

# GREATER BENDIGO COMMUNITY AQUATIC FACILITIES STRATEGY



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30 JUNE 2020

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The City of Greater Bendigo is on Dja Dja Wurrung and Tungurung Country and acknowledges the Traditional Owners.

We acknowledge and extend our appreciation for the Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung People, the Traditional Owners of the land.

We pay our respects to leaders and Elders past, present and emerging for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and the hopes of all Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung people.

We express our gratitude in the sharing of this land, our sorrow for the personal, spiritual and cultural costs of that sharing and our hope that we may walk forward together in harmony and in the spirit of healing.

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# GREATER BENDIGO COMMUNITY AQUATIC FACILITIES STRATEGY SUMMARY



**Greater Bendigo's residents enjoy access to diverse recreational opportunities. Along with a variety of sporting and recreational facilities, beautiful parks, gardens, open spaces and reserves, access to aquatic facilities is an important factor in Greater Bendigo's liveability.**

**BACKGROUND** While the importance of community aquatic facilities to Greater Bendigo's liveability and wellbeing is indisputable, the current provision (which offers the highest number of public aquatic facilities of all 79 local government areas in Victoria) is not sustainable (financially or environmentally), contemporary, fit for purpose and does not adequately deliver on the community's goal to maximise liveability and wellbeing in the community.

Growing maintenance costs combined with rising operational expenses (cost of energy, insurances, staffing and supervision due to increased compliance) and limited ability to raise service income from users, means that continuing to operate the extensive network of aquatic facilities (in the current form) will present an untenable financial situation for Council over the coming decade.

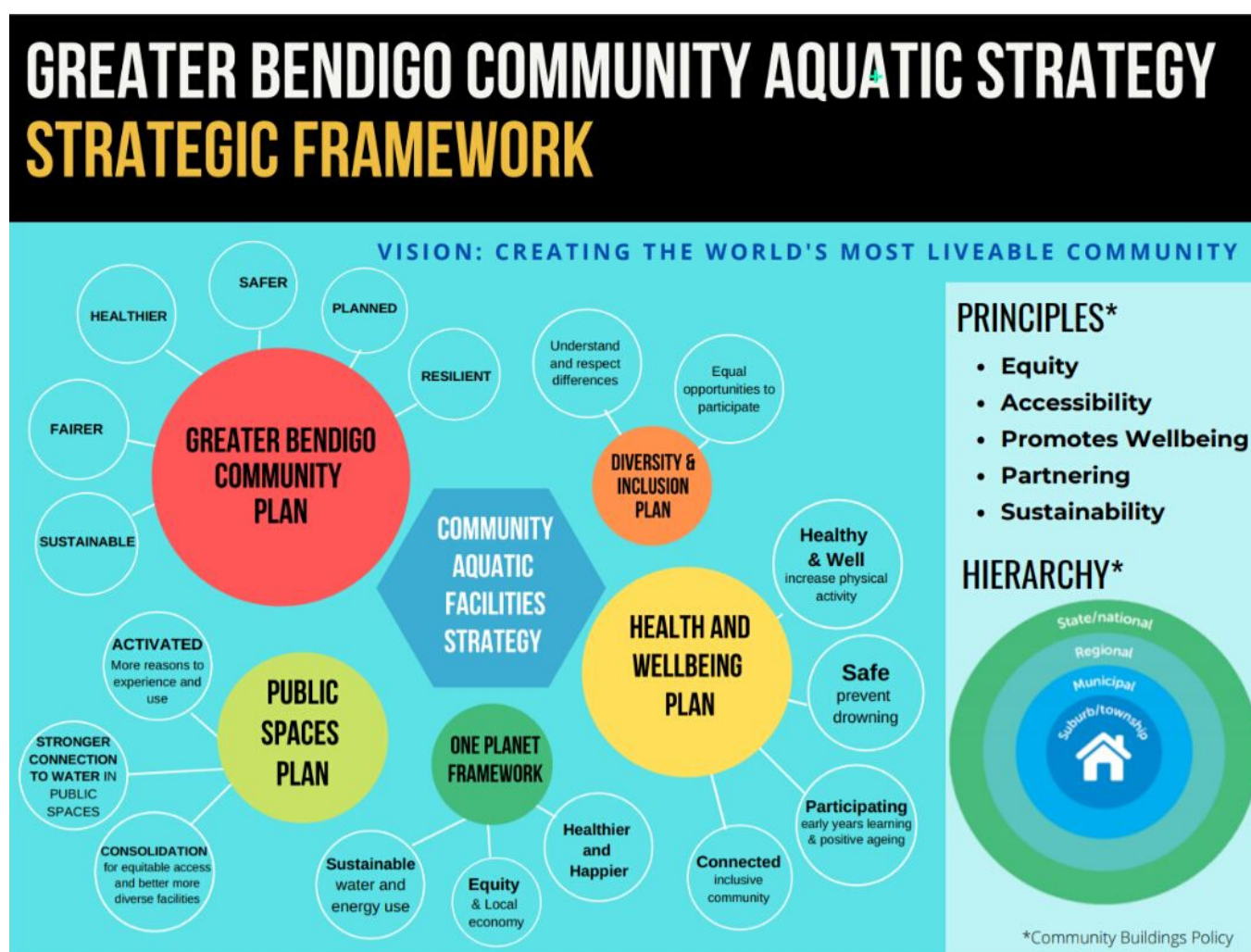
The Community Aquatic Facilities Strategy will assist Council address significant and complicated challenges in providing community aquatic facilities including:

- inequities in existing service levels
- changing community needs and legislated standards
- responding to community needs within financial constraints
- changing patterns of community volunteering
- some existing facilities no longer being fit for purpose
- lack of clarity about Council's role in facilities

# STRATEGIC CONTEXT

**Aquatic facilities, like all community buildings provided by Council, are not an end in themselves. They are designed, developed, maintained and managed to deliver outcomes for the community in the context of the community vision and health and wellbeing goals of the community.**

The existing planning and policy context which guides this Community Aquatic Facilities Strategy (CAFS) is extensive. The direction provided by existing strategies, plans and policies is well aligned, easily integrated and provides a robust foundation for future decisions about aquatic facility provision in the municipality.



*The Strategic Framework above and the Community Buildings Policy, including the principles and the hierarchy, forms the primary policy basis for this Strategy.*



# CURRENT PROVISION & USE

## FACILITY PROVISION

**Most aquatic facilities in Greater Bendigo were built in the post-war decades, a time when there were fewer competing recreation activities, limited air-conditioning, less sun awareness and significantly fewer backyard pools. The use and culture of swimming pools has changed immeasurably since this time.**

With 13 aquatic facilities (12 pools and a splash park), most community aquatic facilities provide a traditional municipal swimming pool experience.

The opening of Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre (GWWC) has seen exceptionally strong patronage, showing there is a desire for contemporary facilities which incorporate indoor aquatic facilities with a range of other services including a gymnasium, community programs and allied health services.

In addition to a lack of diversity in the existing infrastructure, there are six aquatic facilities clustered within 5km of Bendigo's city centre and eight within 10 kilometres. There are also five swimming pools in rural towns and the City has a free splash park at Long Gully.

**Current provision of aquatic facilities in the Bendigo region sees over-served catchments, duplication of services and older facilities which are no longer sustainable or able to fully meet the needs of the community.**

## HOW DOES ACCESS TO AQUATIC RECREATION COMPARE TO OTHER PLACES?

### Community facilities:

Of the nine regional cities assessed, only Bendigo, Mildura and Wangaratta have a provision ratio of under 10,000 residents per community aquatic facility.

With 10 outdoor pools, City of Greater Bendigo has the most of any of these municipalities.

The closest is the Rural City of Mildura, however the context is significantly different with Mildura having one outdoor pool per 3154 km<sup>2</sup> and Bendigo having much more dense provision with one pool per 300 km<sup>2</sup>.

### Domestic Pools:

Real estate sales data and building permits indicate a significant proportion of homes in Greater Bendigo have their own swimming pool (between 1 in 8 and 1 in 15 homes). Also, a large proportion of people who swim (approximately 50%) do so in a private setting.

Community aquatic facility provision should consider equity and disadvantage with access to community facilities prioritised for those groups who are least likely to have access to private pools.

## WHO SWIMS?



- Half of the residents who participate in swimming do so at home\*
- Females swim more than males.
- A higher proportion of 3-7 year olds participate than any other age group.
- 90% of people use a car to get to their swimming activity
- Those who swim do it regularly with almost half swimming at least weekly.
- Quality and accessibility ratings are high and have improved since 2014.
- Swimming is most popular in Kangaroo Flat – Big Hill, which also has the highest facility accessibility rating and residents travel the shortest distance to get to the facility.

\* A significant difference in swimming participation between 2014 (17.5%) and 2019 (8.5%) is explained in the Active Living Census Top Line report. The definition of “participation” changed in the 2019 survey stating that responses should not include any physical activity in the home (i.e. swimming in pools at home).

Residents of all ages and genders participate in swimming for exercise, although, swimming was more popular for females than males. Males and females aged 3 to 11 reported the highest rates of swimming.

|  | Male  | Ages    | Female |  |
|--|-------|---------|--------|--|
|  | 14.3% | 3 - 11  | 16.9%  |  |
|  | 6.5%  | 12 - 17 | 8.3%   |  |
|  | 5.3%  | 18 - 34 | 8.1%   |  |
|  | 6.7%  | 35 - 49 | 8.4%   |  |
|  | 6.5%  | 50 - 69 | 9.1%   |  |
|  | 6.2%  | 70+     | 7.6%   |  |

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# CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

## THE CHALLENGES

The 2019/20 cost of operating swimming pools was \$3,240,096\* which is 2.66% of all rates collected. This equates to a subsidy of \$5.90 per 'swim'.

There is inequity between the financial contributions needed to provide services at different facilities. Sites requiring a higher subsidy do not generally offer better outcomes in terms of quality, accessibility or diversity of services/programs.

Due to aged and outdated infrastructure, many facilities don't meet the needs of current or potential aquatic users in their catchment due to the limitations of the infrastructure available. Subsidy levels need to be considered in context of the value and outcomes offered in terms of liveability, health and wellbeing which are the core goals of aquatic service provision.

\* This amount excludes depreciation in recognition of the different asset stages of the City's facilities (ie. higher cost for new assets and low allowance for end of life assets).

## THE OPPORTUNITIES

Sport and active recreation settings, including community aquatic facilities in all forms, have potential to increase physical activity, promote healthier lifestyles, improve access and engage people of all 'backgrounds, ages and stages' in active, social fun.

Through the careful planning for and provision of community aquatic facilities and services, these become invaluable settings to help Greater Bendigo achieve its goal of becoming a healthier and more liveable place.

Existing community aquatic facilities in Greater Bendigo do not adequately cater for current and importantly, potential users. It is only when closer alignment between the community's needs and fit for purpose provision is achieved that Council will see significant gains in health and wellbeing outcomes, higher rates of facility utilisation and reduced subsidies needed to offset the cost of aquatic recreation.

**To align with Council's policies, maximise the sustainability and utilisation of existing facilities and strengthen the health and wellbeing outcomes achieved, the strategy proposes:**

- Investing in new or refurbished facilities which meet the needs of under-served market segments (especially health and therapy).
- Limiting further investment in facilities which cater mostly for the fitness and training market.
- Transform and diversify the most sustainable and well-located facilities to better match the needs of the community and attract new aquatic participation.
- Ceasing or transforming aquatic services which duplicate other facilities which are provided by more sustainable, cost effective, better located and/or higher quality centres.

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# THE STRATEGY

**The Strategy has been developed using Council's existing strategic framework, including the Community Buildings Policy 2020.**

Based on the principles of the Community Buildings Policy, the following decision making framework is proposed:

## **PRINCIPLE 1: EQUITY**

i. Decisions will seek to ensure that high quality facilities and user experiences are delivered equitably to maximise liveability and wellbeing outcomes for the benefit of all residents.

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## **PRINCIPLE 2: ACCESSIBILITY**

- i. Council's aquatic facilities will be developed, managed and promoted in ways which maximise access to appropriate, safe and high quality service provision for everyone.
- ii. Decisions will ensure that community aquatic facilities are accessible across the municipality.
- iii. Aquatic facilities will be retained at a scale appropriate for surrounding land uses

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## **PRINCIPLE 3: PROMOTE WELLBEING**

- i. Council's aquatic centres purpose is to support and encourage residents to live healthier lifestyles through improved facility design, accessibility and fee structures.
- ii. Council will actively develop its community aquatic facilities as integrated, adaptive and multi-function community buildings which provide for a range of community activities and purposes.

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## **PRINCIPLE 4: PARTNERING**

- i. Council welcomes and actively pursues opportunities to work in partnership to design and deliver aquatic facilities, services and programs which maximise liveability, health and wellbeing outcomes for the community.

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## **PRINCIPLE 5: SUSTAINABILITY**

- i. Council's aquatic facilities will be designed and managed to be environmentally sustainable and will include energy saving, waste minimisation and water saving and re-use elements.
- ii. Council will seek to implement a sustainable approach to community aquatic provision which focuses on provision of fewer facilities which:
  - a. more effectively and appropriately meet the needs of the whole community,
  - b. attract a greater and more diverse level of use
  - c. are more connected and integrated with other services and facilities
  - d. are accessible
  - e. offer a diversity of aquatic facilities to match the needs of the potential user market (ie the market segments/demand for Recreation, Leisure & Adventure 60%; Fitness & Training 20%; Warm water exercise, recovery & rehabilitation 10% and Education/Learn to Swim Schools 10%)

**For detailed strategies & site-specific recommendations see Section 9 of the Strategy.**

**A five-year action plan (to be updated annually) will be developed to define timelines for projects, identify key initiatives and specific actions which will implement this strategy in the short to medium term.**

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# 1. Introduction

Greater Bendigo's 116,000+ residents enjoy access to a diverse range of natural and built recreational opportunities. Along with a variety of sporting and recreational facilities, beautiful parks, gardens, open spaces and reserves, access to aquatic facilities is an important factor in Greater Bendigo's liveability.

A lack of natural water bodies (ocean or rivers) and hot-dry summers increases the demand for access to aquatic facilities for recreational purposes.

This draft *Community Aquatic Facilities Strategy (CAFS)* aims to guide sustainable, equitable and contemporary provision of community aquatic facilities to maximise wellbeing and liveability outcomes as Greater Bendigo's population demands a more inclusive and accessible range of aquatic facilities.

## a. Why are Aquatic Facilities so important?

In Australia, using public aquatic facilities for sport, recreation, rehabilitation and recovery, social connection, play and education is part of our way of life. Australians have a strong connection to swimming due to our climate and natural environment. It is widely acknowledged as part of our cultural identity.

According to Sport and Recreation Victoria, public aquatic facilities provision includes 'swimming pools, hydrotherapy/warm water pools, spa pools and interactive water features (splash parks and zero depth water play)'. Public aquatic facilities are recognised in State Government policy as important for maintaining and promoting active lifestyles and providing direct health and wellbeing benefits.

Contemporary aquatic facilities offer a wide range of activities and often include both wet and dry program areas. Common elements include pools suited to a variety of ages and abilities, water play areas as well as multi-purpose spaces for other activities such as exercise classes, group programs, childcare and gymnasiums. Many higher order facilities across Victoria are co-located with other community facilities and services such as schools, libraries, health services etc.

Some facilities are used for sporting competitions such as swimming, diving or water polo, while others are used for non-competitive, community recreation.

Used by a wide variety of people, community aquatic facilities are particularly important for children learning to swim, people recovering and rehabilitating following injury or illness and older adults who wish to participate in gentle water exercises to maintain health. Contemporary aquatic facilities are suitable for people with access or mobility issues, as water can offer opportunities for exercise and enjoyment for everyone.

## b. The challenge for Councils everywhere

Providing new and upgraded infrastructure to meet contemporary needs and standards, while maintaining existing, often ageing aquatic assets, must be carefully balanced.

In recognition of this challenge faced by Councils across the state, the Victorian Auditor-General's Office published a report in 2016. Greater Bendigo was one of six Councils profiled. The VAGO report<sup>1</sup> identifies key challenges facing the aquatic and recreation industry, assessing whether councils effectively identify

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<sup>1</sup> *Local Government Service Delivery: Recreational Facilities*, Victorian Auditor General's Office 2016

community needs for recreational facilities/services, whether planning for aquatic recreation centres is robust and sound and whether councils are maximising value from investment in the facilities they do have.

Specifically, VAGO identified the key issues as:

- The cost of building new centres is high - exceeding \$50 million in some instances
- There are many ageing aquatic and recreation centres across Victoria
- Councils are generally dependent on grants for the development and refurbishment of aquatic and recreation centres
- Aquatic and recreation centres are complex, evolving businesses with generating low returns, hence private sector investment is low
- Aquatic and recreation centres remain a high priority for their communities, and may generate high profile community and political issues
- Councils effectively engage with their communities, which informs planning for future facility developments
- A lack of effective evaluation for aquatic and recreation centres often limits councils' ability to demonstrate achievement of councils' broader social, health and wellbeing objectives.

The findings recommended Councils improve monitoring, reporting and evaluation to determine how well community aquatic facilities meet broader objectives, given the significant investment needed.

This Strategy will offer the City of Greater Bendigo a sound process and a robust strategic framework for decision making in terms of future investment, service delivery and monitoring whether provision delivers on liveability, health and wellbeing goals.

### c. The challenge for Greater Bendigo

Across Victoria the current provision of community aquatic facilities (mostly swimming pools) is a legacy of significant construction of community swimming pools post-war (associated with the 1956 Olympic Games) and municipal service provision prior to Council amalgamations in the mid-1990s. This is a significant challenge for Greater Bendigo due to the number of existing (and well loved) swimming pools which have been servicing their community for decades.

While the importance of community aquatic facilities to Greater Bendigo's liveability and wellbeing is indisputable, the current provision (which offers the highest number of public aquatic facilities of all 79 local government areas in Victoria) is not sustainable (financially or environmentally), contemporary, fit for purpose and does not adequately deliver on the community's goal to maximise liveability and wellbeing in the community.

Almost all Greater Bendigo's existing aquatic facilities are examples of last century design and services, with a main pool of water (50m, 33m or 25m), an intermediate pool and a toddler pool. Many of these facilities are outdoor and unheated and are generally only open seasonally from mid-November or December to mid-March.

With the age of most assets and a history of insufficient maintenance/renewal, this vast infrastructure network needs significant investment in the short term to keep operating in their current form. In addition to the infrastructure reaching the end of its life, most of the facilities do not meet contemporary community needs, are inefficient and expensive to operate, do not offer an inclusive range of wellbeing opportunities and are not accessible to all residents.

Growing maintenance costs combined with rising operational expenses (cost of energy, insurances, staffing and supervision due to increased compliance) and limited ability to raise service income from users, means that continuing to operate the extensive network of aquatic facilities (in the current form) will present an untenable financial situation for Council over the coming decade.

While there are some opportunities to offset escalating costs through investment in technology (including renewable energy) and attempting to increase the income from users by increasing utilisation, this is not viable at all facilities due to the significant upfront cost of maintaining ageing infrastructure.

#### d. Greater Bendigo Aquatic Strategy 2010-2020

Council's previous Strategy was adopted in 2010. The strategy was an asset management plan to guide the maintenance, renewal and improvements of existing aquatic facilities, along with recommendations for limited upgrades and new facilities. Most of the recommendations have been implemented or are now superseded (see Background Report for a summary).

Due to the changed context of aquatic facilities in Greater Bendigo, including the opening of Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre in October 2018, a growing and increasingly diverse regional population, and an increase in the number of domestic/private pools, a new strategy is needed to guide investment in provision of public aquatic facilities to sustainably meet resident's health and wellbeing needs and improve the liveability of the Greater Bendigo community.

#### e. The Strategy for the next decade (2020-2030):

The Greater Bendigo Community Aquatic Facilities Strategy 2020 – 2030 (CAFS) will provide a sound process and a robust strategic framework for decision making and investment to ensure future provision:

- Aligns with and progresses goals and objectives in Council's strategic planning/policy framework
- Responds to local and national aquatic recreation/swimming participation trends
- Offers contemporary and appropriate recreational activities which meet the needs of target groups and are accessible to/inclusive of all residents
- Improves the health and wellbeing of residents and enhances the liveability of the region
- Is equitable, environmentally responsible and financially sustainable.

This report outlines key information and analysis which was relied on to develop the proposed strategic direction.

Detailed in the following sections is a community-needs focussed strategy which relies on evidence and policy including:

- Participation data
- Direction from Council's strategic and policy framework
- Contemporary aquatic programming
- Current facility provision
- The challenges and opportunities for future community aquatic facility provision.

This strategy will assist Council to address the significant and complicated challenges of community aquatic facility provision including:

- |                                                              |                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| ○ inequities in existing service levels                      | ○ changing patterns of community volunteering              |
| ○ changing community needs and legislated standards          | ○ some existing facilities no longer being fit for purpose |
| ○ responding to community needs within financial constraints | ○ lack of clarity about Council's role in facilities       |

**This Strategy provides the City of Greater Bendigo a sound basis for decision making to deliver a network of efficient, appropriate and fit for purpose aquatic facilities and maximise liveability, health and wellbeing outcomes for the whole community in line with Council's vision and goals.**

## 2. Developing the Strategy

The previous Aquatic Strategy was adopted by Council in 2010. This strategy established a set of actions to be implemented over a seven year period.

There have been significant changes to the aquatic industry, technology and the community over the last decade and these will continue in those ahead.

The CAFS will provide high level guidance and principles for future provision; directions to capitalise on current recreation trends; a summary of the condition of existing facilities and recommendations regarding opportunities to better align with community needs and expectations over the next ten years.

### a. Process



### 3. Trends in Swimming

#### a. National and Victorian participation (Ausplay 2019<sup>2</sup>)

- Nationally, participation in swimming (sporting and non-sporting) is around 15%. Notably, rates in total participation remain unchanged since 2001.
- People who speak a language other than English at home participate at similar rates to the total population (14.7%); People with Disability swim slightly less (12.4%) and Indigenous people swim around a third less (11.5%).
- More females over 15 years participate in swimming than males (56% vs 44%).
- Highest participation rates are in children under 15, with the peak of participation being 5 to 8-year-olds. There is no gendered difference in participation in people younger than 15 years.
- Club participation is low – around 3% of all swimmers.
- Victorians who swim, on average do so once a week (across all age groups).
- Of people over 15 years, 1 in 2 swim for health and fitness; 1 in 3 swim for fun and enjoyment; and 1 in 10 swim for social reasons.
- Approximately 45% of all those over 15 years who swim pay to do so; 96% under 15 years pay to swim.
- Children's 0-14 participation in organised swimming out-of-school, accounts for approximately 28% of all fees for organised out-of-school sport/physical activity.



#### Growth & Opportunities:

- There are opportunities for growth in swimming both among Adults 15+ and Children 0-14.
- With adults, there was high consideration for take up and estimated net growth market opportunity of a potential 26% increase.
- This was mostly due to female interest, but with broad appeal across all ages. For children, most of the opportunity lies with infants (0-4) as they start learning to swim.

*For more information about national trends in swimming/aquatic participation see [Background Report](#).*

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<sup>2</sup> The **AusPlay** survey 2019 provides trends in participation and physical activities among Australian residents, including children aged under 15 and adults over 15 years - <https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/research/smi/ausplay/results>

## b. Active Living Census - 2019<sup>3</sup>

- Swimming remains the no. 2 recreational activity in Greater Bendigo across all age groups with an 8.5% participation rate - excluding swimming at home\*. Walking is the no.1 activity.
- Females (of all ages) participate in swimming more than males.
- Participation highest in children 3-7 years old, with 14% boys and 17% girls swimming. This participation rate is double any other age group.
- 53% of respondents visited a swimming pool or splash park in the previous 12 months
- 44% of those who swim participate regularly (weekly or more)
- Greater Bendigo's swimming facilities were given ratings of 87% and 88% respectively for their Quality and Accessibility
- People born in Australia visit swimming/splash park facilities more than those born overseas (53.4% vs 46.6%)
- There were no other statistically significant differences in use of facilities in groups with other demographic characteristics (including Aboriginal, Non-English speaking, LGBTQIA+, holds a Bachelor's degree, low income).



- Half of the residents who participate in swimming do so at home\*
- Females swim more than males.
- A higher proportion of 3-7 year olds participate than any other age group.
- 90% of people use a car to get to their swimming activity
- Those who swim do it regularly with almost half swimming at least weekly.
- Quality and accessibility ratings are high and have improved since 2014.
- Swimming is most popular in Kangaroo Flat – Big Hill, which also has the highest facility accessibility rating and residents travel the shortest distance to get to the facility.

### Who?

Residents of all ages and genders participate in swimming for exercise, although, swimming was more popular for females than males. Males and females aged 3 to 11 reported the highest rates of swimming.

|  | Male  | Ages    | Female |  |
|--|-------|---------|--------|--|
|  | 14.3% | 3 - 11  | 16.9%  |  |
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|  | 5.3%  | 18 - 34 | 8.1%   |  |
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|  | 6.5%  | 50 - 69 | 9.1%   |  |
|  | 6.2%  | 70+     | 7.6%   |  |

\* The significant difference in swimming participation rates between 2014 (17.5%) and 2019 (8.5%) is explained in the Active Living Census Top Line report. The definition of "participation" changed in the 2019 survey stating that responses should not include any physical activity in the home (i.e. swimming in pools at home). In 2014 this was not stated.

*For a summary of swimming data in the Active Living Census 2019 see the Background Report.*

<sup>3</sup> Healthy Heart of Victoria's **Active Living Census 2019** was conducted to help with planning for health and recreation services and allow a better understanding of people's activity levels and preferences - <https://www.bendigo.vic.gov.au/Services/Community-and-Care/Active-Living-Census>

## 4. Strategic Planning and Policy Context

**Aquatic facilities, like all community buildings provided by Council, are not an end in themselves. They are designed, developed, maintained and managed to deliver outcomes for the community in the context of the community vision and health and wellbeing goals for Greater Bendigo.**

The existing planning and policy context which guides this Community Aquatic Facilities Strategy (CAFS) is extensive. The direction provided by existing strategies, plans and policies is well aligned, easily integrated and provides a robust foundation for future decisions about aquatic facility provision in the municipality. Parts a) and b) of this section explain this relationship.

In addition, the Victorian State Government has two particularly relevant strategies which need to be acknowledged. Strong alignment between CAFS and the Victorian State Health and Wellbeing Plan 2018-2023 and Active Victoria 2017- 2021 is important to recognise to ensure future partnerships with the State Government can be maximised. These are summarised in [Part c\)](#) of this section.

### a. Greater Bendigo's Vision: Creating the world's most liveable community

The well-aligned and integrated goals and objectives adopted by the City of Greater Bendigo can be directly applied to this strategy.

Greater Bendigo has robust plans and policies which provide clear direction, and these can be combined to create a strategic framework which forms the basis for the overall objectives and strategies of CAFS and principles to guide decision-making about the future of community aquatic facilities.

Basing this strategy on the existing framework overleaf, the City's vision, goals, and objectives provide clear direction for identifying priorities, assessment of opportunities and appropriate strategies.

In addition, key council policies (see section b.) have established principles and hierarchies which provide a basis for determining appropriate service levels, catchments, priorities for assessing community need and overall provision. These have been applied as a structure to guide the strategy and categorise the site specific recommendations.

*More detail about the strategies and plans which are relied on in the following framework is provided in the [Background Report](#).*

# GREATER BENDIGO COMMUNITY AQUATIC STRATEGY

## STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

VISION: CREATING THE WORLD'S MOST LIVEABLE COMMUNITY



### PRINCIPLES\*

- Equity
- Accessibility
- Promotes Wellbeing
- Partnering
- Sustainability

### HIERARCHY\*



\*Community Buildings Policy

## b. Greater Bendigo's Council Policies

In addition to the strategic plans, Council has three key policies which provide direct guidance for CAFS and are applicable to any provision of new, or changes to existing, aquatic facilities. Their guidance is summarised in the following section.

### Community Buildings Policy 2020 (DRAFT)

The Community Buildings Policy was developed to address challenges linked to the provision of community buildings (including aquatic facilities) across Greater Bendigo. These include:

- inequities in existing community building service levels
- changing community needs and legislated standards
- responding to community needs within financial constraints
- changing patterns of community volunteering
- some existing facilities being no longer being fit for purpose
- lack of clarity about Council's role in community buildings it doesn't own or manage

These challenges apply to the provision of community aquatic facilities (both the built infrastructure and the services/programming).

Feedback from community supported a set of commitments stating that community buildings should:

- |                                                                                               |                                            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| ✓ be equitable, including providing core service levels within both a rural and urban context | ✓ be flexible/multi-purpose and multi-use  |
| ✓ be safe                                                                                     | ✓ promote wellbeing                        |
| ✓ be welcoming                                                                                | ✓ promote civic and economic participation |
| ✓ incorporate universal design                                                                | ✓ promote partnerships; and                |
|                                                                                               | ✓ be sustainable.                          |

Community engagement on this policy resulted in the vision for Greater Bendigo's community buildings being:

**By 2036, Greater Bendigo will have an equitable network of welcoming and inclusive community buildings where all people can:**

- connect with other people, culture, activities and programs
- play and create
- learn and contribute
- rest

*Council's policy is that community buildings (including community aquatic facilities) are not an outcome in their own right: they exist to promote community wellbeing, social connectedness and life-long learning.*

The new Community Buildings Policy guides how Greater Bendigo's community buildings will be **planned, designed, resourced, managed and used** to maximise Council's ability to meet community needs and achieve high levels of individual and community wellbeing.

To achieve its vision for Community Buildings, Council will apply the principles of:

- |                      |                   |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. equity            | 4. partnering     |
| 2. accessibility     | 5. sustainability |
| 3. promote wellbeing |                   |

**The *Community Buildings Policy*, including the principles and the hierarchy, form the primary policy basis for this Strategy.**

## Asset Management Policy

The Asset Management Policy is a framework for the sustainable management and care of the City's infrastructure assets, in a way that assists in the achievement of Council's vision and the infrastructure needs of the community.

Realising Council's vision and meeting community needs are dependent on a functional and cost effective asset base. This requires an integrated and multidisciplinary approach to asset management to address major planning, resource allocation, and accountability measures essential for cost effective service delivery.

Achieving the best possible value from aquatic facilities, while meeting the community's needs requires understanding of the costs associated with each aquatic facility over its lifecycle. Adopting best practice asset management approaches will ensure Council decisions are informed by the investment required to retain potentially redundant infrastructure. The asset renewal gap is significant and maintaining all current existing community buildings (including 13 aquatic facilities) in their current form is unlikely to be realistic within the context of changing levels and types of need and with limited ability to increase revenue.

To ensure Greater Bendigo's community aquatic facilities deliver the best value to the community including: the range and quality of services needed to maximise liveability, health and wellbeing outcomes; a cost-effective model (in terms of the required mix of Council subsidy and user pays fees); sustainable facilities which contribute to Council's commitment to a low carbon future; the CAFS must align with Council's Asset Management Policy. This will ensure that community aquatic facilities provide services that are appropriate, accessible, responsive, affordable and sustainable to the community.

**The new Local Government Act 2020 requires Councils to develop 10 Year Financial and Asset Management Plans. Given the cost of providing aquatic facilities, having clear strategic direction for investment in future delivery will ensure that Council's overall commitments can be achieved.**

**The Asset Management policy is relied on for all asset management recommendations in this Strategy.**

## Sustainable Buildings Policy

This policy supports the adoption of contemporary best practice Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD) policy standards and practices. It aims to deliver community buildings which:

- ✓ are efficient to run,
- ✓ healthy and safe to occupy
- ✓ a good return on investment and
- ✓ limit the impacts on our environment

The policy influences organisational practices around the social, environmental and financial credentials of City facilities whilst facilitating a coordinated and consistent approach to achieve best practice sustainable design standards.

Aquatic facilities which require heating and cooling are significant consumers of energy and as a result produce high volumes of carbon dioxide. The recently constructed Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre is an example of a large facility which is highly utilised by the community but is now the largest consumer of electricity of all the City's assets. Reducing consumption and offsetting the impact will assist Council to achieve its financial and environmental objectives.

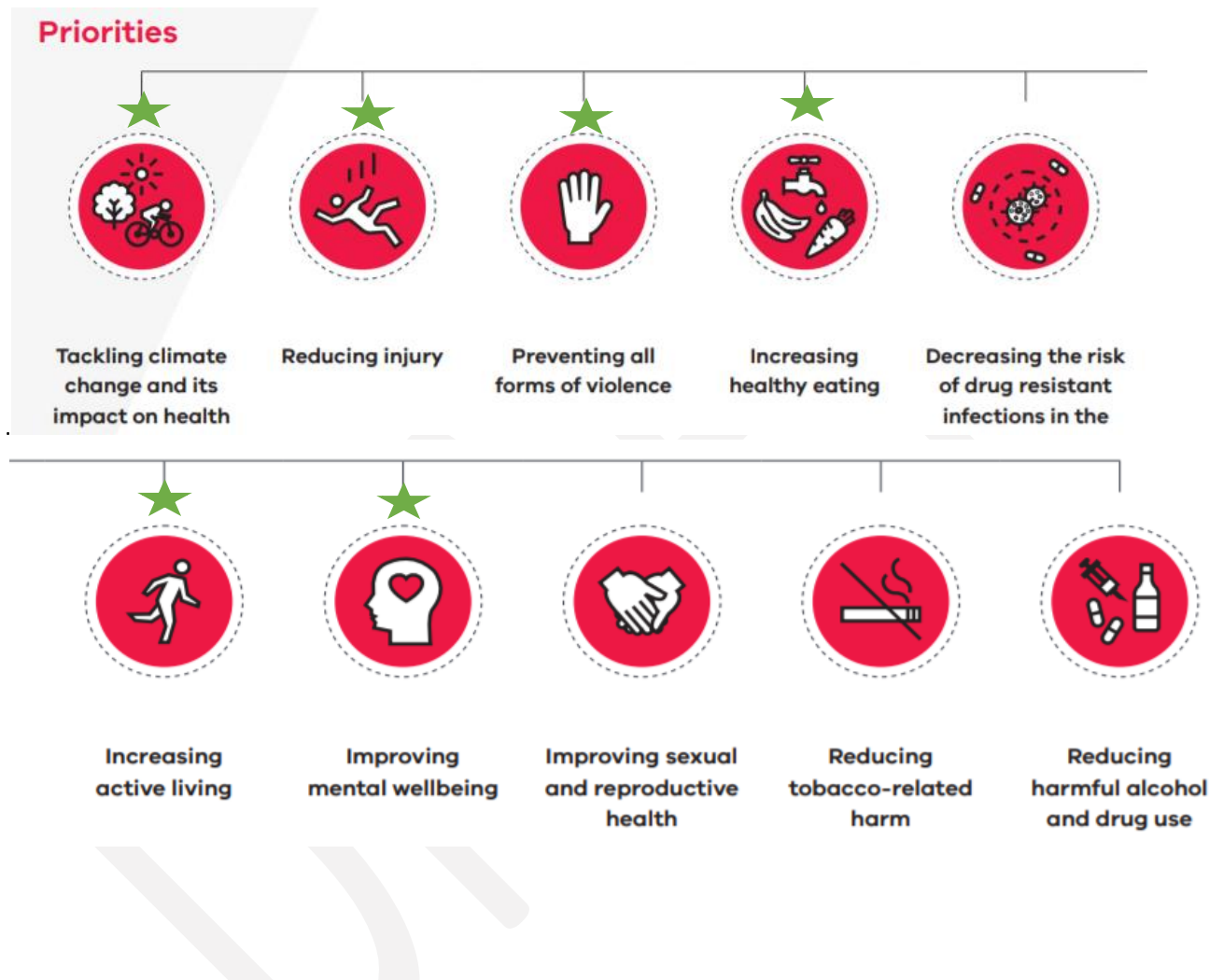
**The Sustainable Buildings policy guides all recommendations regarding improving environmental and financial sustainability in this Strategy.**

c. Victorian State Government Plans and Strategies:

Victorian State Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019-23

This plan defines current priorities for community health and wellbeing; guides partnership with Victorian communities; focuses effort towards meeting the needs of all people at all stages of life and promotes the use of place-based approaches.

The following extract illustrates the 10 key priorities, with the green stars identifying where future provision of community (aquatic) facilities, can contribute to the state’s goals.



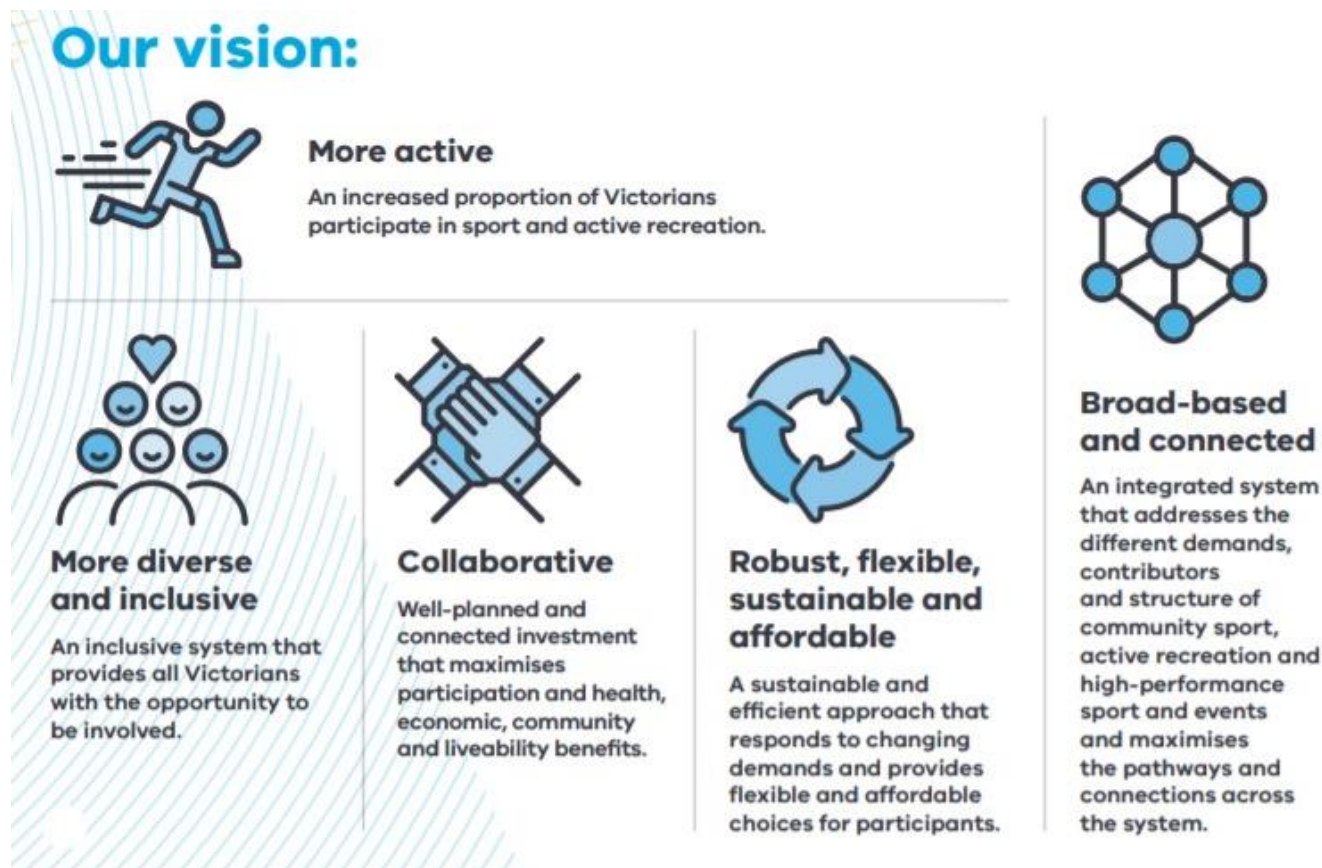
Community Aquatic Facilities, like all recreation settings, are ideal places to promote healthy living and create healthy environments where individual and community wellbeing is at the forefront of all decisions. This important role for community aquatic facilities to be supportive settings for health underpins this Strategy.

## Active Victoria Strategy 2017-2021

Active Victoria is the State Government’s plan to strengthen sport and recreation, boost participation and ensure every Victorian has the chance to be involved.

Active Victoria’s six-part vision (overleaf) strongly aligns with the City of Greater Bendigo’s own strategic framework and goals.

Ensuring the Community Aquatic Facilities Strategy responds to and aligns with the Active Victoria’s objectives will maximise future partnership and funding opportunities.



Greater Bendigo’s Community Aquatic Facilities Strategy places the strategic direction of Active Victoria at the centre of the Council’s recommendations in relation to local provision.

## 5. Community Aquatic Facilities in Greater Bendigo

### a. Local Context

Most aquatic facilities in Greater Bendigo were built in the post-war decades, a time when there were fewer competing recreation activities, limited air conditioning, less sun awareness and significantly fewer backyard pools. The use and culture of swimming pools has changed immeasurably since this time.

Almost all existing facilities across the municipality include a traditional swimming pool with a main pool of water (50m, 33m or 25m), intermediate pool and a toddler pool. As many of these facilities are outdoor and unheated, they are generally only open seasonally from mid-November or December to mid-March.

With limited maintenance of this older infrastructure over time significant investment will be needed to continue to operate these facilities into the future. In many cases, significant investment could be necessary within the next five years.

The recent investment in Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre (GWWC) and the strong patronage shows there is an appetite for contemporary facilities, which incorporate indoor aquatic facilities with a range of other services including a gymnasium, community programs and allied health services. Notably, the strong performance of GWWC as a contemporary offering that better meets community needs has been at the expense of attendances at the older facilities, in this instance the Peter Krenz Leisure Centre.

### *Greater Bendigo's Network of Community Aquatic Facilities*

Most of the facilities across the municipality provide a traditional municipal swimming pool experience. There are 13 aquatic facilities (12 pools and a splash park) with the following features:

- 2 indoor aquatic centres operating all year
- 1 outdoor heated pool operating all year
- 1 outdoor heated pool operating 9 months
- 8 facilities operating between late Nov/early Dec and mid-March
- 6 x 50m pools
- 2 x warm water exercise pools
- 1 splash park and 1 aquatic playground
- 2 solar heated pools
- Two facilities with aligned services such as gym, program rooms, etc
- One dive tower and water slide
- 2 facilities with diving boards
- 2 facilities with creche
- 1 allied health service
- 5 swimming clubrooms providing for 3 swimming clubs

*A table summarising the existing services and detailed information about each facility is provided in the **Background Report**.*

Location of existing community aquatic facilities and their distance from the city centre.



## SWIMMING POOLS

- |                              |                              |                                    |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 Peter Krenz Leisure Centre | 6 Bendigo East Swimming Pool | 11 Marong Swimming Pool            |
| 2 Faith Leech Aquatic Centre | 7 White Hills Swimming Pool  | 12 Heathcote Swimming Pool         |
| 3 Brennan Park Swimming Pool | 8 Goornong Swimming Pool     | 13 Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre |
| 4 Golden Square Pool         | 9 Elmore Swimming Pool       |                                    |
| 5 Long Gully Splash Park     | 10 Raywood Swimming Pool     |                                    |

As can be seen in the map on the previous page there are six aquatic facilities clustered in Bendigo's city centre (within a 5km radius) and eight within 10 kilometres. Five swimming pools are in rural towns and the City's free splash park is at Long Gully.

The dense clustering of community aquatic facilities in the urban area and provision of traditional local pools in many of the region's small towns, is a legacy of pre-Local Government amalgamation provision; the result of a program of construction of community swimming pools associated with the 1956 Olympic Games; and to reduce drownings in unsupervised waterways (lakes and rivers).

**This incremental rather than planned provision of aquatic facilities across the Bendigo region has resulted in overlaps of catchments, duplication of services and older facilities which are not sustainable or able to meet the needs of the community.**

#### b. How does Greater Bendigo's provision compare to other Local Government Areas?

*The table below compares Greater Bendigo to other regional cities based on the number of residents per aquatic facility.*

| Municipality       | Community aquatic facilities                                                                       | Municipal Population | Residents per facility |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Ballarat           | <b>8 Community Facilities:</b><br>1x Wellness Facility<br>4x Outdoor Aquatic<br>3 Splash Parks     | 107,325              | 13,416                 |
| Greater Bendigo    | <b>13 Community Facilities:</b><br>2 x Wellbeing Facilities<br>10 Outdoor Aquatic<br>1 Splash Park | 116,045              | 8,926                  |
| Greater Shepparton | <b>5 Community Facilities:</b><br>1 x Wellness Facility<br>4 x Outdoor Aquatic                     | 66,007               | 13,201                 |
| LaTrobe City       | <b>3 Community Facilities:</b><br>3 Wellness Facilities                                            | 75,211               | 25,070                 |
| Mildura Rural City | <b>8 Community Facilities:</b><br>1x Wellness Facility<br>7 x Outdoor Aquatic                      | 55,515               | 6,939                  |
| Horsham            | <b>1 Community Facility:</b><br>1 x Wellness Facility                                              | 19,875               | 19,875                 |
| Wangaratta         | <b>3 Community Facilities:</b>                                                                     | 29,087               | 9,695                  |

| Municipality   | Community aquatic facilities                                                 | Municipal Population | Residents per facility |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
|                | 1 Indoor Aquatic (at Stadium)<br>1 Outdoor Aquatic<br>1 Splash Park          |                      |                        |
| Warrnambool    | <b>1 Community Facility:</b><br>1 x Wellness Facility                        | 34,862               | 34,862                 |
| Wodonga        | <b>2 Community Facilities:</b><br>1x Wellness Facility<br>1x Outdoor Aquatic | 41,429               | 20,715                 |
| <b>AVERAGE</b> |                                                                              |                      | 17,498                 |

\* *Wellness Facilities* are sites which offer a range of aquatic facilities and other recreational/wellbeing opportunities – eg group/community programs (dry) and gymnasiums.

Of the nine regional cities assessed, only Bendigo, Mildura and Wangaratta have a provision ratio of under 10,000 residents/per community aquatic facility.

With 10 outdoor pools, City of Greater Bendigo has the most of any of these municipalities. The closest is the Rural City of Mildura, however the context is significantly different with Mildura having one pool per 3154 km<sup>2</sup> and Bendigo having much more dense provision with one pool per 300 km<sup>2</sup>.

| LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT | DESCRIPTION | CATCHMENT POPULATION ESTIMATE |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------------------------|
| 1                    | RURAL       | UNDER 10,000                  |
| 2                    | LOCAL       | 10,000 – 40,000               |
| 3                    | DISTRICT    | 40,000 – 70,000               |
| 4                    | MAJOR       | 70,000 – 100,000              |
| 5                    | REGIONAL    | 100,000 to > 150,000          |

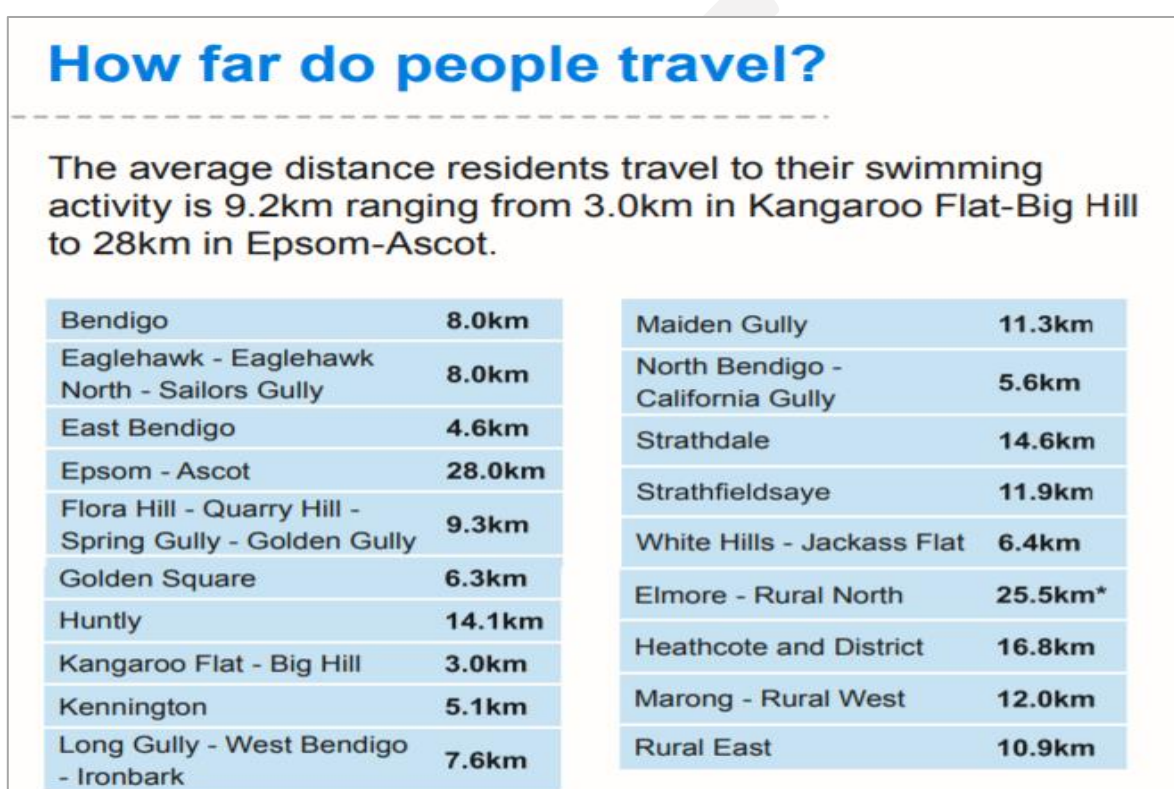
Aquatics & Recreation Victoria guidelines recommend that “as the catchment population increases, so does the ability for it to support larger facilities with a greater range of amenities, components and programming options.

(see [Section 8 b](#) of this report for detailed consideration of facility component provision)

### c. How do users travel to community aquatic facilities?

Leisure and sporting facility trends and benchmarking by Aquatics and Recreation Victoria indicates that local or district level recreation and sporting facilities have a primary catchment of approximately 5km and a secondary catchment of 10km. Approximately 75% to 85% of users will reside within a 5km catchment with the remaining 15% to 25% coming from between 5km to 10km from the facility.

Regional facilities providing unique components and a larger number of activities will draw users from a wider catchment than a local/municipal facility.



Active Living Census 2019

The 2019 Active Living Census shows 9 out of 10 people visiting aquatic facilities travel by car and are willing to travel outside their local area to access them.

#### d. Private Pool Ownership

**Private pool ownership is growing in Australia and is most prevalent in households with children and in warmer climates, especially inland areas with hot-dry summers.**

In 2007 12% of Australians and 7% of Victorians had a pool at home; by 2018 this had increased slightly to 13% of Australians and 9% of Victorians. The data showed that the proportion of urban and regional households with a pool was the same (9%) <sup>4</sup>.

Besides a warmer climate there are other factors that determine whether someone will have a swimming pool at home. These include socio-economic factors and the presence of children in the house. Over 17% of Australians with kids aged 6-11 have a pool at home (up 2% on four years ago), a figure that jumps to just over 23% (up 3%) for homes with older children (12-15 years).

Based on these factors alone it is likely that Greater Bendigo has a greater proportion of private/domestic pools than many inland municipalities in Victoria. From the Active Living Census we can estimate approximately 50% of all swimming for recreation and leisure likely occurs at a private home.

##### *How many domestic pools in Greater Bendigo?*

While national and state data shows growing pool ownership, definitive data is not yet available for Greater Bendigo. This data will become available in October 2020 when the new requirement to register all pools with Council (under the Building Act) comes into force.

Using currently available data, the following observations are made:

- 3,922 building permits have been issued for domestic swimming pools. Across the 47,000 residential properties in Greater Bendigo this equates to **one pool per 12 houses (8.3%)**.
- Over the past 5 years, building permits have been issued for 839 domestic swimming pools across Greater Bendigo. Data shows most of these were in new residential growth areas including Strathfieldsaye, Junortoun and Maiden Gully.

##### **Houses for sale with a swimming pool - May 2020**

| Location        | Total properties for sale | Properties with pools for sale | % with a pool |
|-----------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------|
| Greater Bendigo | 456                       | 87                             | 19.08         |
| Ballarat        | 722                       | 22                             | 3.05          |
| Warrnambool     | 325                       | 8                              | 2.46          |
| Mildura         | 488                       | 52                             | 10.66         |
| Victoria        | 248,652                   | 40876                          | 16.44         |

Source: [www.domain.com.au](http://www.domain.com.au)

An analysis of all properties advertised for sale suggests that 1 in 5 homes in Greater Bendigo (19%) have a pool (May 2020). This was substantially higher than for the other inland regional cities assessed, with 1 in 10 homes in Rural City of Mildura (10%) and only 3% of homes in Ballarat.

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<sup>4</sup> Roy Morgan Research, 2018 -

<http://www.roymorgan.com/findings/7811-australian-swimming-pool-ownership-september-2018-201811230555>

In addition to this data, a change to a survey question in the 2019 Active Living survey which excluded counting any recreational activities undertaken at home saw the number of respondents who said they had been swimming in the last 12 months fall from 17.5% in 2014 to 8.5% (2019). This suggests that approximately half of those people who swim do so in a private swimming pool.

From this snapshot of user and housing data, an assumption can be made that a notable proportion of Greater Bendigo residents have access to private pools and a larger proportion of houses than comparable inland regional cities have domestic swimming pools.

As a significant proportion of homes have a swimming pool and a large proportion of those who swim do so in pools at private homes, providing community aquatic facilities for 100% of people in a catchment is unnecessary.

Community aquatic facility provision should consider equity and disadvantage with decision making supporting access to community facilities for those who are least likely to have access to private pools.

## 6. Contemporary Aquatic Facilities

Industry trends across Australia show traditional community pools are continuing to see a drop in visits whilst experiencing significant and ongoing increases in operating costs. Increasing staffing / supervision requirements, escalating energy costs and the need for asset maintenance / renewal / refurbishment all pose challenges to the viability of community aquatic facility provision.

With more than 360 aquatic facilities built across Australia between 1956 and 1968 in communities across Australia to increase viability there has recently been a widespread need to retrofit, redevelop and replace many of the older traditional pools.

Expectations of community aquatic facilities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is that they are more than a place to swim; they are designed and programmed to meet a range of aquatic, social and physical activity needs in one place.

Aquatics & Recreation Victoria highlight the importance of following a disciplined planning process and basing the development of a new or refurbishment of community aquatic and recreation facilities on the needs and demands of its potential users. Understanding these potential users, and how to best engage them in aquatic activities through provision of contemporary, fit for purpose infrastructure is critical.

### a. What does the aquatic market in Victoria look like?

Aquatics & Recreation Victoria has defined the four typical aquatic market segments<sup>5</sup>. These are described as:

- **Recreation, Leisure & Adventure** - usually families, people coming with friends and groups for fun, relaxation, heat-relief, social and casual physical activities.
- **Competitive/Training/Fitness** - usually made up of people predominantly attending facilities alone for structured fitness or competition activities.
- **Education** - children and adults wishing to increase water safety and survival skills. Includes learn to swim classes, schools, club members and individuals joining programs to improve their skills and techniques. They require warm water pools, shallow water depths with some straight edges and accessible water access.<sup>6</sup>
- **Health and Therapy** - children, adults and older adults wanting to relax and/or exercise in hot water. This market also includes specialist health groups such as arthritis, asthma sufferers, etc. They require hot water pools and associated health/relaxation facilities i.e. spa/saunas, etc.

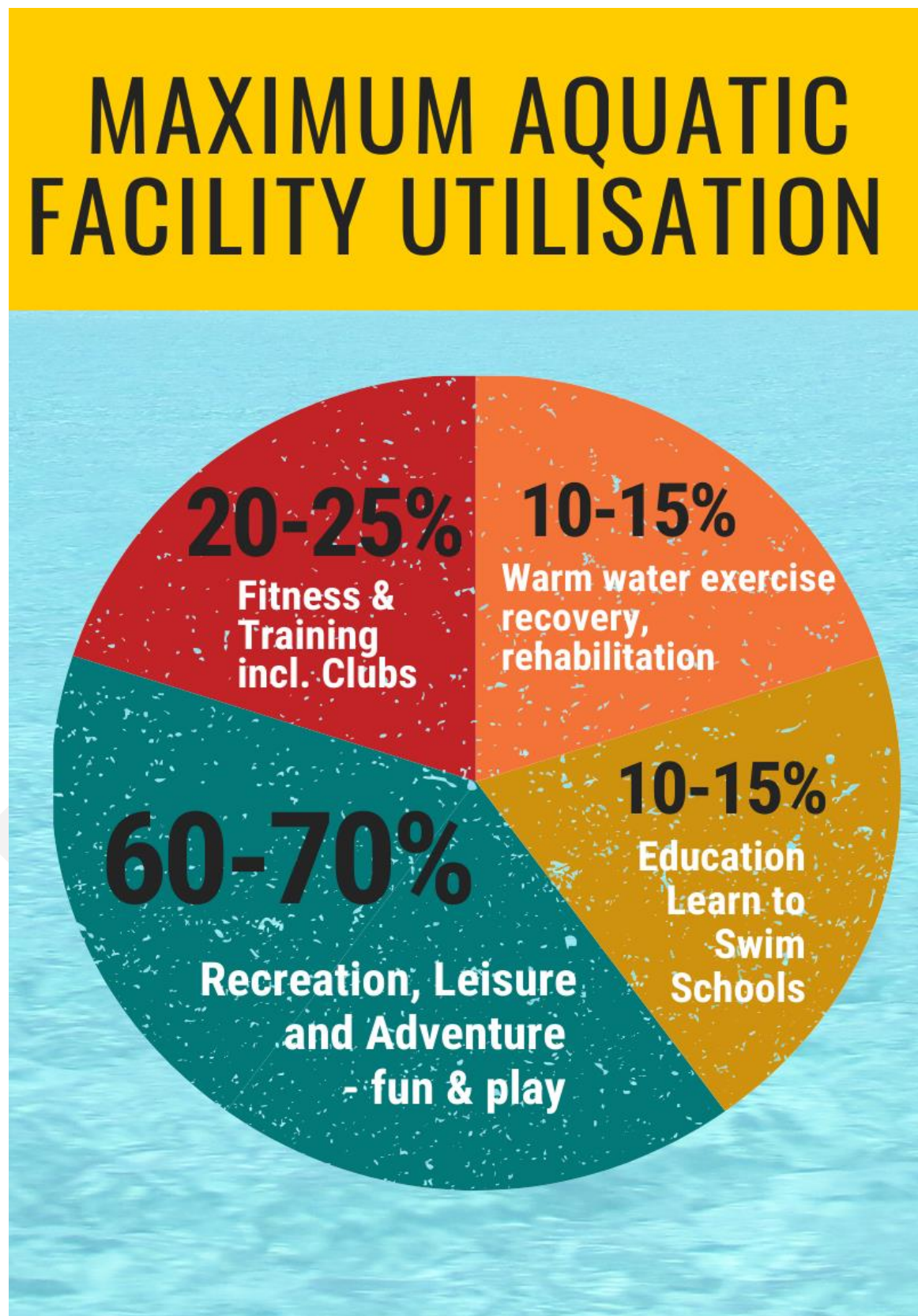
To achieve maximum utilisation of community facilities aquatic infrastructure needs to be provided meet the needs/wants of all users. As 90% of users drive to community aquatic facilities and are willing to travel (Active Living Census 2019), different users can be accommodated across multiple sites across a network of co-ordinated and complementary facilities. Only in larger, higher order facilities is it possible to find all most user types accommodated in one place. Planning needs to ensure that across the network that all needs are met in the appropriate mix relative to the demand for specific aquatic activities.

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<sup>5</sup> [Indoor Aquatic & Recreation Facility Development Guidelines, Aquatics & Recreation Victoria \(2011\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> ARV's Indoor Facility Design Guidelines - <https://cdn.revolutionise.com.au/site/bi2udirgexw5dlqr.pdf>

The diagram following illustrates Aquatics and Recreation Victoria's market research which suggests the optimum mix of infrastructure / programming based on user demand for different activities.



## b. Current mix of community aquatic facilities

Almost all Greater Bendigo's existing aquatic facilities are examples of last century design and services, with a main pool of water (50m, 33m or 25m), an intermediate pool and a toddler pool. Many of these facilities are outdoor and unheated and are generally only open seasonally from mid-November or December to mid-March.

With a predominance of deep water provision at Greater Bendigo's facilities, the lack of diversity in current infrastructure means many potential users are not being provided for. The Fitness/Training segment is currently over-serviced with multiple facilities offering similar traditional pools, near each other.

Greater Bendigo's current facilities mostly cater for the competitive/fitness & training market, and have limited capacity to meet therapy, education or recreation, leisure & adventure markets. Pools designed for lap swimming are not very adaptable to the infrastructure needs of other activities (leisure/fun, learn to swim or therapeutic programs)

The following is an assessment of which existing aquatic facilities accommodate (at least some) needs of each market segment:

### **Recreation, Leisure & Adventure**

These needs are met to some extent through the following infrastructure at a limited number of facilities:

- **Water slides:** Peter Krenz Leisure Centre, Faith Leech Aquatic Centre and small slide at Elmore Swimming Pool.
- **Splash Parks:** Long Gully and Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre.

### **Health and Therapy**

- Specific infrastructure designed for this market's needs is only available at Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre and Peter Krenz Leisure Centre.
- There is a limited therapeutic program at Heathcote Pool.
- User data from Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre shows 42% of members are aged over 55 years and 11% aged over 75 years of age which demonstrates the need/demand for this activity by older demographics.
- With children, older people and people with a disability identified in Health and Wellbeing Plan provision of facilities which meet the needs of these groups should be a priority.

### **Education**

- Learn to Swim is provided through comprehensive programs at Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre and Peter Krenz Leisure Centre.
- There are learn-to-swim programs offered at some outdoor pools during the summer months. Pool depths, floor gradients and cold water limit the ability of these pools to provide a competitive, quality program offering.
- As well as year around learn to swim classes at both Gurri Wanyarra and Peter Krenz Leisure Centre, there are five other community facilities that offer learn to swim classes, with these offering classes from infant through to primary school aged.
- Many schools host swimming carnivals and swimming /physical education programs over summer months two facilities (Faith Leech or Bendigo East) in order to utilise large grassed areas, while a smaller number of schools utilise local outdoor pools to provide in-school-hours learn to swim programs.

## Fitness & Training

- While only around 1 in 5 users want to participate in lap swimming, all community aquatic facilities (except Long Gully Splash Park) offer fitness and training facilities.
- The City has 6 x 50m (Olympic size) pools, with Gurri Wanyarra's pool having a moveable boom which makes it more adaptable and allows it to be converted to 2 x 25m pools for short course competition during winter.
- Water temperatures, depth/gradient and water volumes limit the ability for these pools to be used to meet the needs from other market segments (especially health & therapy which is in increasingly high demand).
- Having swimming clubs based at a site offers opportunities to attract and host major and local sporting events.
- Peter Krenz Leisure Centre offers a regional facility for diving (accommodating both regular practice sessions and competitions).

**To align with Council's policies, maximise the utilisation of existing facilities and strengthen the health and wellbeing outcomes achieved, Council should consider:**

1. *Investing in new or refurbished facilities which meet the needs of under-serviced market segments (especially health and therapy).*
2. *Limit further investment in facilities which cater mostly for the fitness and training market.*
3. *Transform and diversify the most sustainable and well-located facilities to better match the needs of the community and attract new aquatic participation.*
4. *Ceasing aquatic services which duplicate other community aquatic facilities which are provided by more sustainable, cost effective, better located and/or higher quality sites.*

## 7. Challenges and Opportunities

**Challenging trends which will continue to impact on the utilisation of Greater Bendigo's community aquatic facilities include:**

- Growth in domestic pools which reduces demand for community aquatic facilities.
- Competition from private providers who offer year-round learn to swim classes in their own pools.
- Expectation of flexibility in accessing recreational facilities demonstrated by the growth in 24-hour gymnasiums.
- Competition from (free) splash parks in playgrounds/parks.
- Demand for different, contemporary aquatic facilities which require significant investment and take a long period of time to plan, fund and construct.

**The opportunities which exist to improve provision to increase the positive impact on health, wellbeing and liveability goals are:**

- Adoption of Universal Design Principles to ensure facilities accessible for all ages and abilities.
- Adoption of Environmentally Sustainable Design and implement improvements which reduce energy consumption, cut greenhouse gas emissions and improve the return on investment in terms of community outcomes (liveability, health and wellbeing goals).
- Capitalise on the growing number of referrals by health professionals by offering more warm water therapy pools to provide rehabilitation, chronic pain management and injury prevention programs – especially targeting older and recovering/rehabilitation markets.
- The potential for aquatic facilities to be used more for community and tourism events.
- More diverse programming, services and amenities (such as cafes, gyms, group fitness and allied health services) at appropriate, higher-order community aquatic facilities to reduce operational costs by diversifying income streams, increasing visitation/utilisation and transforming potential users into active participants by improving infrastructure, programming, accessibility and inclusion.
- Plan for more 'one-stop' community hub models including aquatic and other community facilities (eg library services, early years, community programs, meeting spaces and / or educational facilities) to maximise usage and share the facility operational costs.

### a. Enhancing liveability and wellbeing

**City of Greater Bendigo has adopted the vision of 'creating the world's most liveable community.'**

Liveability is one of the five goals in the Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017-2021.

The Health and Wellbeing Plan aims to achieve a community in the future which has access to sustainable natural, built, social and economic environments that support and enhance health and wellbeing. These environments or "settings" are places that can impact and improve wellbeing outcomes by making healthy choices the easiest choices.

Council can improve and manage these settings in ways which best match community needs and support improvements in health and wellbeing outcomes. These settings, places where Bendigo's residents live, work and play, have significant potential to improve the community's wellbeing.

To achieve Greater Bendigo's vision and goals all community settings must be health promoting. They must encourage and facilitate healthy lifestyle choices and work to inform, encourage, enable and communicate healthy choices/behaviours to their users.

Sport and active recreation settings, including community aquatic facilities in all forms, have potential to increase physical activity, promote healthier lifestyles, improve access and engage people of all 'backgrounds, ages and stages' in active, social fun.

By supporting the health and wellbeing goals through the careful provision of appropriate infrastructure and programming, these influential community settings will play an important role in Greater Bendigo becoming a healthier and more liveable place.

## b. Maximising utilisation

Planning for community aquatic facilities regularly evokes emotive debate and stimulates significant public interest – especially in relation to the infrastructure components and services considered. This is common whether planning for existing facilities or delivering new infrastructure.

It is important to understand how people use or want to use aquatic facilities and the appropriate mix of infrastructure which makes the most difference by meeting the needs of target groups such as: young children, older adults and people with a disability (per the strategic direction in the Greater Bendigo Health and Wellbeing Plan).

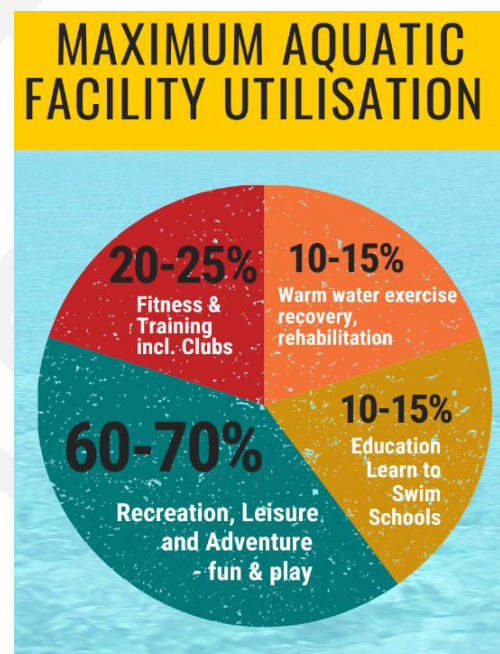
When community aquatic providers (usually Councils) are faced with developing or redeveloping an aquatic recreation facilities, the debate about what components a facility should include to best service its community is often influenced most by club/sport-based stakeholders who are organised to advocate for the provision of competition, lap swimming and training facilities. This risks curbing potential growth of new users whose needs would be better met by other forms of (often more viable) aquatic facilities which meet the needs of the other market segments.

As described fully in section 7 of this report (see diagram above) research shows that most people use aquatic facilities for recreation, fun, enjoyment, socialisation, education and therapy). Deep water (ie pools suitable for lap swimming) are often provided but only meet needs of only 20-25% of the potential users. This form of provision adds operating costs and is a barrier to wider utilisation of the infrastructure by a diverse mix of participants.

Also, important to consider is the lack of co-ordination, planning and integration in the existing aquatic facilities network across the Greater Bendigo area. This results in duplication of similar facilities (often 25m or 50m swimming pools) and activities which do not meet the needs of a cross section of the community.

Aquatics & Recreation Victoria acknowledge in their 2011 guidelines that “as the catchment population increases, so does the ability for it to support larger facilities with a greater range of amenities, components and programming options.

Their service provision model is summarised in the table overleaf.



| LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT | DESCRIPTION | CATCHMENT POPULATION ESTIMATE | TYPICAL GENERAL COMPONENTS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1                    | RURAL       | UNDER 10,000                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- shared competition and shallow water to reduced separate water areas</li> <li>- dry/gym facilities as future development option</li> <li>- usually linked to other community facilities to share management and operating costs</li> </ul>                                                   |
| 2                    | LOCAL       | 10,000 – 40,000               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- limited program water combined with leisure water</li> <li>- limited dry/gym facilities</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 3                    | DISTRICT    | 40,000 – 70,000               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ability to separate program and leisure water</li> <li>- larger dry/gym facilities</li> <li>- additional limited amenities</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                        |
| 4                    | MAJOR       | 70,000 – 100,000              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- more extensive program and leisure water</li> <li>- consideration of indoor 50m pool and complementary warm water pools</li> <li>- increased gym and program space</li> <li>- additional complementary amenities, food and beverage</li> </ul>                                               |
| 5                    | REGIONAL    | 100,000 to > 150,000          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- extensive and varied program leisure water and attractions</li> <li>- inclusion of indoor 50m pool and separate warm water pools</li> <li>- wellness/health club and extensive program room inclusions</li> <li>- complementary services and amenities, crèche, food and beverage</li> </ul> |

*“The size and component mix for any aquatic facility should be informed by research, a project feasibility study and operational financial modelling to ensure the catchment population’s needs and future demands are met.” Aquatics & Recreation Victoria 2011*

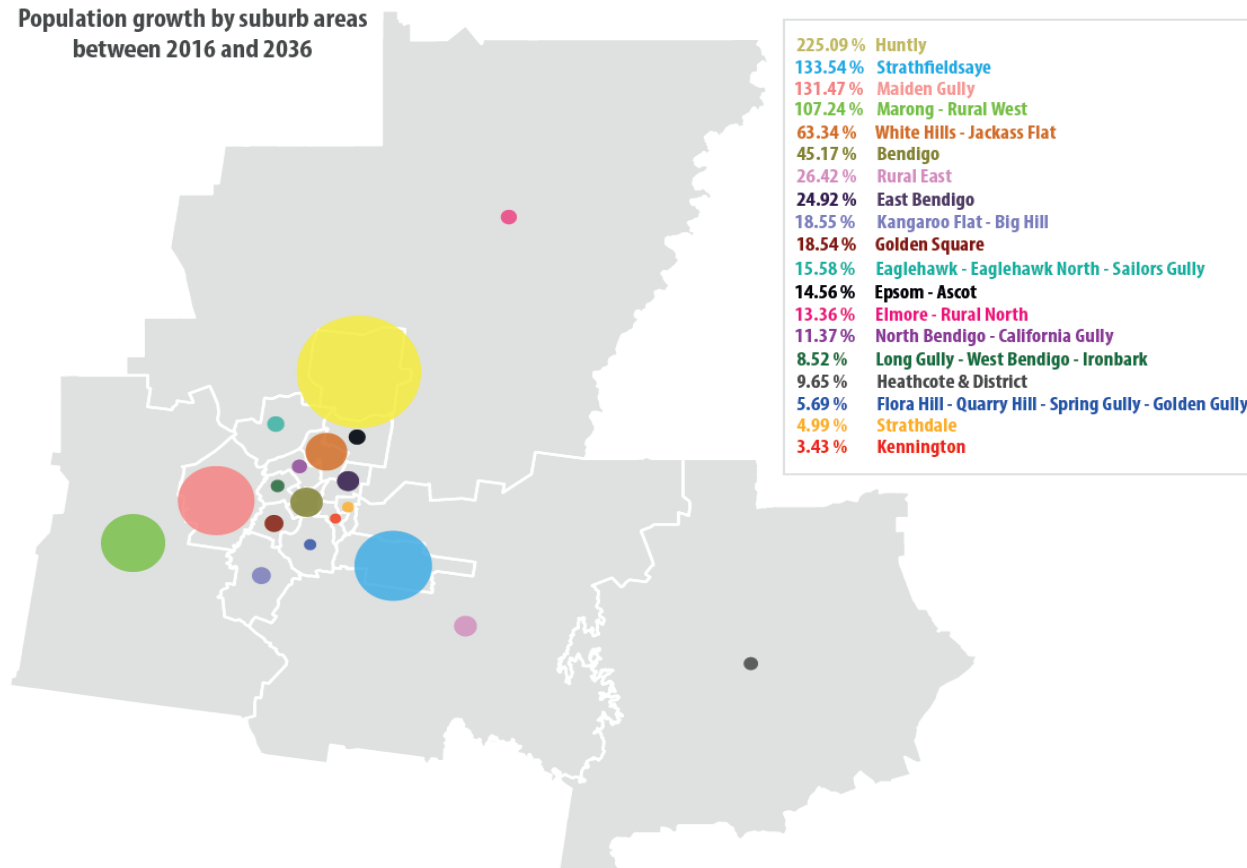
The current provision of community aquatic facilities in Greater Bendigo does not adequately cater for current and importantly, potential users. It is only when closer alignment between community needs and provision is achieved that Council will see gains in health and wellbeing outcomes, higher rates of facility utilisation, and reduced subsidies needed to offset the cost of aquatic recreation.

### c. Equity of provision and access

The population of Greater Bendigo has been steadily growing at around 1.72% per annum over the last 10 years. It is forecast for similar growth to continue with a population of around 156,000 expected by 2036 and more than 200,000 by 2050.

This forecast growth is not evenly distributed with most expected to occur in suburbs such as Marong, Maiden Gully, Huntly and Strathfieldsaye. The plan overleaf shows the population growth hotspots and the relative size of that growth across Greater Bendigo to 2036.

Population growth by suburb areas  
between 2016 and 2036



In terms the provision of community aquatic/recreational facilities (both existing and new) to accommodate a growing, ageing and diversifying population, the following must be considered:

- Areas with higher proportions of older residents require access to warm water for therapy, injury prevention, rehabilitation and overall wellbeing. This includes demand in some smaller townships such as Heathcote.
- Areas with higher proportions of children/ young families require access to water for learning to swim and water play.
- Communities experiencing relative economic disadvantage need access to community facilities have greater price sensitivity to cost.
- Whilst data shows 90% of aquatic facility users arrive by car and are willing to travel outside their suburb to access facilities, increased travel can pose a barrier to participation for communities with low incomes and/or low car ownership.
- An increasingly diverse community means that the need for culturally safe, appropriate, inclusive and accessible facilities and programming is critical to maximising participation.
- The suburbs of Huntly, Maiden Gully and Strathfieldsaye are forecast to experience the most growth and they currently have no community aquatic facilities within these suburbs.
- Building permits indicate there is approximately **one pool per 12 houses (8.3%)** in Greater Bendigo. Data shows most of the pools in the last five years have been constructed in new residential growth areas including Strathfieldsaye and Maiden Gully. This may indicate demand for community aquatic facility provision in these areas may be less.

For future provision of community buildings (including community aquatic facilities) to better meet the needs of Greater Bendigo's growing and changing population, Council must recognise and address:

- inequities in existing service levels
- changing community needs and legislated standards
- some existing facilities are no longer fit for purpose
- challenges in maintaining a community led management model (in some areas)
- changing patterns of community volunteering.<sup>7</sup>

Aquatics & Recreation Victoria highlights the importance of following 'a disciplined and integrated planning process' and basing the development of any new or refurbishment of existing community aquatic facilities on the needs of and potential use by its catchment population.

#### d. Financial challenges of Aquatic Facilities Operations and Management

**Greater Bendigo City Council currently provides a significant subsidy to the provision of aquatic facilities.**

Growing maintenance costs combined with rising utility prices, staff (in some facilities), the recent introduction of the updated Guidelines for Safer Pool Operations, and a limited ability to increase entry /membership prices will mean that continuing to operate such a large number of aquatic facilities will have a significant financial impact.

While there may be some ways to offset these costs through investment in new technologies, a shift to renewable energy or maximising the utilisation of some facilities through events or other activities, this will not be possible at all facilities given the upfront costs and limitations of existing facility design.

The 2019/20 cost of operating swimming pools was \$3,240,096 which is 2.66% of all rates collected. This amount excludes depreciation in recognition of the different asset stages of the City's facilities (ie. higher cost for new assets and low allowance for end of life assets).

#### What is driving up costs?

##### Staffing

Compliance with relevant legislation, regulations and increasingly stringent risk management (see [Regulation and Compliance](#)) has had a massive impact on the cost of staffing community aquatic facilities.

Previously, community-managed swimming pools were operated relying supervision by parents and volunteers. The Royal Life Saving Society of Australia guidelines now require 2 accredited lifeguards on duty, depending on the access to Ambulance services at each facility.

In addition, regulations for water quality management now require 4 hourly testing and recording of chlorine and pH levels.

These two factors have significantly increased the direct staffing costs, especially at community managed pools.

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<sup>7</sup> Community Buildings Policy – Engagement Report 2020

## Utilities

To meet water quality management needs and user expectations, swimming pools operate plant and equipment requiring high consumption of electricity, gas and water. This results in extremely high operational costs and high greenhouse gas emissions.

In the four years to 2014/15 the average wholesale electricity price in Victoria was around \$43/MWh. Since 2015 there have been huge rises in the cost of electricity. In 2018/19 the average price reached \$99/MWh.

As a result of this doubling in energy prices the cost of operating community aquatic facilities has outstripped either growth in participation or the capacity to increase user fees. As result the subsidy provided by Council has increased substantially.

Community-managed sites have not received operating grant increases in line with growing utility costs and as a result many undertake fundraising in an attempt to raise the additional funds. It is anticipated that if operating grants to these facilities are not increased, these facilities will be forced to reduce their service levels (operating hours, season length, etc.) or potentially not open at all.

An environmental audit, to identify opportunities to improve efficiency, reduce costs and decrease emissions, is underway at Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre. It is possible to undertake audits for all sites, however improvements to costs via reduced energy/water use are unlikely to be feasible at some due to the age and condition of assets.

## Asset Maintenance

The Greater Bendigo Council manages plant, equipment and infrastructure assets valued at more than \$1.7 billion. The average investment required to maintain all the City's assets each year is around \$44 million.

Current renewal allocations of between \$27-\$34 million per year are inadequate. As a result, the condition of some community infrastructure and assets will deteriorate over time. This underfunding leads to a growing 'gap' that will require funding over and above the annual allocation to eliminate.

As a result, investment in new and upgraded infrastructure and maintaining existing assets must be carefully balanced to ensure the City's assets are protected (if required).

### ***Victorian Auditor-General's Report 2016<sup>8</sup>***

Recognising the challenge faced by Councils in provision of aquatic facilities, the Victorian Auditor-Generals Office (VAGO) published a report in which Greater Bendigo was one of six Councils audited.

The report identified key challenges including:

- The cost of building new centres is high - exceeding \$50 million in some instances
- There are many ageing aquatic and recreation centres across Victoria
- Councils are generally dependent on grants for the development and refurbishment of aquatic and recreation centres
- Aquatic and recreation centres are complex, evolving businesses with generating low returns, hence private sector investment is low
- Aquatic and recreation centres remain a high priority for their communities, and may generate high profile community and political issues

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<sup>8</sup> *Local Government Service Delivery: Recreational Facilities*, Victorian Auditor General's Office 2016

- Councils effectively engage with their communities, which informs planning for future facility developments
- A lack of effective evaluation for aquatic and recreation centres often limits councils' ability to demonstrate achievement of broader social, health and wellbeing objectives.

The report found that "ARCs (aquatic and recreation centres) are generally well planned and managed. However, most ARC operations are heavily subsidised by councils who are reliant on grants for new developments and refurbishments. The cost of providing ARCs should be balanced against social and other community outcomes, however none of the audited councils effectively evaluate their ARC services to determine how well they meet council's broader policy objectives."

The findings recommended Councils should improve monitoring, reporting and evaluation to determine how well community aquatic facilities meet broader objectives, given the significant investment needed. VAGO also recommended Sport and Recreation Victoria and Councils need to improve regional planning to avoid a concentration of aquatic facilities in some areas and manage ageing stock.

### ***Infrastructure audits***

While there are a range of benchmarks and indicators of asset condition which have been used to develop long term asset management plans for community aquatic facilities, there have not been detailed, sit-specific audits undertaken.

The available condition audits are based on asset age, inspections and maintenance records. These records are not complete due to loss of information during amalgamation and a lack of reliable systems to record works undertaken. For detailed understanding of an asset, further detailed investigation is needed to understand likely lifespan and renovation options.

While the City does not have highly detailed information, engineering standards for water retaining structures and historical data indicate that the life of a swimming pool is approximately 50 years. While this is the likely lifespan, the pool will not necessarily suffer major failure after this length of time, but will become less reliable, prone to breakdown, water leakage and undertaking renovation/repairs become risky.

The City of Greater Bendigo allocates between \$350,000 and \$550,000 each year to renew plant, buildings and equipment at community aquatic facilities. This varies depending on the need for unplanned/unscheduled maintenance.

While these amounts appear significant, it is not enough to undertake renewal works which are overdue at many facilities. For example, replacement of a concrete pool shell can cost in the order of \$2M and there is no allowance in the Council's asset management plan for investment of this scale. As a result, short term, low cost repairs are undertaken to minimise service interruptions or loss of the facility over the short/medium term.

**Council should undertake further detailed investigation of facilities which are to be retained to understand the condition of these assets, determine their realistic lifespan, plan for maintenance and determine the feasibility of refurbishment options. These investigations also offer more certainty for long term budget planning.**

### ***Pool Plant and Equipment Audits***

Like the infrastructure, swimming pool plant and equipment condition is also a risk to service continuity and safety. Condition is categorised in the audit as either *Good, Fair and Poor* for each site

The table below summarises the current condition of pool plant and equipment at each facility.

| Good                            | Fair                     | Poor                       |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| Faith Leech                     | Brennan Park             | Elmore                     |
| Goorong                         | East Bendigo             | Golden Square              |
| Heathcote                       | Marong<br>(Good to Fair) | Peter Krenz Leisure Centre |
| Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre |                          | Raywood                    |
| Long Gully Splash Park          |                          | White Hills                |

The 2010 Aquatic Strategy recommended investment in those facilities which:

- were intended to be retained for the long term
- are owned or operated by the City of Greater Bendigo
- are in population growth areas, and/or
- present safety concerns.

The condition of the plant and equipment at each site as illustrated above, relates to the implementation of the previous strategy. Over the past decade, investment has focussed on retaining and improving those sites considered part of the City's long term aquatic facility network.

**The 2019 plant and equipment audit recommended that \$1.72 million needs to be spent over the next 5 years on equipment maintenance. Recommendations in this strategy indicate the priority sites.**

## Regulation and Compliance

Due to the risks associated with aquatic facilities in relation to drowning, public health and child safety, there is a wide range of legislative regulations and guidelines to comply with to operate community aquatic facilities.

As the requirements become more stringent, compliance has become more costly and risk of not meeting the regulations increases unless adequate investment in resources and capacity are made.

In summary, these changes have impacted the financial cost of operating aquatic facilities:

- Guidelines for Safer Pool Operations (GSPO) provide a practical framework for auditing, managing and ensuring adequately trained staff at different facilities. Introduced in September 2019 implementing the GSPO presents challenges especially for volunteer-run facilities – both financially and with staffing. Implementation of these guidelines will increase the cost an estimated additional \$233,000 which relates predominantly to the smaller rural facilities where additional funding for staff is required.
- Public Health Regulations which were updated in December 2019 increase the regulations and requirement for water testing. While cost implications are unknown, it is likely to increase costs in the order of \$1,000 for seasonal pools and \$1,600 for year-round facilities.

## Council's Environmental Commitment – One Planet Framework

Consumption of grid electricity and natural gas results in greenhouse gas emissions. Pools are huge users of energy along with potable water, which is a non-renewable and a finite resource in Greater Bendigo.

Council adopted a carbon reduction target of 50% by 2020 (based on 2010/11 levels). Large facilities such as pools with significant energy use limits the City's ability to achieve these targets. The number of aquatic facilities provided across the municipality and their ageing infrastructure limits opportunities to achieve significant energy efficiency improvements.

Many of the older facilities also use water inefficiently. Deep water pools need huge volumes of water, are prone to water leaks due to ageing pools and plant, along with evaporation losses result in inefficient and wasteful water use when compared to other forms of aquatic infrastructure which have significantly lower energy and water needs.

Activities to reduce carbon emissions at community aquatic facilities are detailed in Greater Bendigo's One Planet Living Report 2018/19.

Council is currently undertaking analysis and review of energy consumption at Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre. This review will identify the most effective ways to reduce consumption through energy efficient technologies and more efficient operational practices.

## Contractor vs Community Management models

Greater Bendigo's aquatic facilities are managed either by a community committee or a contractor. Both management arrangements are supervised and supported by Council staff.

Contract managed facilities (current providers: Belgravia Leisure and YMCA) have larger operational expenses (as volunteers are not used) but the contract arrangements deliver more extensive services and programming, professional incident and risk management activities, better quality compliance and efficient administration.

Facilities run by the community (via committees of management) have low staffing costs as they rely on volunteers with limited paid staff in specific roles. However, as compliance requirements increase, the capacity of some committees to meet these is currently limited (see [Regulation and Compliance](#)).

The table overleaf indicates the costs met by Council at each facility - illustrating the different operational models between the community-managed/led (Committee of Management) and contract-managed (eg YMCA) facilities.

| COUNCIL SUBSIDY AND GRANT ALLOCATIONS |                |                   |                  |                      |             |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------------|-------------|
| Facility                              | Contract Costs | Lifeguard Funding | Chemical Funding | Utilities            | Maintenance |
| Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre       | X              |                   |                  | X                    | X           |
| Faith Leech Aquatic Centre            | X              |                   |                  | X                    | X           |
| Brennan Park Swimming Pool            | X              |                   |                  | X                    | X           |
| Heathcote Swimming Pool               | X              |                   |                  | X                    | X           |
| Marong Swimming Pool                  | X              |                   |                  | X                    | X           |
| Long Gully Splash Park                | X              |                   |                  | X                    | X           |
| Peter Krenz Leisure Centre            | X              |                   |                  | X                    | X           |
| Golden Square Pool                    | X              |                   |                  |                      |             |
| White Hills Swimming Pool             |                | X                 | X                | X                    | X           |
| Bendigo East Swimming Pool            | X              | X                 | X                | X<br>(partial)       | X           |
| Raywood Swimming Pool                 |                | X                 | X                |                      | X           |
| Elmore Swimming Pool                  |                | X                 | X                | X<br>(partial water) | X           |
| Goornong Swimming Pool                |                | X                 | X                |                      | X           |

## e. Subsidising aquatic facilities

With annual attendance in 2019/20<sup>9</sup> of around 550,000 visits at a net cost of \$3,240,096 the community (via Council rates revenue) subsidised aquatic facilities by \$5.90 per visit. This subsidy is additional to user entry fees.

As can be seen in the table following, depending on a range of variables, including attendances/utilisation rates, age of the infrastructure and management model, each facility requires a different level of subsidy to operate.

Four of the rural/regional pools – Heathcote, Marong, Goornong and Raywood – required subsidies of between \$35 and \$81 per user/swim to operate.

| FACILITY                        | Subsidy per visit<br>2019-2020 (\$) | FACILITY                   | Subsidy per visit<br>2019-2020 (\$) |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre | 3.69                                | Elmore                     | 17.29                               |
| Faith Leech Aquatic Centre      | 10.71                               | Goornong                   | 35.48                               |
| Brennan Park                    | 17.17                               | Raywood                    | 62.85                               |
| Heathcote                       | 59.33                               | White Hills                | 13.06                               |
| Marong                          | 81.64                               | Golden Square              | 2.69                                |
| Bendigo East                    | 3.08                                | Peter Krenz Leisure Centre | 6.95                                |

### Notes:

- Subsidy is additional to the 'user pays' price of entry.
- Subsidy excludes GST
- Subsidy excludes depreciation
- Excludes internal administration costs (finance, contract management, etc)
  - Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre  
Includes building servicing charges which would usually be accounted for within Property Services/building maintenance budgets - total \$173,000.
- Covid-19 closure has reduced attendance for from 23 March 2020 months at the following facilities:
  - Bendigo East Swimming Pool
  - Faith Leech Aquatic Centre (2 months)
  - Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre
  - Peter Krenz Leisure Centre.
- Some volunteer sites do not capture reliable attendance records. Attendance is not recorded at Long Gully Splash Park
- Bendigo East Pool suffered electronic data loss during 2019/20. Attendance is therefore an estimate based on banking data which indicates a 13.5% decrease.
- Bendigo East Pool incurred significantly increased gas costs during 2019/20

<sup>9</sup> Note the 19/20 operational year ended early on March 23 due to the Covid-19 restrictions.

In addition to annual subsidies, in 2019/20 Council provided additional support (facility specific grants) to top up funding for community-managed pools who were unable to operate within their budget due to increasing utility costs.

There is inequity between the financial contributions needed to provide services at different facilities. Sites requiring a higher subsidy do not generally offer better outcomes in terms of quality, accessibility or diversity of services/programs.

Due to aged and outdated infrastructure, many facilities don't meet the needs of current or potential aquatic users in their catchment due to the limitations of the infrastructure available. Subsidy levels need to be considered in context of the value and outcomes offered in terms of liveability, health and wellbeing which are the core goals of aquatic service provision.

#### f. Planning for future service provision

Financial modelling indicates that there are extreme financial challenges ahead due to the age and condition of many assets. If the maintenance and infrastructure renewal gap is not reduced there is a strong likelihood that facilities will become unreliable and suffer service interruptions and/or will fail to meet required standards e.g. water quality or health & safety standards.

Critical to reliable planning is site specific testing (as recommended in the [Infrastructure Condition](#) section of this report) to quantify the actual cost of maintenance over the long term.

In addition to the risk of not meeting basic standards there is a need to fund refurbishments to enable community aquatic facilities to better deliver on the vision of Council and the health and wellbeing needs of the community.

Investment in new facilities and/or significant upgrades will diversify opportunities for participation, improve access and increase utilisation rates (which are currently largely catering to fitness and training pool users/lap swimming).

Council should commence a transformation of the network of existing community aquatic facilities by:

- Allocating Council funds for new or refurbished infrastructure to increase liveability, health and wellbeing outcomes by better meeting the community's needs
- Seeking State and Federal Government grants
- Review of fees and charges
- Reducing or opting out of services
- Reducing levels of service where there is limited demand or duplication of services
- Reducing the number of facilities provided
- Potential commercial investment/partnership
- Diversification to maximise the use of existing facilities

*The following section details the strategic framework, objectives and strategies for the coming decade.*

## 8. Strategic Recommendations 2021-2031:

This section of the Strategy provides high level recommendations, along with site specific recommendations for facilities in the context of the hierarchy and principles of the Community Buildings Policy 2020.

The Strategic Objectives are outlined in section a. High level strategic recommendations are provided in section b. and site-specific guidance is provided in section c.

A five-year action plan (to be updated annually) will be developed to define timelines for projects, identify key initiatives and specific actions which will implement this strategy in the short to medium term.

### a. Strategic Objectives

The Strategy and its recommendations have been developed in context of the principles adopted from the Community Buildings Policy 2020. These are:

- |                      |                   |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1) equity            | 4) partnering     |
| 2) accessibility     | 5) sustainability |
| 3) promote wellbeing |                   |

In applying these principles to decisions regarding the provision of community aquatic facilities in the City of Greater Bendigo, the following objectives are proposed:

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1) Equity</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| i. Decisions will seek to ensure that high quality facilities and user experiences are delivered equitably to maximise liveability and wellbeing outcomes for the benefit of all residents.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>2) Accessibility</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| i. Council's aquatic facilities will be developed, managed and promoted in ways which maximise access to appropriate, safe and high quality service provision for everyone.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| ii. Decisions will ensure that community aquatic facilities are accessible across the municipality.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| iii. Aquatic facilities will be retained at a scale appropriate for surrounding land uses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>3) Promote Wellbeing</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| i. Council's aquatic centres purpose is to support and encourage residents to live healthier lifestyles through improved facility design, accessibility and fee structures.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| ii. Council will actively develop its community aquatic facilities as integrated, adaptive and multifunction community buildings which provide for a range of community activities and purposes.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>4) Partnering</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| i. Council welcomes and actively pursue opportunities to work in partnership to design and deliver aquatic facilities, services and programs which maximise liveability, health and wellbeing outcomes for the community.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>5) Sustainability</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| i. Council's aquatic facilities will be designed and managed to be environmentally sustainable and will include energy saving, waste minimisation and water saving and re-use elements.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| ii. Council will seek to implement a sustainable approach to community aquatic provision which focuses on provision of fewer facilities which:<br>a. more effectively and appropriately meet the needs of the whole community,<br>b. attract a greater and more diverse level of use<br>c. are more connected and integrated with other services and facilities<br>d. are accessible<br>e. offer a diversity of aquatic facilities to match the needs of the potential user market (ie the market segments/demand for Recreation, Leisure & Adventure 60%; Fitness & Training 20%; Warm water exercise, recovery & rehabilitation 10% and Education/Learn to Swim Schools 10% |

## b. TEN YEAR STRATEGIES

| Principle 1 - Equity        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | PRIORITY<br>Short term<br>Medium Term<br>Long term Ongoing |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| i.                          | Revise service levels to ensure community aquatic facilities are an appropriate scale for the catchment                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Short                                                      |
| ii.                         | Minimise duplication of services where the scale or distribution of facilities does not reflect community needs                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Medium                                                     |
| iii.                        | Undertake local planning and analysis to identify catchment service needs and provide the appropriate facilities mix.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Medium                                                     |
| iv.                         | Identify alternative fee structures which support access for groups who have identified poorer health outcomes including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. People with a disability</li> <li>b. Culturally or linguistically diverse</li> <li>c. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders</li> <li>d. People with low income</li> <li>e. Older aged residents living at home</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Ongoing                                                    |
| Principle 2 - Accessibility |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                            |
| i.                          | Transition from traditional lap swimming pool provision which meets the needs of fitness and training markets, to more diverse and inclusive facilities which cater for other aquatic market segments including leisure/fun/entertainment; warm water therapy; and aquatic education                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Long                                                       |
| ii.                         | Work with Traditional Owners to acknowledge their culture and connection to the land in a meaningful way and to understand if opportunities exist to enhance service provision to the local aboriginal community                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Ongoing                                                    |
| iii.                        | Undertake stakeholder engagement to identify opportunities which would improve accessibility. Initiatives already identified include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. colour contrast for those who have vision impairment</li> <li>b. hearing loops and emergency strobe lighting to provide access and safety for people with a hearing difficulty</li> <li>c. accessible parking and pathways close to entry points to improve physical access</li> <li>d. crime prevention by environmental design to improve safety for females or other vulnerable people</li> <li>e. increased water temperatures to assist users with low mobility in the water</li> <li>f. change facility design to support safety and be appropriate for all genders</li> <li>g. culturally appropriate/safe programs to increase participation CALD, ATSI, LGBTIQ+ community members</li> </ul> | Medium                                                     |
| iv.                         | Advocate for improved public transport connections to aquatic facilities and other community services/facilities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Ongoing                                                    |
| v.                          | Review and benchmark the City's Cold Weather Policy to better reflect community use patterns when temperatures are 22 degrees or below                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Short                                                      |

| Principle 3 - Promote Wellbeing |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |         |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| i.                              | Undertake place based planning (rather than aquatic facility planning) to identify needs of the community and consider and consider all options (including aquatic, leisure and community programs) to achieve improved health and wellbeing outcomes               | Medium  |
| ii.                             | Utilise aquatic facilities to promote healthy lifestyles and support behaviour change to support the goals and priorities of the Municipal Public Health & Wellbeing Plan                                                                                           | Ongoing |
| iii.                            | Support positive ageing initiatives through programming and facility design improvements                                                                                                                                                                            | Short   |
| iv.                             | Undertake annual service planning to ensure program delivery reflects the needs identified within the Municipal Public Health & Wellbeing Plan, Council (Community) Plan and other key strategic documents.                                                         | Ongoing |
| Principle 4 - Partnering        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |         |
| i.                              | Identify opportunities to provide more efficient services by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Supporting community-led management models</li> <li>b. Reviewing the financial and professional support provided at volunteer managed facilities</li> </ul> | Short   |
| ii.                             | Seek a formal review of support provided to facilities which are the responsibility of DELWP                                                                                                                                                                        | Medium  |
| iii.                            | Build partnerships with health and community service providers to deliver services at community aquatic facilities and increase utilisation of spaces                                                                                                               | Medium  |
| iv.                             | Partner with the community to design and/or deliver culturally appropriate/safe programs to increase participation of identified target groups (ie CALD, ATSI, LGBTIQ+ community members)                                                                           | Medium  |
| v.                              | Support the co-location of services to share costs, improve aquatic facility utilisation and enhance access to services (for example a library, health etc);                                                                                                        | Long    |
| vi.                             | Identify ways to increase use of existing facilities through partnering to deliver programs, events and activities.                                                                                                                                                 | Medium  |

| Principle 5 - Sustainability                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| i. Review operational practices to minimise waste                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Short  |
| ii. Continue investing in technologies which reduce consumption of non-renewable resources                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Short  |
| iii. When considering options for asset renewal or upgrade, minimise environmental impacts such as embodied energy; maximise energy efficiency and source low impact product alternatives.                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Long   |
| iv. Undertake audits to identify: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. chemical dosing system age condition and replacement options</li> <li>b. environmental risks associated with chemical delivery and storage</li> <li>c. water quality – chemical and reticulation</li> </ul>                                                                                                         | Short  |
| v. Use natural shade and landscaping solutions to provide cooler environments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Long   |
| vi. Undertaking more detailed asset condition assessments to understand the condition of major assets such as pool tanks/shells and water reticulation.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Medium |
| vii. Investigate the feasibility of consolidating facilities which duplicate aquatic activities/services within a catchment.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Long   |
| viii. Prioritise investment according to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Legislative compliance (safety of staff, community and environment)</li> <li>b. Asset protection/preservation</li> <li>c. Economic and environmental efficiency</li> <li>d. Service enhancement</li> <li>e. Aesthetic improvement</li> </ul>                                                                | Short  |
| ix. To improve sustainability, review annual operating seasons and hours for all facilities in response to the availability of regional-level facilities at Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre. The aim will be to increase consistency of outdoor swimming pool seasons and to align facility opening hours with community use patterns/demand to maximise utilisation and curb escalating costs. | Medium |

c. HIERARCHY AND SITE-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

| Hierarchy             | Typical Characteristics                                                                                                                                                                                           | Catchment Indicators                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Existing Aquatic Facilities | Site specific Recommendations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Priority |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| <b>Small Township</b> | <p>Able to be used by a diversity of users, across the lifespan, for a diversity of purposes, including wellbeing, social and life-long learning activities and programs.</p> <p>Example:<br/>Community Halls</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Primarily attracts people from the township within which it is based, as well as some people from neighbouring townships.</li> <li>Up to 2km travel distance (or 25 minutes average walking time) for people based in the township.</li> </ul> | <b>Elmore</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retain base service level and community management.</li> <li>Review level of financial and professional support needed/provided.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                    | High     |
|                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>Goornong</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retain base service level and community management.</li> <li>Review level of financial and professional support needed/provided.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                    | High     |
|                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>Raywood</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement aquatic facility actions adopted Master Plan</li> <li>Replace with Splash Park of local level, shared amenities between park and oval.</li> <li>Convert balance to parkland/playground</li> <li>Provide place for RV camping (including dump point)</li> <li>Retain community management.</li> </ul> | High     |

| Hierarchy                                                    | Typical Characteristics                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Catchment Indicators                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Existing Aquatic Facilities | Site specific Recommendations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Priority                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Large or residential growth corridor township/ suburb</b> | <p>Able to be used by a diversity of users, across the lifespan, for a diversity of purposes, including wellbeing, social and life-long learning activities and programs.</p> <p>Example: Golden Square Recreation Reserve Pavilion.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Primarily attracts people from the township within which it is based, as well as some people from neighbouring townships.</li> <li>Up to 2km travel distance (or 25 minutes average walking time) for people based in the township/ suburb.</li> </ul> | <b>Bendigo East</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>After upgrades occur at Brennan Park, remove pool and relocate community management.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <i>Refer Brennan Park</i>                                |
|                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <b>Brennan Park</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Upgrade as an all year outdoor facility focused on fitness/lap swimming.</li> <li>Strengthen connections to adjacent areas incl. LaTrobe Uni, Bendigo South East Secondary College, Strathfieldsaye growth corridor.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <p>High</p> <p>(Note: non-viability of current pool)</p> |
|                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <b>Golden Square</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue operating Golden Square Swimming Pool until a site master plan for Golden Square Recreation Reserve is adopted under the following conditions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>continued community management</li> <li>the City undertaking asset renewal responsibilities to a maximum value of \$20,000</li> <li>a Council contribution of \$35,000 per season for operation</li> </ul> </li> <li>Implement Golden Square Master Plan</li> </ul> | <p>Short</p> <p>High</p>                                 |
|                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <b>Heathcote</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retain a base level of service. Investigate viability of moving to community-led management.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Medium/ Long                                             |
|                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <b>Marong</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retain a base level service only given access to Gurri Wanyarra and Peter Krenz indoor facilities.</li> <li>Consider opportunities for partnerships and co-location as Marong grows towards a forecast population of 8,000</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <p>Short</p> <p>Long</p>                                 |
|                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <b>White Hills</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement the aquatic facility actions adopted in the Bendigo (White Hills) Master Plan</li> <li>Transform facility to replace current aquatic infrastructure with a regional level Splash Park.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <p>Medium</p> <p>Medium</p>                              |

| Hierarchy        | Typical Characteristics                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Catchment Indicators                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Existing Aquatic Facilities                        | Site specific Recommendations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Priority                   |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Municipal</b> | <p>Somewhat unique in terms of the range of experiences, activities and program offered within Greater Bendigo.</p> <p>Usually occupies strategically important and highly accessible locations.</p> <p>More often found within or close to the Bendigo urban area.</p> <p>Example: Libraries</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Primarily attracts people from across Greater Bendigo.</li> <li>Up to 10km travel distance (or 15 minutes average travel time via car) for people based in urban Greater Bendigo.</li> <li>For people based in rural Greater Bendigo, travel distances/times are likely to be greater.</li> </ul> | <b>Long Gully Splash Park</b>                      | No change.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | N/A                        |
|                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>Peter Krenz Leisure Centre</b>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake a place based planning process to explore opportunities to redevelop the facility as a community hub.</li> <li>Consider scale/form of aquatic components and needs of the community for other services at this location (e.g. library).</li> </ul> | High.                      |
| <b>Regional</b>  | <p>Usually has a moderate level of uniqueness or significance connected variously with sport and recreation, cultural heritage, the arts or other special values.</p>                                                                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attracts people from across Greater Bendigo plus central Victoria.</li> <li>Up to 2 hours of travel time by car</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Gurri Wanyarra Aquatic and Wellbeing Centre</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retain as premier regional facility.</li> <li>Fund 100% asset renewal/ replacement of equipment commensurate with the scale of facility.</li> <li>Investigate need to expand gym and wellness suites</li> </ul>                                              | <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Long</p> |

| Hierarchy                      | Typical Characteristics                                                                                                                                                                     | Catchment Indicators                                                                                                                           | Existing Aquatic Facilities                                 | Site specific Recommendations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Priority                            |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Regional</b><br>(continued) |                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                | <b>Faith Leach Aquatic Centre</b>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain current infrastructure including provision of competitive diving facilities - tower and diving boards - and water slide.</li> <li>• Consider reducing operating hours/ season due to proposed changes at Bendigo East Pool, and access to other municipal and regional aquatic facilities</li> <li>• Upgrade diving pool plant infrastructure, replace / renew water slide, upgrade water treatment system.</li> </ul> | Ongoing<br><br>Medium<br><br>Medium |
| <b>State or national</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has a high level of uniqueness or significance connected with sport and recreation, cultural heritage, the arts or other special value.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attracts people Victoria and interstate.</li> <li>• More than 2 hours travel time via car.</li> </ul> | <b>No facilities exist or are proposed in this category</b> | N/A                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | N/A                                 |