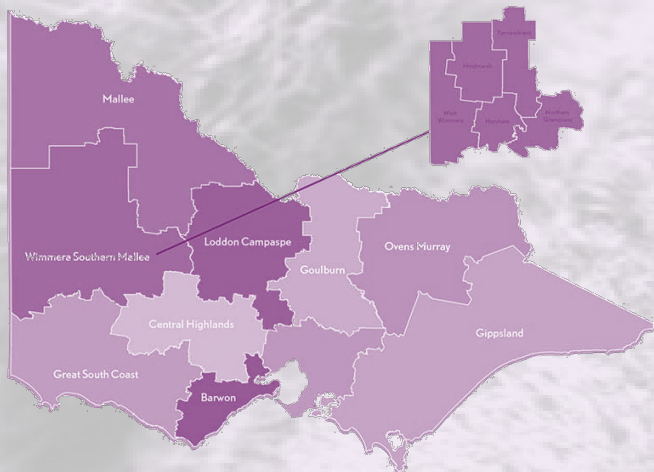


REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

WIMMERA SOUTHERN MALLEE



Our region in central western Victoria encompasses one of the world's great grain growing areas. It is home to many small, vibrant communities and is served by the major regional centres of Horsham and Stawell.

We are proud to acknowledge the culture and connection to country of the indigenous peoples of the WSM and will promote inclusion, mutual respect and a shared commitment to recognising their history of caring for country over many thousands of years.

The WSM provides residents and visitors with recreational and outdoor pursuits in vast and open landscapes and bustling regional centres.

Home to some of Victoria's iconic natural attractions, including the Grampians National Park, the Wimmera River, major deserts, wetlands and lakes, our region includes the municipalities of Hindmarsh, Horsham, Northern Grampians, West Wimmera and Yarriambiack.

The culture of our region is warm, welcoming and inclusive. We are proud of Wimmera Southern Mallee's agricultural history and the connection of our community to our natural environment.

The outcomes we are striving to achieve

Our region is striving to achieve the following long term social, economic, environmental and cultural outcomes for individuals, families and communities who live in and visit the WSM. The roadmap overleaf outlines the challenges we face in achieving these outcomes, the actions we are taking and what success looks like for our region.



Our Outcomes Roadmap

Pillar 1: Integrated Regional Planning



Economic Diversification

A vibrant economy with a thriving, innovative agriculture industry and emerging tourism opportunities



Telecommunications

High quality, reliable digital connectivity and services



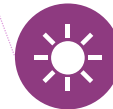
Connectivity – Public Transport & Roads

Safe, accessible and connected roads and rail



Strong Local Government

Sustainable, connected and change-ready local government



Energy

Affordable, sustainable and renewable energy



Rural & Remote Funding

Focussed funding that drives infrastructure investment and business growth into rural areas



Early Years

Equity of access to early years education and care



Family Violence

WSM Families are safe and supported



Workforce

A high performing, valued and empowered workforce



Health & Education

Quality health and education for all



Youth Disadvantage

Young people in WSM reach their full their potential

Pillar 2: Coordinated Service Delivery

This roadmap reflects the views of the Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Partnership. The roadmap is a living document that will be updated regularly by the Regional Partnership.



What success looks like for Wimmera Southern Mallee

Some key challenges we are facing

How our partnership is responding



The actions and key projects we are focussing on



Economic diversification

A vibrant economy with a thriving, innovative agriculture industry and emerging tourism opportunities

An adoption of **agricultural technologies and innovation** across the grain industry, supported by training, research and development opportunities. We have a **vibrant tourism industry** across the region, **supported by a coordinated partnership model with industry and government.**

Agriculture is the dominant land use in our region, but we **lack the networks and supports to drive innovation.** This is important, particularly as our region deals with the **effects of a drying climate**, which in turn impacts our industry's **economic viability.** **Poor tourism infrastructure** in the north and west of the region is limiting **opportunities and investment.**

We are capitalising on regional strengths to be **leaders in applied agricultural technologies**, by **creating new networks** to increase innovation & uptake of **new technologies** & business models in the grains sector.
We're also doing significant **planning and modeling** to create a more active and connected visitor economy.

- Projects like *AgTIDE* and the *Victorian Networked Grains Centre of Excellence (VNGCE)*, encourage innovation in agricultural technology
- Projects to stimulate tourism, like the Tourism Collaboration Project and the 10 Year Grampians Regional Cycling Infrastructure Strategy
- Making vital upgrades to roads and rail



Telecommunications

High quality, reliable digital connectivity and services

Digital innovation and connectivity across the region is achieved, with 95% of our region accessing reliable, **high speed internet** connection, supported by **high quality telecommunications** services. Our digital capability is in-line with other parts of urban, regional and rural Victoria.

Household **internet access rates** are low, due to inequity in **digital infrastructure, service quality & cost.** Lack of competition between carriers creates potential for market failure & poor service, making our region **less productive & businesses less competitive and sustainable.** It also impacts our ability to **respond to emergencies.**

We are working on a plan designed to **deliver digital innovation and connectivity** across the region. We are also working to better understand and map where our **mobile blackspots** are, with a view to target these areas and **place coverage, access and connectivity** where it needs to be.

- Projects that help us better understand access and connectivity issues, including working with Telstra to identify 17 priority blackspot tower locations across the region
- Working with Govt & community to develop a digital plan to improve access, connectivity and stimulate innovation
- Funding and implementing the *AgTIDE* project over three years



Connectivity – Public Transport & Roads

Safe, accessible and connected roads and rail

Our region is connected by **safe and accessible rail and roads**, supporting **economic and social outcomes, community health, diversification of industry and reduced travel time** within the WSM & to major service centres.

Fluctuating funding streams, climate variability (drought & flood), an increase in weight, size & frequency of freight vehicles has impacted the **structural integrity** of the rural road network. The majority of our region is **not serviced by passenger rail.** This significantly **inhibits transit flow into and out of the region for tourist, specialists & residents.**

Our priority is to see the **return of passenger rail services** to Horsham. This ambitious but important work will result in **improved connectivity across and into the region.**
We're also focused on making sure our **roads meet the demands** of freight and domestic use **and are safe to travel on.**

- Prioritising the return of passenger rail to Western Victoria by 2023, with improved alignment of coach timetables, funding of new and upgraded services
- Increasing road repair and maintenance budgets and duplication of the Western Highway to the South Australian border



Strong Local Government

Sustainable, connected and change-ready local government

The five WSM local governments take a **coordinated approach** to **planning and service delivery** and work **collaboratively with communities** to deliver tailored services. **Long term, structural changes** have resulted in more **effective and sustainable local government operations.**

Historic land tax models, large & growing asset renewal gaps, declining & ageing populations, along with rate capping are impacting on **LGAs financial viability & capacity** to meet growing community expectations around service delivery. No **coordinated regional approach** exists to **streamline or share service delivery.** Local governments are expected to deliver more services from the State.

We support efforts that continue to **bring our local councils together** to collaborate to deliver **shared service models** that work for small rural councils. We recognise and advocate for **systems change** that enable councils to **achieve financial sustainability** and bring **balance to the expectations** on what they deliver and their ability to do so.

- Implementing important changes to how local government operates, including support for local outcomes from the *Rural Council's Transformation Program*
- Advocating for structural changes to local government funding
- Improving models of regional governance, service delivery and collaboration through the Rural Innovation Project



Energy

Affordable, sustainable and renewable energy

Energy is **no longer a limiting factor** for economic development in the region, with an **affordable & environmentally sustainable energy supply.** Training services, communities and regional coordination supports the industry and there are **fewer barriers to establishing and delivering innovative renewable projects.**

Our region has high renewable energy resources of wind, solar, biomass and land, but **growth of the sector is limited** by grid capacity, regulation and poorly integrated development. The region is **missing out on important economic opportunities**, and our community has limited access to **affordable energy.**

Our focus is to set a **clear vision and strategy** for how we achieve our **exciting new energy future**, bringing together community and industry to identify how best to **tackle infrastructure and funding challenges and identify new energy innovations.**

- Implementing projects like the *GNET – Grampians New Energy Taskforce* to map out our region's new energy future
- Advocating for Wimmera based community and organisational energy projects through GNET, like the *N-CORE Natimuk Community Energy Project*



What success looks like for Wimmera Southern Mallee

Some key challenges we are facing

How our partnership is responding



The actions and key projects we are focussing on

Rural & Remote Funding

Focussed funding that drives infrastructure investment & business growth into rural areas



Our region has **successfully addressed infrastructure decline**, with well **supported pathways for innovation and funding for agricultural industries & businesses**. This support and investment is evidenced by **strong economic and population growth** for our region.

While agriculture is the dominant industry, our **infrastructure is in decline, limiting growth and innovation**. There is significant investment into regional centres, with less investment in rural areas. Existing funding models are **not appropriate for rural and remote growth**, and we lack the funding to **drive innovation**.

We are seeking to **increase funding** that will address **infrastructure decline and support agricultural industries and businesses**, with a focus on **improving productivity** and efficiency of supply chains. These are imperative for sustainability and growth of rural areas because they **address workforce issues and provide pathways for innovation**.

- Advocate for **rural focused funding streams** that will empower communities to implement **priority projects**
- Create an Agricultural Innovation Fund to support infrastructure and capabilities for agricultural industries & businesses.

Early Years

Equity of access to early years education and care



Families across our region enjoy **equity of access** to early years education and care, establishing ourselves as a **leader in delivering early years services** in rural and remote areas.

Our region has some of the **poorest results in Victoria across the five early childhood developmental benchmarks (AEDC)**. WSM children are starting school with **low literacy, numeracy and social skills**. There is a **lack of coordination and integration across early years programs** and the system is **difficult to navigate**.

We are exploring how best to **achieve equity of access** to early years education in our region in a way that meets the **specific needs of our communities** and we're also supporting investment in projects that **will build teacher and carer capability and help local providers** deliver the best services possible.

- Trialling innovative ways to deliver early years services in rural and remote areas
- Undertake a three-year Early Years Trial across six trial sites in the region that covers 16 communities.
- Seeking subsidised traineeships in Cert 3 & Diploma Early Childhood Education courses as a pathway to fill skills gaps.
- Pooling of part-time funded allied health positions and coordinating position across the region.

Family violence

WSM Families are safe and supported



People experiencing family violence **receive the place-based, integrated and client-centred support** they need, in the right place at the right time. **Prevention and early intervention** is reducing the prevalence and incidence of family violence.

We experience **significant rates of family violence incidents**. Gender inequality is entrenched in parts of our community. Support services are fractured, complex, dispersed and difficult to navigate. We **have limited crisis housing allocated to those families escaping family violence**, with **demand outstripping supply**.

In parallel to the **State's investment in addressing family violence**, our region is focused on how we can **improve our service delivery models** increasing **access and quality** of service for family violence victims. A connected and integrated service system is key. We are also tackling how services can **reach the most remote areas of our region**.

- Improving access to services including: increasing local access to crisis accommodation, counselling and perpetrator intervention models in partnership with Police and family violence service providers.
- Establishing a *Regional Support & Safety Hub ('Orange Door')*, with delivery methods tailored to local needs and services located in the WSM.

Workforce

A high performing, valued and empowered workforce



WSM offers diverse and supported employment options with opportunities for career progression. We **attract, train, retain and reward** some of Victoria's best talent.

There is currently no formal 'whole of region' mechanism to address **systemic and complex workforce issues** which apply cross sectors and also impact on industry & business. **Poor links to training needs and skills development** also exist across the region.

We are working toward a **planned, strategic approach** across the region to overcome skills shortages which is **cross sector and inclusive of business and industry needs**. We are working to identify ways to ensure **funded positions in health and education** are filled, and looking at other key sectors of our local economy requiring a skills uplift.

- Working to increase employment in health roles through the *Allied Health Cross Sector Collaboration* with DET & DHHS
- Advocating for a Workforce Retention, Attraction and Development Coordinator to work collaboratively across community and industry to overcome skills shortages
- Exploring flexible secondment and traineeship models that drive local employment

Health & Education

Quality health and education for all



Our region has **flexible and well resourced health and education hubs**, which use service systems, technology and coordination to reflect local needs and **deliver quality health and education outcomes to our communities**.

Families in our region are experiencing **increasing levels of disengagement and disadvantage**. This translates into both **poor health and education outcomes** for residents. Compounded by **complex funding, high service costs, centralised policy making, lack of available skilled staff and long travel distances**.

We're looking at ways to **improve and expand health and education service design and delivery across the WSM**. Focusing on models of integrated planning and service coordination through fit for purpose regional assets and infrastructure that reduce costs, provide a wider range of services in more targeted and efficient ways.

- Delivery of the *Warracknabeal Education Precinct* which will deliver holistic education, community and social services
- Delivery of the *Wimmera Health Care Group Master Plan* which will expand health service delivery capability across the region
- Expansion of Tele-Health Programs as a mechanism to provide increased access to specialist services.

Youth

Disadvantage

Young people in WSM reach their full their potential



WSM children and young people are **confident, optimistic, healthy and resilient**. They are safe, supported, given pathways to stay engaged in education and training and able to reach their potential **regardless of background, place or circumstances**.

Young people in our region are experiencing **extreme disadvantage, hardship and homelessness**. **Family violence and abuse** is driving **poor education outcomes** for our youth, with our region experiencing rates of **teenage pregnancy** three times the Victorian average. Our services are **not meeting needs**, breaking cycles of disadvantage or addressing homelessness.

We are working to raise **community awareness** of complex youth disadvantage and homelessness issues, and **support our region's most vulnerable**. We are **supporting programs** and services designed to provide **pathways toward safe, healthy living and engagement with education and employment opportunities**. Early intervention is central to our efforts.

- Supporting the development of projects to better understand the barriers, issues and access to services for **teenage parents**.
- Investing in new projects that address youth disadvantage, including housing solutions for **youth homelessness**.
- Supporting innovation in the **Out of Home Care** space and advocating for a *Professional Foster Care Network*