2020 (undertaken between 30 September 2020 and 28 February 2021) found that the proportion of adults in Maroondah who had low levels of trust in others was lower in Maroondah (at 8.0%) than it was across Victoria as a whole (14.2%)²⁷.

Community Organisations

Local community organisations (including volunteer-based organisations) reported facing extensive challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

- Reduced capacity to deliver services as usual/ deliver remotely
- Establishing and/or maintaining engagement

- Reduced staff and volunteers/ staff turnover and recruitment
- Staff burnout/ decreased wellbeing
- Planning/ disruptions due to uncertainty and instability
- Meeting increased demand
- Transition to/ from working from home

Many local community services reported that they are struggling with increased levels of demand and client waitlists, particularly mental health and counselling services, emergency relief services and family violence services.

Through the Maroondah Community Volunteering Survey, local volunteer-based organisations reported:

- Volunteering decreased by 25-50% in a quarter of the participating organisations
- This impacted their financial strength, limited some of their services and added stress and pressure to the organisation and the individuals involved
- For sporting organisations, many could not run their normal seasons, meaning a reduced income and membership
- For arts organisations/groups, lack of venue space and event opportunities curtailed activities and events, affecting motivation
- Some groups reported a drastic impact on their governance and management, and some reported struggling with planning and resourcing under an unpredictable future
- Mental health and wellbeing became a big issue and continues to be a burden on many
- 25% of respondents indicated that the future viability of their volunteer-based organisation was at risk
- All participating volunteer-based organisations indicated a desire for further training and support

Key supports needed by the Maroondah community

Consultation with both community organisations and individual community members identified the following key supports needed by the Maroondah community over the next 12 months within this capital area:

- Social connection via online or face-to-face interaction is highly important for all demographics and age groups, but particularly for people living alone and older residents
- Support to re-engage and establish new volunteers
- Opportunities for social activities
- Holding low-cost or free local and community events, with significant mention of markets, festivals and music events
- Community spirit needs to be fostered and enhanced
- Opportunities to build community engagement in local neighbourhoods
- Building community communication networks
- Re-engagement with sporting groups
- *“Anything that helps people come together face-to-face. Supporting and facilitating face-to-face activities and events. Be Kind program has been great, continue with that messaging. Helps with hyper-local connections”*

Future Considerations

- As with Human Capital, there are still many important impacts and support/recovery needs within this Capital, both now and continuing into 2022 and beyond.
- Social and community connection is a clear ongoing focus area for both COVID-19 response and recovery efforts – *social isolation* is a major impact now; *community/social connectedness and participation* are clear support needs and recovery priorities going forward.
- Community organisations of all types and sectors are facing challenges that impact their ability to provide much needed services for the Maroondah community, both now and going forward. This includes significant workforce issues in our caring professions / community services, and the unique challenges and needs facing our volunteer-based community organisations. Going forward, it will be critical to work collectively to support Maroondah’s community organisations and the continuation of their care to the community.
- As the pandemic progresses, it will be important to continue to apply evidence informed approaches to understanding and responding to the evolving social impacts on the Maroondah community.



7. Built Capital

'Built capital' refers to the design, building and maintenance of physical infrastructure, including its functional and aesthetic value. This includes critical facilities and services, housing, vehicles, equipment, information technology, communications, water and energy infrastructure.

Maroondah COVID-19 Recovery Plan	
Recovery Capital	Key Council responses to date
<p>Built Capital - Sustaining our community facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Returning to accessible and safe community facilities • Infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular and enhanced maintenance of parks, gardens, foot and bike paths • Supported accessibility and inclusion for community groups to continue to use Council facilities in a COVIDSafe environment • Offered a fee subsidy program for arts and cultural groups and creative practitioners to increase access to facilities • Facilitated the acceleration of community projects such as Dorset Recreation Reserve

Medium-term Impacts

A recent Infrastructure Australia study found that in Australia critical infrastructure and networks were able to reconfigure quickly and deliver differently, showing a resilience beyond many other OECD nations

They noted the following trends that emerged across the community that have shaped the infrastructure sector:

- **Digitisation** - A rapid shift from physical to virtual interaction, with increased convenience for users and providers
- **Decentralisation** - A redistribution of demand for utilities, and increased vibrancy in regional centres
- **Localism** - Better use of local infrastructure, and local and regional vibrancy were evident, with more local trips and travel remaining in regional and local areas of WA, SA and TAS
- **Service innovation** - Providers responded by moving teaching curricula and students online, telehealth consultations grew, and transport services introduced new protective measures
- **Adaptability** - A responsive repurposing of infrastructure and assets, and quickly scaling up latent capacity²⁸

They also noted a number of challenges that are made more critical now as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic²⁹, the following which are relevant to Maroondah:

Mitigating growing car dependency	Private motor vehicle use was the first mode to rebound to pre-COVID-19 levels, with more people driving to work and a significant number of households purchasing a second-hand car. To avoid congestion problems, safe and/or trusted alternatives to driving need to be provided and encouraged.
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Improving sorting and processing for waste	With the waste export ban coming into effect in 2021, circular economy reforms that were urgent before COVID-19 are now critically so. Efforts to improve waste economics by reforming collection and sorting, to reduce municipal waste contamination and to promote new technology investment are needed.
Supporting financial sustainability	Some critical infrastructure services have struggled through COVID-19 –as distancing requirements reduced their operating capacity, and as working from home reduced their revenue. A legacy of COVID-19 may be fresh challenges to the longer term financial sustainability of critical services.
Addressing areas of investment uncertainty	Uncertainty about the timing and shape of economic and health recovery risks deferral and indecision on critical infrastructure projects. Difficulty with strategic planning and decision making will risk future unmet needs, if service and infrastructure capacity is not available when it is required. Ongoing trade tensions and uncertainty over border openings amplify this uncertainty for certain sectors.
Real-time data insights	In general, private sector data has been more current, granular and insightful in revealing the real-time impacts of COVID-19 and the distribution of those impacts across the country. By comparison, public and national datasets are often being released months or years after their reporting timeframe. The need for better data for public decision makers to manage crises is a major priority.

The review found that a number of behaviour changes linked to infrastructure could become ‘hard-wired’ persisting beyond the pandemic:

- There are several behaviour changes directly and indirectly driving trends, including:
 - Long distance and international travel restrictions have impacted business-related travel, access to skilled labour, education and tourism “staying at home”, which reduces regular weekday mobility in cities and disperses consumption of essential utilities
 - Social distancing reduces the effective capacity of infrastructure spaces and services, and drives avoidance of certain services
 - Health and hygiene requirements are increasing operating costs and contributing to greater generation of waste
- There are strong linkages between behaviour trends and infrastructure impacts, for instance:
 - Growth in online shopping and home food delivery has driven growth in residential waste
 - Greater online collaboration is linked to a reduction in business-related trips on the transport network (local, domestic and international)
- These changes flow into behavioural changes that could ‘stick’ either partially or permanently, such as:
 - Shoppers who purchase online may find they continue to do so where retail shopfronts have closed during the pandemic or converted to ‘e-businesses’
 - Businesses that downsized CBD office space or closed their office altogether, will likely embed working from home and flexible working beyond the pandemic
 - Households that bought an additional car or a bike to avoid public transport are likely to use them more once the pandemic is over
 - A person who invests in establishing their home office is more likely to work from home in the future³⁰

In Maroondah, there were periods during COVID-19 with significant reductions in the number of people using public transport, with one organisation noting that travel on public transport got as low as 9%.

Traffic in Maroondah also reduced, however traffic volumes recorded at end of 2020 and early 2021 indicate that daily traffic volume totals are higher than 2019 pre-COVID daily volumes. This demonstrates a significant return of local car and freight-based traffic and confirm a reduced return to public transport for commuter work-based trips.

Key supports needed by the Maroondah community

Consultation with both community organisations and individual community members identified the following key supports needed by the Maroondah community over the next 12 months within this capital area:

- Well-maintained, safe and improved nature trails, footpaths and active transport options
- Well-maintained outdoor facilities including playgrounds and skateparks
- Re-opening of recreational/ sports and exercise facilities
- Ensuring infrastructure such as carparks are available and located close to facilities attended by older residents or those with disability
- Improvement of local strip shopping locations
- More consideration of the impacts of new developments in local neighbourhoods
- *“The library throughout last year was a life line for a lot of people - for me it was books, for mum it was DVD’s - for my friends’ kids online story time”*
- *“Access to spaces - knowing that there are options in the community [and] having a more community friendly pricing scheme for hire venues”*

Future Considerations

- Infrastructure Australia’s study notes that working from home, social distancing, infection control and recession are ‘curveballs’ in critical infrastructure sectors that need long term planning certainty³¹
- Community facilities in Maroondah will continue to be faced with ongoing additional costs to maintain COVID-safe measures, and the continued challenge of building community confidence to return to safe in-person use of community facilities.
- Infrastructure-related challenges of key relevance to Maroondah going forward include:
 - Mitigating growing car dependency
 - Improving sorting and processing for waste
 - Addressing areas of investment uncertainty
 - Supporting financial sustainability
 - Addressing areas of investment uncertainty
 - Real-time data insights
- There are also opportunities to positively leverage the greater localisation experienced by the community during the COVID-19 pandemic to build upon the ‘20 minute neighbourhoods’ concept in Maroondah



8. Political Capital

‘Political capital’ refers to the power to influence decision-making in relation to resource access and distribution, and the ability to engage external entities to achieve local goals. It includes agency, voice, justice, equity, inclusion, legislation, regulation, governance, leadership and policy. It applies within and between groups and exists both formally and informally.

Maroondah COVID-19 Recovery Plan	
Recovery Capital	Key Council responses to date
<p>Political Capital - Supporting community leadership and advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Community led decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided information on available services and support that is accessible, repeated, includes translations and in different formats • Extensive engagement processes with community and businesses undertaken • Advocated for the needs of the community to partners and other levels of government • Liaised with key partners such as Migrant Information Centre and CALD community leaders to understand needs and provide support

Medium-term Impacts

Communication

Local community organisations identified a number of medium-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on clients / community members in relation to communication:

- The COVID-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions has reduced access to information for some in the Maroondah community, e.g. those with:
 - Limited or no internet access
 - No access to tech devices
 - Language barriers
 - Accessibility issues
 - Those used to accessing information in-person
- Some community members still prefer hard copy information distributed and telephone check-ins, as opposed to the online alternatives
- Clear and timely communication and access to accurate information continues to be a challenge in some parts of the Maroondah community, e.g. CALD communities - translated information and resources for CALD community members was noted as highly important

- For some in the community there is a lack of understanding about the reasons for restrictions, and it has been difficult to ‘keep up to date’ with changing circumstances
- People requiring support from community services aren’t always aware of how to access them or what is open
- With mixed messaging around the vaccine rollout, there is also hesitancy and fear around vaccines and where to get the best/ most accurate information.

Local community organisations also noted that Council's community coverage is highly valued and is seen as an opportunity to assist in promotion of community services and activities.

Building/ rebuilding community confidence in Maroondah was raised as an important resilience effort by local community organisations, and Council is seen to play an important role in supporting the community to regain confidence - finding ways to instil hope and spread positive messaging around gratitude and connection or phrases such as “We will get through this together” was seen as beneficial to the community.

Community-led decision making

The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience notes that *“Empowering communities to create their own solutions can improve overall social cohesion and this is critical to sustainable recovery outcomes”*³².

A number of local community organisations identified community consultation and engagement as a top long-term recovery priority for Maroondah, with comments around the need to:

- Consult with the community and listen to what is needed and wanted and responding to that - in the short term, medium-term, and long-term timeframe
- Provide a voice to local organisations
- Make sure the community is heard via local papers, online forums and group forums

Local community organisations noted that regular consultation with community about their needs and challenges is highly important, and a more coordinated effort to encourage agencies to work together will benefit people's wellbeing. Local community organisations also reported that they are very happy to work together with Council to address any of the predicted ongoing issues arising from the pandemic.

The Maroondah Deliberative Panel Process (conducted in February and March 2021) aimed to inform Council planning, including long-term recovery planning – the panel identified a number of recommendations about community engagement and decision making with the aim of improving partnerships between Council and the community.

Key supports needed by the Maroondah community

Consultation with both community organisations and individual community members identified the following key supports needed by the Maroondah community over the next 12 months within this capital area:

- Accessible public information about what is available locally
- Information around outreach and support services
- More community information via newsletters and other hard copy formats
- Centralised resource for support or information from Council about COVID-19
- Finding ways to reach people when they are isolated and don't want to go online regularly
- Finding ways of celebrating community strengths to contribute to a healthy the recovery
- Spaces for the community to lead programs
- Running community-led initiatives

- “Making sure that publicity is available around services that can be accessed - getting information out to the public is critical”

Future Considerations

- Both community organisations and community members identified *regular updates* as a support need over next 12 months to help the Maroondah community recover, with suggestions including:
 - Access to current information through varied methods (i.e., online and hardcopy)
 - Ongoing provision of information about COVID-19 and vaccine rollout, in languages needed
 - Information to understand, accept and move forward into the 'new normal' pandemic world.
- *Access to resources/ information* was the equal third highest long-term priority for recovery in Maroondah. Suggestions to address this priority included:
 - Promote what is available in the community
 - Raise the visibility of the support that is offered and what Council can do
 - Increase the accessibility of services
 - Deliver courses to use/access online services/e-devices
 - Help organisations with technology e.g., to produce newsletters and build/ update websites
 - Provide information in-language and via channels that communities use
- In particular, more work is needed to support effective communication with our culturally and linguistically diverse communities, particularly those community members who are newly arrived or not yet proficient with the English language
- *Community consultation and engagement* was identified as a top long-term recovery priority for Maroondah by a number of local community organisations. Going forward, consideration should be made on how best to support:
 - Ongoing community-wide consultation and engagement
 - Targeted consultation and engagement with harder to reach cohorts
 - Effective community-led decision making and recovery, noting that this could also assist with rising tensions and dissatisfaction in some sections of the community



9. Financial Capital

‘Financial capital’ refers to the availability of and access to resources including savings, income, assets, investments, credit, insurance, grants, donations, loans, consumption and distribution of goods and services, employment and economic activity. Financial capital represents the resources available to people, households and communities, with interactions across these levels.

Maroondah COVID-19 Recovery Plan	
Recovery Capital	Key Council responses to date
<p>Financial Capital - Rebuilding livelihoods and business activation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business support • Job creation and pathways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated the expansion of outdoor dining areas for hospitality businesses • Provided business fee relief for some permits and registrations • Shopping centre improvement works • Business promotion – shop local • Bayswater Business Precinct Project • Place Activation Project (parklets, pop up parks) • Supported initiatives to reduce barriers to employment, particularly for young people

Medium-term Impacts

Businesses

The medium-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in business environments have been extensive but varied, with some businesses ceasing and some booming.

Throughout the pandemic, impacts on businesses have changed as the restrictions to manage the health impact of COVID-19 continued to evolve and adjust. Businesses that in the past were based on in-premise transactions, e.g. hospitality and retail and personal services, were a particularly visible face of health measures.

Many businesses faced, and will continue to face, disruptions due to workers needing to isolate for testing requirements or exposure to the virus. This disruption is currently being felt by many businesses including national brands like Australia Post and Woolworths. It is envisioned that high vaccination levels will reduce disruptions to both businesses and workers.

Currently State and Federal government are supporting both business and workers with payments if operations are impacted, however not all businesses or workers qualify for support payments. The State Government are currently continuing to provide assistance to landlords and tenants during this time.

One of the key growth drivers in the economy is population. Until COVID-19 this had been driven primarily from immigration, which virtually overnight was reduced to zero. This has flow-on impacts to consumption, demand for housing and labour supply at all skill levels.

Locally, in September 2021 the Maroondah Business Advisory Committee discussed the following issues:

- Complexity of messaging from government on support available, too difficult for some to sort
- Usual to have a reasonable % of business closures
- Uncertainty of roadmap timing and outlook in 2022 difficult for some
- Not all business can work from home, do click and collect etc - eg hairdressers, swim schools, real estate
- Work with business groups to provide peer to peer support / problem solving / mentoring

Also, a recent survey of women who are small business owners on what topics they would like information on showed a shift from direct COVID information to ones that help propel this business. Top responses were:

- Marketing 20%
- Networking 18%
- Innovation 16%
- Other ways of working e.g. coworking 12%
- COVID-19 support 4%

Growth, both nationally and for Victoria, is forecast to move back into the positive as the economy reopens. This will coincide with vaccination rates reaching desired levels and impacts of COVID-19 on the workforce and health system reduce. This reflects a similar pattern in 2020 as sections of the economy rebounded quickly. Support payments to both business and workers were a key reason for this.³³

As a broad measure, the number of new businesses (measured by ABN registrations) is currently around pre-COVID numbers, with slightly more volatility. The number of ABN cancellations has recovered from the immediate shock with now a healthy overall increase in businesses.

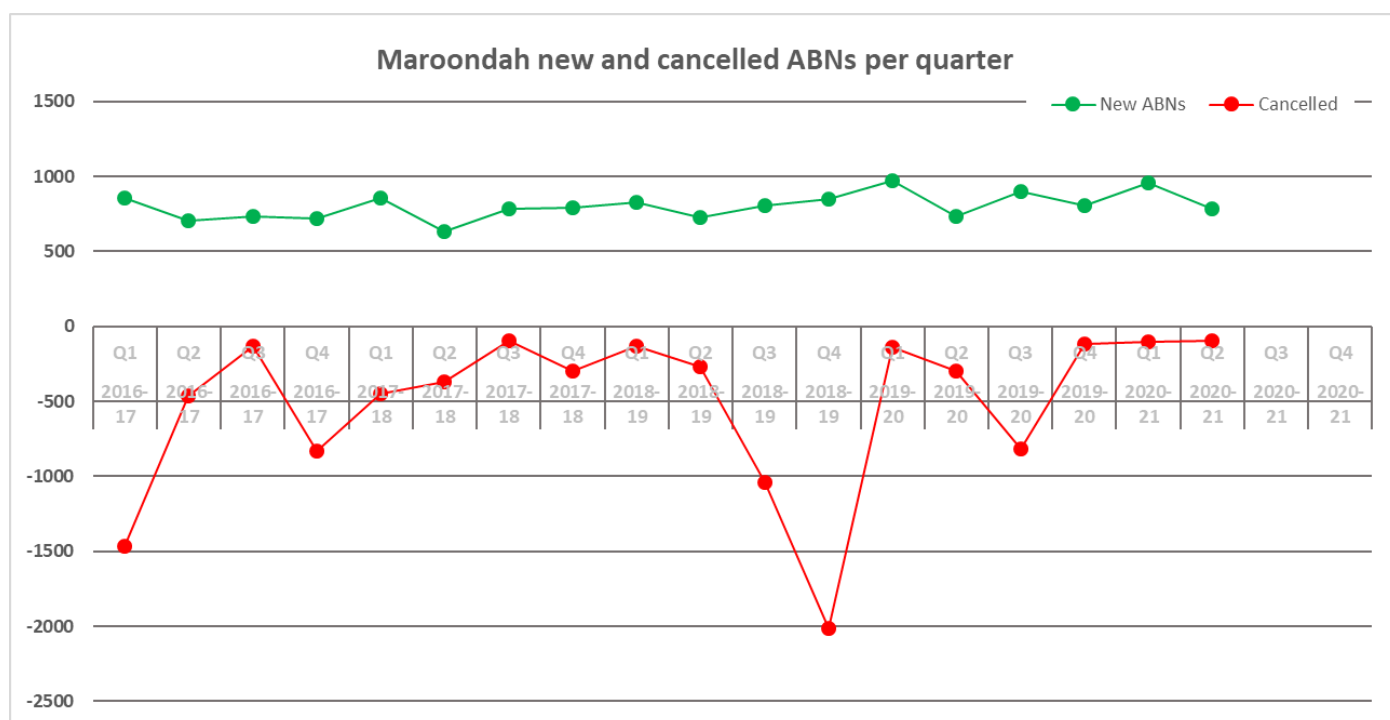


Figure 4: New and cancelled ABNs in Maroondah per quarter³⁴

Overall, Maroondah’s economy in June 2021 was slightly ahead of pre COVID levels. It is expected that the next quarter update will show a decline from this position as the impact of recent lockdowns flows through.

In Maroondah, prior to COVID-19 and the introduction of lockdowns and restrictions to manage the pandemic, the total monthly output across all local industry sectors was estimated at \$1.208 billion. For **June 2021**, industry output is estimated at \$1.219 billion, **an increase of 0.86%**. *Note - this is a monthly estimate and should not be annualised. The next major update to this data will be after the release of the September quarter National Accounts that are due for release 1 Dec 2021.*

Maroondah

COVID-19 Impact on Output

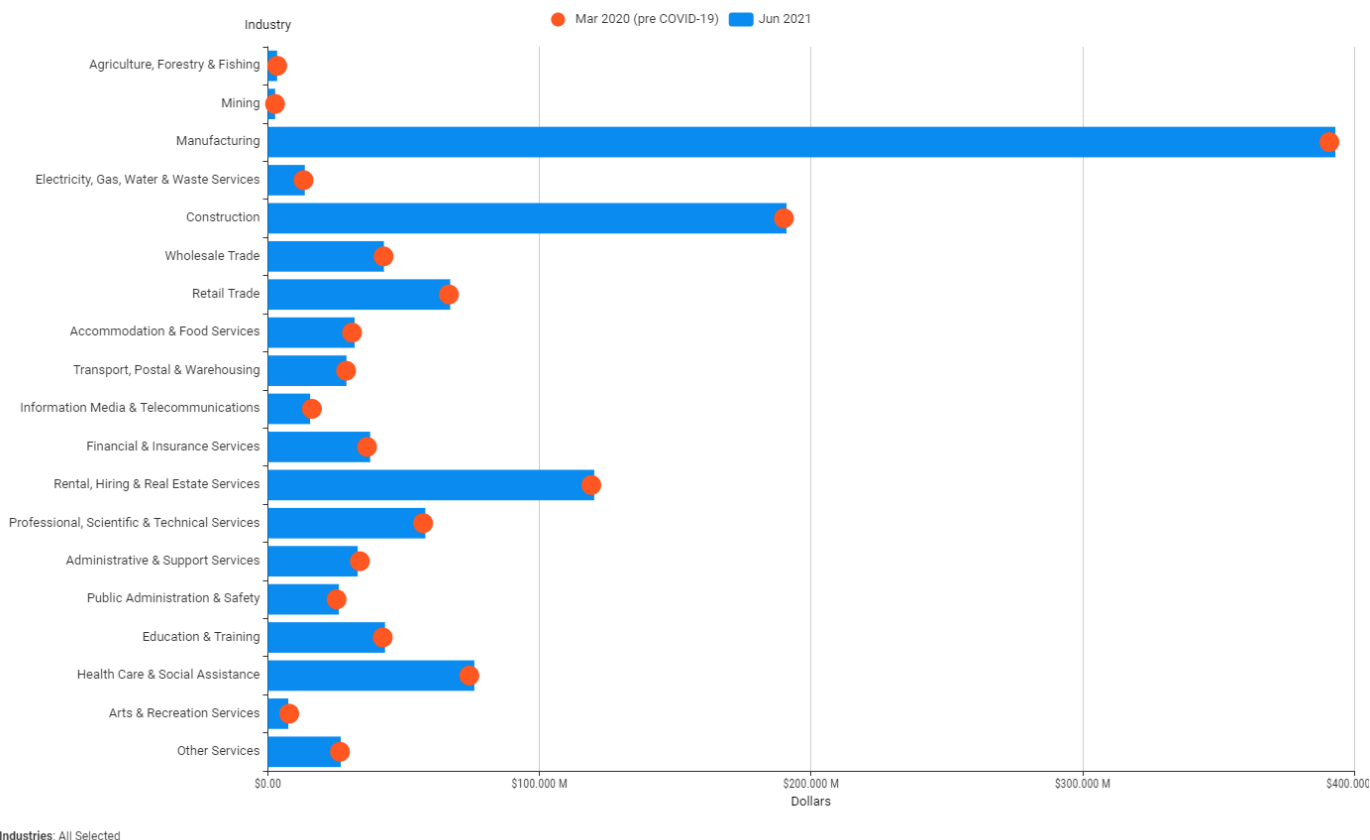


Figure 5: COVID-19 impact on economic output³⁵

Employment

In March 2021 the unemployment rate in Maroondah was 6.2%, compared to 3.7% in March 2020 ³⁶. At the beginning of Stage 4 restrictions in August 2020, the number of employed persons in Maroondah was 3.5% lower than pre-COVID levels (March 2020) – by March 2021 this had returned to pre-COVID levels³⁷. Young people and women have been disproportionately affected in terms of employment. As with businesses, there is support available for many, but not all people who lose jobs.

Just as the impact of COVID-19 is variable on businesses, the same is reflected in jobs. However, overall, employment / jobs in Maroondah continue to recover. National-level labour data trends point to a quick rebound when health measures ease.

ABS began monitoring weekly payroll data pre COVID. Using 14 March 2020 as a baseline of 100%, the following graph clearly shows the impact on jobs slow recovery over the past 18 months; with the recent NSW and Vic escalations clearly impacting both locally and nationally. A positive is that post February 2021 to July 2021 there were more jobs than the March 2020 figures.

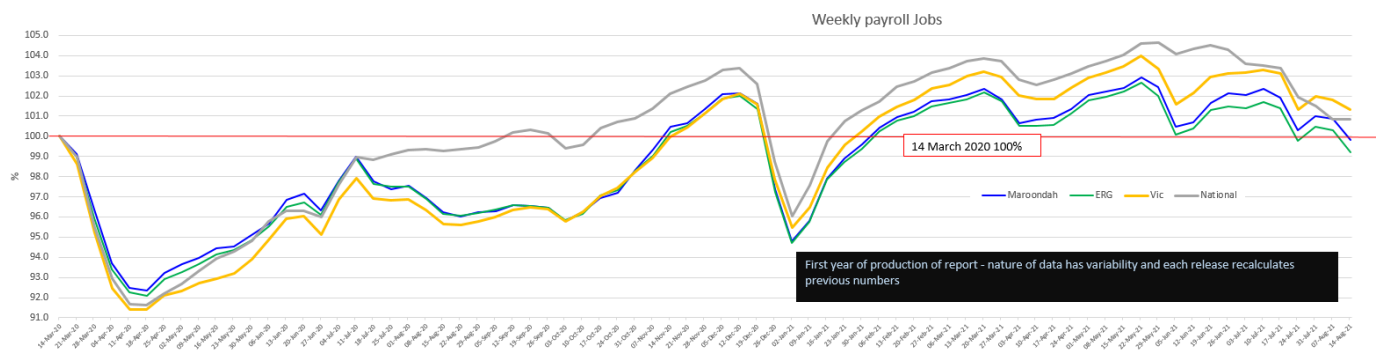


Figure 6: Weekly Payroll Jobs and Wages in Australia³⁸

These trends are reflected at a national level and included in the 9 September 2021 RBA chart pack³⁹. The labour data shows the positive rebound of participation (more opportunities), total hours worked and coupled with lower unemployment and underemployment - the beginning of the impact of public health measures in NSW and Vic can be seen. These point to a quick rebound when health measures ease.

Pre-COVID, Maroondah had over 44,000 jobs, of which only 36.3% were filled by Maroondah residents. Another 37.1% lived in neighbouring councils in the Eastern Region. Maroondah residents are mobile in their employment, with the largest percentage (13.2%) working in the CBD⁴⁰. The recovery of businesses, and in turn jobs, needs to be considered in terms of the Region as this is where the effect is felt, it is not contained solely within Maroondah’s boundaries.

There have been several responses at national and state levels that continue to support job creation including:

- Working for Victoria
- Boosting Apprenticeship Commencement (BAC) wage subsidy
- Global Talent Visa Program

One response to the skilled labour shortage and changes in job availability has been an increase in partnerships. Ai GROUP reported in September 2021 that employers were taking up the support for new apprentices with 180,000 new apprentices in last 10 months, compared to the previous 12 month periods of between 150,000 to 160,000⁴¹.

Given the announcement of the Victoria Roadmap there will hopefully be gradual improvement across a range of sectors, however it is unlikely this will be uniform across sectors.

Key supports needed by the Maroondah community

Consultation with both community organisations and individual community members identified the following key supports needed by the Maroondah community over the next 12 months within this capital area:

- Support for businesses to boost promotion and online presence
- Sponsorship or donations to hold events
- Financial aid for business suffering prolonged financial hardship, including lowering fees
- Ensuring access to financial support information and local job opportunities
- Pathways for upskilling and entering industries with employment shortages
- Increased opportunities for trading
- Materials grants
- Provide incentives for the community to shop locally and hold events in strip shopping locations in Maroondah as well as enhance them

- Financial education support to assist the community with economic impacts
- More outdoor dining areas for coffee shops and restaurants
- *“Young people and casual workers will need more secure employment pathways and regular hours. Casual labourers in fields like retail, hospitality, allied health, aged care often need to work across multiple locations to make a living wage. This is not helpful for COVID spread and worker wellbeing”*
- *“Training programs in place to help people in the community who may need up-skilling to find new forms of employment”*
- *“Support to local small businesses and organisations will be vital to the recovery. Financial support is needed, but also increased support from Council in regards to offering promotional and partnership opportunities”*

Future Considerations

- Economic growth for Victoria is forecast to move back into the positive in 2021/22 as the economy reopens when vaccination reaches desired levels and impacts of COVID reduce
- Overall Maroondah’s economy in June 2021 was slightly ahead of pre-COVID levels – next quarter update is likely to show a decline from this position as the impact of recent lockdowns flows through
- Labour data trends point to a quick rebound in employment / jobs figures when health measures ease
- Unfortunately, not all businesses will survive post-COVID
- Support needs for businesses and workers include:
 - Access to government support when & if required into the future (e.g. local lockdowns)
 - Simplify and consolidate messaging from all levels of government – too many messengers
 - Support for business owners – mental health, business mentoring and peer support
- It is unclear yet to what extent changes in consumer behaviour and staff working from home arrangements will continue as the economy reopens
- Further information is needed to better understand and respond to the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Maroondah. The upcoming Maroondah Economic Impact Assessment will be vital in supplying this information.



10. Cultural Capital

‘Cultural capital’ refers to the way people understand and know the world, and how they act within it. It includes ethnicity, habits, language, stories, traditions, spirituality, heritage, symbols, mannerisms, preferences, attitudes, orientations, identities, norms and values.

Maroondah COVID-19 Recovery Plan	
Recovery Capital	Key Council responses to date
<p>Cultural Capital - Revitalise cultural and creative industries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arts and cultural recovery Support creative industries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provided subsidised use of cultural facilities for local arts and cultural groups and creative practitioners including rehearsal, presentation, and exhibition spaces at Karralyka, Maroondah Federation Estate, Wyreana Community Arts Centre, and halls across Maroondah. Ensured accessible arts experiences and assisted community to re-engage and share their experiences through creative expression including writing, storytelling, songwriting, visual and performing arts Supported cultural tourism initiatives to boost visitation to our activity centres and provide opportunities for local artists and creative industries

Medium-term Impacts

Arts and Culture

The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impacts across all levels of the arts and creative ecosystem.

In Maroondah, local arts and cultural organisations and groups reported the following impacts during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Lack of engagement with others and missed opportunities to share experiences and meet, practice, rehearse and perform together. This has had a significant impact at a personal and cultural level.
- Lack of motivation to keep going with artistic and creative endeavours. Lack of motivation to participate in online activities and pursue events in the uncertain climate.
- Constant need to reschedule and cancel performances, exhibitions, events and other activities has also had a significant impact and led to fatigue and exhaustion.
- Financial impact, particularly on musicians, who have lost a great deal of work and are struggling to make ends meet.

- Audience hesitancy and the need to encourage audiences to return and participate and engage once the pandemic is over.
- Impact on group membership has been significant - financial, morale and volunteer support has been impacted. This threatens the viability of a number of long-established community-based arts groups.

They also reported some benefits, opportunities and positive changes arising from the pandemic, including:

- New online methods and innovations have been a benefit, with most using Zoom, streaming, etc to hold virtual events, activities, rehearsals, etc. This has also encouraged many to learn new skills with technology; and has also increased the scope for access to events, etc.
- There has been a focus on hyper-local activity and engagement within communities and with neighbours.
- Flexibility and contingency planning - most groups and organisations are more flexible now than previously.

Creative Industries

Creative Victoria notes that:

“Creative industries have been amongst the hardest hit sectors in Victoria, with venue closures, screen industry shutdowns and event cancellations leaving thousands of creative practitioners and associated trades out of work and leading to millions in lost revenue”⁴²

In Maroondah, local arts and cultural organisations and groups reported the following impacts on creative industries:

- Significant negative financial impacts for the industry and artists, particularly musicians
- Significant impact on membership of community-based arts groups (financial, morale, volunteer support), threatening the viability of many groups
- Social isolation amongst artists and those in the community

As of July 2021, Creative Victoria reports that:

- The majority of Victorian audiences were comfortable attending a range of venues such as museums and galleries (97%), large theatres (86%) and live music venues (54%)
- The risk of future lockdowns and cancellations is the primary barrier to attendance (55% of respondents)
- A high percentage believed that vaccination will enable normal activities to resume within 12 months⁴³

Key supports needed by the Maroondah community

Consultation with both community organisations and individual community members identified the following key supports needed by the Maroondah community over the next 12 months within this capital area:

- Support the community to build a culture of attending events
- Promotion of local events
- Access to rehearsal spaces and venues
- Support for organisations to re-engage and establish members
- Support to re-build and strengthen the creative ecosystem
- Financial aid and assistance
- More opportunities to be involved in activities and programs in the community (e.g., public exhibitions)

- *“Support the community to build a culture of attending events. There was excitement at the start of the year to attend events, but now ticket sales are fluctuating again, doom and gloom perspective again, currently people don't want to commit. Council could support with a campaign around positive messaging and promotion of local events. [Organisations] would also benefit with access to rehearsal space, as this will build their ability to work in the community”*

Future Considerations

- Representatives of Maroondah’s arts and cultural community suggested the following priorities and strategies for recovery in Maroondah:
 - Community connectedness and participation. A focus on support and engagement at the local level - there is a need to bring communities together and activate local spaces
 - Increased collaboration and connection between community groups and organisations who can work together and support each other
 - Promotion of the arts and local events to encourage community participation is very important, and a valuable support that Council could offer
 - Positive health messaging, including around the safety of Maroondah facilities
 - Access to venues and spaces for performances, rehearsals, and events, including planning for COVID-Safe performance spaces that allow for physical distancing - e.g. outdoors
 - Mental health and wellbeing
 - Support with membership and financial recovery
- In an already heavily impacted sector, consideration will have to be given about how to adequately respond to these significant needs in Maroondah going forward.



11. Natural Capital

‘Natural capital’ refers to natural resources and beauty, and the overall health of ecosystems. This includes air, land, soil, water, minerals, energy, weather, geographic location, flora, fauna and biodiversity.

Maroondah COVID-19 Recovery Plan	
Recovery Capital	Key Council responses to date
<p>Natural Capital - Enhancing our connection with nature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection and enhancement of green open space • Improving community wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued implementation and delivery of the Re-imagining Tarralla Creek project • Partnered with Traditional Owner groups and Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place for storytelling and other cultural activities • Promoted participation in activities that connect people and nature

Medium-term Impacts

Environmental

- Globally, fossil CO₂ emissions (coal, oil, gas and cement) dropped in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic - however the drop is temporary, and based on preliminary estimates across 2021, emissions have largely bounced back to pre-pandemic levels⁴⁴.
- As trips shifted from long journeys to local ones during periods of lockdown and restrictions, some people switched from cars and public transport to walking and cycling⁴⁵. Traffic in Maroondah reduced, however traffic volumes recorded at end of 2020 and early 2021 indicate that daily traffic volume totals are higher than 2019 pre-COVID daily volumes.
- Household waste increased by 20% nationally during 2020 (reversing a long-term trend), with high levels of food delivery and online shopping generating large increases in packaging and single use waste⁴⁶.

Wellbeing

- Research shows that people who reported feeling connected to the natural environment had better outcomes on a wide range of psychosocial measures following disasters⁴⁷.
- Benefits of nature include reducing stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression, as well as boosting immune systems, physical activity and social behaviours^{48 49}.
- Living in walking distance of parks and green spaces has been linked to positive health outcomes such as reduction in stress, improved mental wellbeing and reduced likelihood of being overweight⁵⁰.
- Such outcomes highlight the importance of nature and access to open spaces, especially during COVID restrictions when communities were reliant on local public green spaces to both exercise and socialise⁵¹.

Key supports needed by the Maroondah community

Consultation with both community organisations and individual community members identified the following key supports needed by the Maroondah community over the next 12 months within this capital area:

- Well-maintained open and green spaces for people to enjoy
- More outdoor areas and undercover areas to sit and socialise including benches, picnic tables and barbeques
- More off leash dog parks
- Outdoor social activities in local parks
- Spread of information about facilities, reserves and spaces in Maroondah for people to access
- Leverage and promote outdoor areas as places for connection
- *“I think there will be raised levels of stress and anxiety so I think maintenance of local parks, shared paths and the like will be imperative”*
- *“I think that the amount to time people spent outside was amazing”*

Future Considerations

- The development of Maroondah City Council’s Sustainability Strategy 2021 to 2030 provides a valuable opportunity to align the Maroondah community’s COVID-19 recovery needs with local sustainability priorities and aspirations, particularly in the following areas:
 - Strengthening community leadership
 - Protection and enhancement of the environment, including green and open spaces in Maroondah
 - Action on climate change, including transport methods

12. Conclusion

The duration of the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia and its associated lockdowns and restrictions has been longer than many anticipated, due largely to a slow national vaccination rollout and the emergence of the highly infectious Delta variant.

Although there were fewer restrictions in place in Melbourne across much of 2021, there were also intermittent lockdowns in response to smaller outbreaks, as well as a return to the significant Stage 4 lockdown settings in August to October 2021 in response to the Delta outbreak across Australia, which effectively returned Victoria to the relief/response stage of the pandemic.

This extended duration of the pandemic has meant that as of November 2021, in many ways the situation has not changed significantly since 2020.

What has changed, however, is the now strong vaccination uptake across Australia, and people's subsequent ability to forward plan more effectively. Past experiences from Victoria's previous lockdowns have also provided a greater understanding of the impacts of the pandemic and our capacity to recover from these impacts, as well as the likely trajectories that elements of recovery may take in the future.

With this context in mind, it is unsurprising that when reviewing the medium-term impacts of the pandemic (i.e. impacts across January to September 2021) within the Recovery Capitals Framework, the impacts on the Maroondah community continued to be spread across all Recovery Capitals.

Medium-term impacts in Maroondah were, however, especially significant in the following four Recovery Capitals:

- Human Capital, particularly -
 - Mental Health and Wellbeing
 - Health and Safety
 - Education
 - Resources and Support
- Social Capital, particularly -
 - Social and Community Connection
 - Community Organisations (including volunteering)
- Financial Capital, particularly -
 - Businesses
 - Employment
- Cultural Capital, particularly -
 - Arts and Culture
 - Creative Industries

Next Steps

To assist with future planning regarding COVID-19 relief and recovery work across Maroondah, Council recommends that local organisations and agencies reflect on the impacts, support needs and future considerations outlined within this report, and what these may mean for their organisation, their clients and the Maroondah community.

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13 14 50

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