



Community Aquatic Facilities Strategy

AUGUST 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The City of Greater Bendigo is on Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung Country.

We would like to acknowledge and extend our appreciation to the Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung Peoples, the Traditional Owners of the land.

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

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.

COUNCIL DECISION

The City of Greater Bendigo's 2023 Draft Community Aquatic Facilities Strategy went to the August, 2023 Council Meeting for adoption. The Council adopted the strategy with the following amendments:

- Subject to a suitably skilled Community Committee of Management being established, that the Bendigo East Swimming Pool is retained, becoming a non-heated seasonal pool, following the upgrade of Brennan Park Pool
- Responsibility for all operations, risk management, asset maintenance, renewal and new investment of the Bendigo East Pool will be the responsibility of the Community Committee of Management
- Provision of \$50,000 in annual funding from Council will be provided to the Community Committee of Management
- If a suitably skilled Community Committee of Management is not able to be established, and adhere to the terms of the resolution, that the Bendigo East Swimming Pool is permanently closed



EXECUTIVE 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 or fit for purpose. Current facilities do 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 increase the income from users, means that continuing to operate the extensive network of aquatic facilities in its current form will present an untenable financial situation for Council over the coming decade.

The Community Aquatic Facilities Strategy will assist Council to 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 facilities provided by Council, are not an end in themselves. They are designed, developed, maintained and managed to deliver outcomes in the context of the community vision and health and wellbeing goals of the community.

The existing planning and policy context that guides this Community Aquatic Facilities Strategy 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.



GREATER BENDIGO COMMUNITY AQUATIC STRATEGY

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Greater Bendigo celebrates our diverse community. We are welcoming, sustainable and prosperous. Walk hand-in-hand with the Traditional Custodians of this land. Building on our rich heritage for a bright and happy future.

COMMUNITY AQUATIC FACILITIES STRATEGY

COUNCIL PLAN: MIR WIMBUL

- Lead and govern for all
- Healthy livable spaces and places
- Strong, inclusive and sustainable economy
- Aboriginal reconciliation
- A climate resilient built and natural environment
- A vibrant, creative community
- A safe, welcoming and fair community

HEALTHY GREATER BENDIGO

- Healthy and well
- Safe and secure
- Able to participate
- Connected to culture and community
- Livable

PUBLIC SPACES PLAN

- ACTIVATED
More reasons to experience and use
- STRONGER
CONNECTION TO WATER in public places
- CONSOLIDATION
for equitable access and better more diverse facilities

SOCIAL JUSTICE FRAMEWORK

- Human Rights
- Access and Inclusion
- Equity
- Participation in decision making

CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENT

- Biodiversity and regeneration
- Zero Carbon
- Circular Economy
- Sustainable and active transport
- Sustainable food systems
- Water sensitive Bendigo

PRINCIPLES

- Equity
- Accessibility
- Promotes Wellbeing
- Partnering
- Sustainability

HIERARCHY



Community Buildings Policy

CURRENT PROVISION AND 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 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 10km. There are also five swimming pools that are in rural towns and the City has a free splash park located in Long Gully.

Current provision of aquatic facilities in the Bendigo region sees over-serviced 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 IN BENDIGO 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, the 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 3154km² and Bendigo having much more dense provision with one pool per 300km².

Domestic pools:

The number of residences with private pools for their own swimming requires registration with the City (between one in eight and one in 15 homes). Also, a large proportion of people who swim (approximately 50 per cent) 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?



1	Half of the residents who participate in swimming do so at home*
2	Females swim more than males
3	A higher proportion of three to seven year olds participate more than any other age group
4	90% of people use a car to get to their swimming activity
5	Those who swim do it regularly with almost half swimming at least weekly
6	Quality and accessibility ratings are high and have improved since 2014
7	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 per cent) and 2019 (8.5 per cent) 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 domestic/private pools).

Residents of all ages and genders participate in swimming for exercise, although swimming was more popular for females than males. Males and females aged three 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%	



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

THE CHALLENGES

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.

In recent years there have been a number of changes to the compliance requirements for swimming pools. This includes increased requirements to comply with the Guidelines for Safe Pool Operations, such as additional lifeguard staff and Department of Health's Water Quality Guidelines for public facilities including registration and testing requirements. These requirements continue to significantly increase the cost of pool operations and therefore the subsidy paid by the City. Increasing entry fees to meet this increased cost would impact most greatly on community members who can least afford the cost of entry.

Greater Bendigo is located in central Victoria and experiences weather extremes throughout the year. Providing a service that is responsive to weather variations experienced, especially during fringe seasons, is difficult and requires flexibility to extend during heat waves or reduce during colder conditions. The City will review and provide consistency in relation to the operating hours of its seasonal outdoor pools and the circumstances in which these will vary as a result of hot, cold or extreme weather conditions.

Aquatic facilities are popular recreational sites but of all the City's public facilities, aquatic centres are one of the most energy intensive. Indoor aquatic centres are complex facilities accommodating diverse uses and differing heating/cooling needs. Heating and cooling consumes significant energy resulting in high greenhouse gas emissions. Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre is the City's highest emissions facility since opening. To address this, the City has undertaken an energy audit and actions are underway to continue to decrease carbon emissions and remove gas infrastructure working towards a Zero Emissions Plan.

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.

Recently the Victorian Government introduced the Gender Equality Act. This Act requires Council to consider the gender impact of its services and policies. Working with pool operators to ensure there are fewer gender barriers and increase accessibility to facilities provides an opportunity to grow participation and sustainability of these facilities.

Through the careful planning for and provision of community aquatic facilities and services, aquatic facilities and programs become invaluable settings to help Greater Bendigo become a healthy, 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.

The City supports operational costs at a number of small township swimming pools, which are highly subsidised but relatively low cost to operate due to the volunteer community-led management structure. These services would not be viable without this level of volunteerism and while communities are willing to operate these sites, the City should continue to support them financially and with other advice.

To align with City 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 that meet the needs of under-served market segments (especially health and therapy)
- Limiting further investment in facilities that 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 that duplicate other facilities and provide more sustainable, cost effective, better located and/or higher quality centres

Bendigo East Swimming Club has agreed to relocate to Brennan Park Swimming Pool following upgrades proposed in this plan. These upgrades will support year-round operation of this facility, which is strategically located adjacent to the Strathdale commercial precinct, LaTrobe University and Bendigo South East Secondary College. As such, this modernised facility will service the City's eastern growth areas.



THE STRATEGY

This strategy has been developed using the City's existing strategic framework.

Based on principles, the following decision-making framework is proposed:

PRINCIPLE 1: EQUITY

1. 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.

PRINCIPLE 2: ACCESSIBILITY

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

PRINCIPLE 3: PROMOTE WELLBEING

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

PRINCIPLE 4: PARTNERING

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

PRINCIPLE 5: SUSTAINABILITY

1. 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.
2. Council will seek to implement a sustainable approach to community aquatic provision, focusing on provision of fewer facilities that:
 - 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 and adventure 60%, Fitness and training 20%, Warm water exercise, recovery and rehabilitation 10%, and Education, learn-to-swim schools 10%)

Specific recommendations of this strategy can be found in sections 8 and 9 of the strategy.



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1. INTRODUCTION

Greater Bendigo's 121,000+ 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 health and wellbeing.

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 Community Aquatic Facilities Strategy 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, Complementary aquatic leisure facilities often incorporate facilities for a range of activities including wet and dry areas. Common elements include: swimming pools for a variety of ages and abilities, spas, saunas and water play areas as well as multipurpose rooms for other activities such as exercise classes, child care and gymnasiums. Public aquatic facilities are recognised in State Government policy as important for maintaining and promoting active lifestyles and providing direct health, wellbeing and education benefits.

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 report¹ identifies key challenges facing the aquatic and recreation industry, assessing

whether Councils effectively identify 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 \$50M 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 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 that 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 or fit-for-purpose, and does not adequately deliver on the community's goal to maximise liveability and wellbeing in the community.

¹ Local Government Service Delivery: Recreational Facilities, Victorian Auditor General's Office 2016

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 un-heated 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 its 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 the City 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

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 10 years:

The Greater Bendigo Community Aquatic Facilities Strategy 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 that 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 that was relied on to develop the proposed strategic direction.

Detailed in the following sections is a strategy focused on community needs that relies on evidence and policy, including:

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

This strategy will assist the City to address the significant and complicated challenges of community aquatic facility provision, 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

This strategy provides the City with a sound basis for decision making to deliver a network of efficient, appropriate and fit-for-purpose aquatic facilities that 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 which will continue.

This new strategy 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

Review of previous Aquatic Strategy 2010-2020

Background research including data, trends and evidence

Assessment of provision in other regional cities and visitation/attendances

Condition assessments of existing facilities

Issues and Opportunities Paper

Preparation of draft strategy

Community engagement on draft strategy

Global pandemic

Community aquatic panel

Present final strategy to Council for consideration

Implementation of strategy

Note: Throughout this Strategy the impacts of the global pandemic COVID19 will be referenced and acknowledged. The pandemic limited and/or altered operating hours, venue density limits and changed participation patterns over the seasons of 2019/2020, 2020/2021 and 2021/2022.



3. TRENDS IN PARTICIPATION AND SWIMMING

a. National and Victorian participation (AusPlay 2022²)

- Nationally, participation in swimming (sporting and non-sporting) is around 16%. Notably, rates in total participation remain unchanged since 2001
- The percentage of inactive Australians aged 15+ for whom physical activity is no longer a priority increased to 11% in 2021/2022 - its highest ever result in AusPlay
- Most popular sport related activities for 2021/2022 includes swimming as 3rd for males 15+ and first for females 15+
- AusPlay data shows there has been significant changes in sport and physical activity participation, motivations and barriers from 2020/2021 to 2021/2022
- The top motivation in 2021/2022 by % change is psychological/mental health/therapy at 3% increase to 31% and fun/enjoyment at 2% increase to 48% and social reasons at 3% increase to 38%

²https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1077544/AusPlay-National-Sport-and-Physical-Activity-Participation-Report-November-2022-V2.pdf

b. Active Living Census - 2019³

- Swimming remains the second most popular recreational activity in Greater Bendigo across all age groups with an 8.5% participation rate - excluding swimming at home* Walking is the most popular activity
- Females (of all ages) participate in swimming more than males
- Participation is highest in children aged three to seven years-old, with 14% of boys and of 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)

* The significant difference in swimming participation rates between 2014 (17.5 per cent) and 2019 (8.5 per cent) 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.

³Healthy 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>



1	Half of the residents who participate in swimming do so at home*
2	Females swim more than males
3	A higher proportion of three to seven year-olds participate than any other age group
4	90% of people use a car to get to their swimming activity
5	Those who swim do it regularly with almost half swimming at least weekly
6	Quality and accessibility ratings are high and have improved since 2014
7	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 three 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%	



4. STRATEGIC PLANNING AND POLICY CONTEXT

Aquatic facilities, like all community buildings provided by the City, 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 strategy 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 that need to be acknowledged. Strong alignment between this strategy and the Victorian Public Health & Wellbeing Plan 2019-2023 and Active Victoria 2022-2026 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.

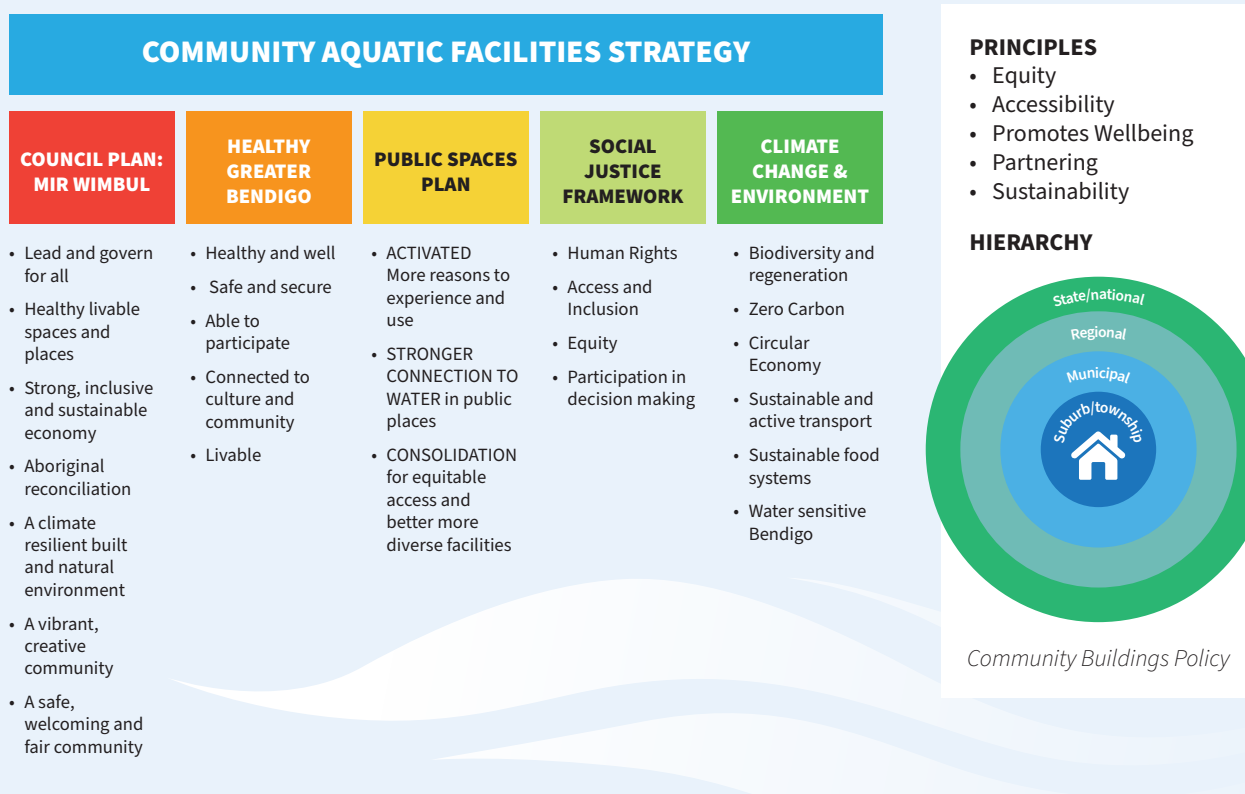
Greater Bendigo has robust plans and policies that provide clear direction, and these can be combined to create a strategic framework which forms the basis for the overall objectives of this strategy and guide decision-making about the future of community aquatic facilities.

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 that 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.

GREATER BENDIGO COMMUNITY AQUATIC STRATEGY STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Greater Bendigo celebrates our diverse community. We are welcoming, sustainable and prosperous. Walk hand-in-hand with the Traditional Custodians of this land. Building on our rich heritage for a bright and happy future.



b. Greater Bendigo policies

As part of the Local Government Act 2020, integrated strategic planning plays a key role:

Key Council documents include:

- [Council Plan 2021-2025: Mirwimbul](#)
- [Healthy Greater Bendigo 2021-2025](#)
- [Financial Plan 2021-2031](#)
- [Asset Plan 2022-2023](#)

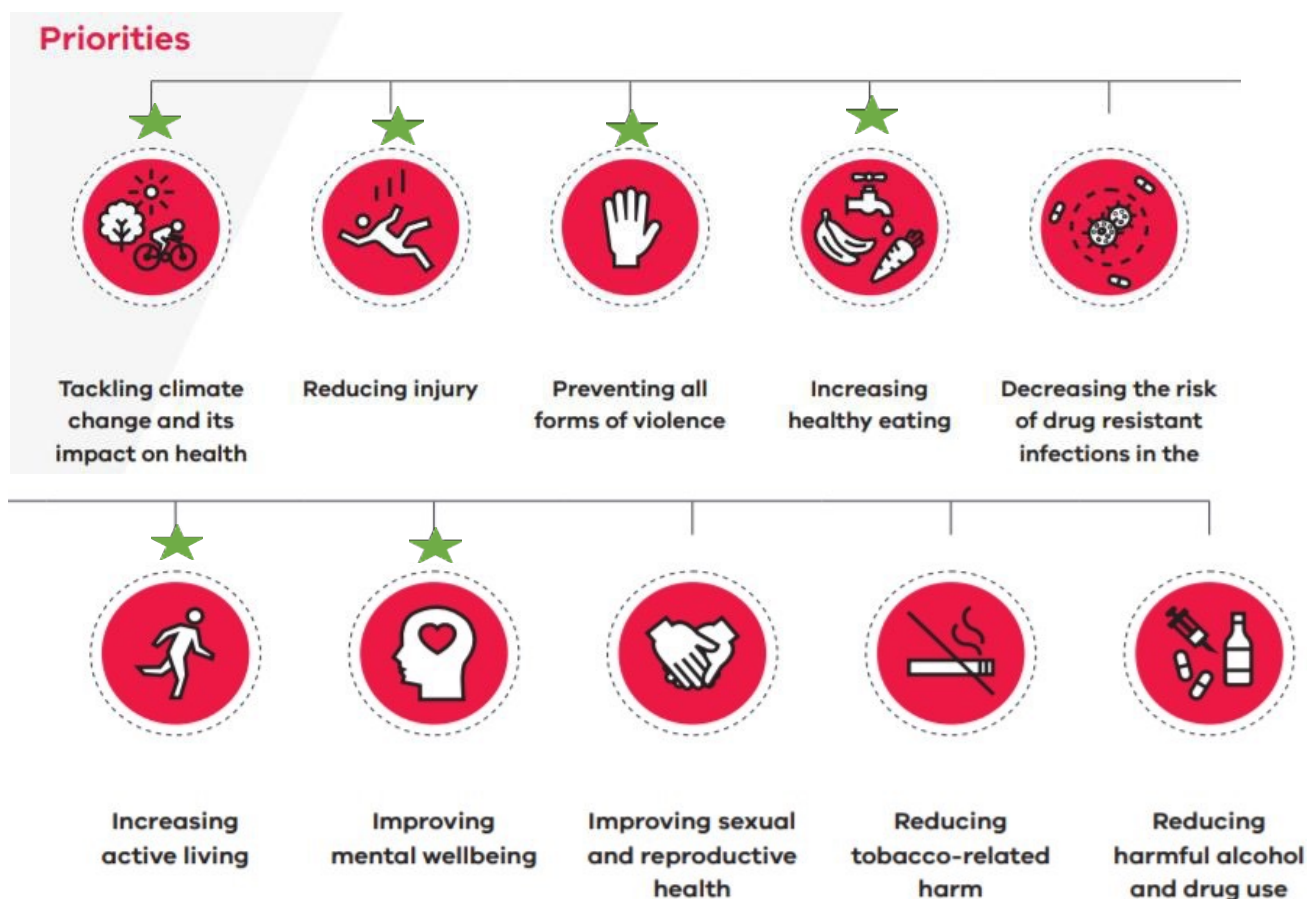
Community aquatic facilities, like all recreation settings, are ideal places to promote healthy living and create healthy environments where individual and community wellbeing is at the forefront of all decisions. This important role for community aquatic facilities to be supportive settings for health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

c. Victorian Government plans and strategies:

Victorian State Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019-2023

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.



Active Victoria Strategy 2022-2026

Active Victoria is the State Government's plan to acknowledge sport and active recreation supports the health and wellbeing of all Victorians, builds the social fabric of our community and delivers thousands of local jobs.

Active Victoria's strongly aligns with the City of Greater Bendigo's own strategic framework and goals.

Ensuring this strategy responds to and aligns with 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 City's recommendations in relation to local provision.

d. Industry reports

Royal Life Saving Australia: The State of Aquatic Facility Infrastructure in Australia

In Australia, in 2022, there are **1,306 public pools** built and owned by government and 807 publicly accessible pools provided by the private sector.

79%

of aquatic facilities located in areas with the lowest SEIFA decile are publicly owned.

74%

of aquatic facilities located in areas with the highest SEIFA decile are privately owned.

77%

of aquatic facilities in regional areas are publicly owned.

The average public pool in Australia was **built in 1968**.

500 (40%) of public pools will reach the **end of their lifespan this decade**.



\$910 million annually would be the likely social, health and economic cost should 10% of aquatic facilities fail to be renewed by the end of this decade.



Regional and remote communities are most at risk of missing out on updated or new aquatic facilities.



Rising energy costs and labour shortages pose a serious threat to the ongoing availability and sustainability of aquatic facilities across Australia.

\$8 Billion

is needed to replace Australia's **500 aging public pools**, whose functional lifespan will end by 2030.



A further **\$3 billion** will be needed to replace facilities ending their lifespan by 2035.

\$10 Million

The basic cost to replace an outdoor swimming pool.

64%

of all renewal or new aquatic facility construction is currently financed by local government.

Many Councils struggle to afford to maintain or replace swimming pools, and increasingly councils are considering closing their pools.



Closing community pools is inherently very unpopular and consistently aggravates community sentiment and mobilises communities towards involvement in the political process.

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 nine months
- 8 facilities operating between late November/early December and mid-March
- 6 x 50m pools
- 2 x warm water exercise pools
- 1 splash park and 1 aquatic playground
- 2 solar heated pools
- 2 facilities with aligned services such as gym, program rooms, etc.
- 1 dive tower and water slide
- 1 facility with diving boards
- 1 allied health service
- 5 swimming clubrooms providing for 3 swimming clubs



Aquatic Facility Summary

Aquatic Facility Site	Overview of aquatic features	Disability/ accessibility	Management model	Overall current condition	Total visits	Days open (assuming no cold weather)	Daily visits	Cost to City per visit per day above casual/season pass entrance fees	Cost to operator per visit per day above casual/season pass entrance fees	Total cost per visit per day above casual/season pass entrance fees
Long Gully Splash Park	• Zero depth water splash park	• Unisex accessible toilets x 2	Managed under commercial contract	Good	* attendance is not recorded			* attendance is not recorded		
Bendigo East	• 50 m gas heated pool • Intermediate pool • Toddlers pool	• Unisex accessible toilet	Council facility. Managed by a volunteer incorporated association	Fair	73,149	364	201	\$4.44	\$1.20	\$5.64
Brennan Park	• 50m solar heated pool • Intermediate pool • Toddlers' pool • Diving pool	• Accessible ramp	Managed under commercial contract	Fair	5,203	127	41	\$37.36	\$0.24	\$37.59
Elmore	• 25m intermediate pool • Toddlers' pool • Water slide	• Separate toilet facilities (possibly not DDA compliant)	Non-Council facility. Managed by a volunteer Crown Land Committee of Management	Poor	3,119	91	34	\$16.23	\$0.00	\$16.23
Faith Leech Aquatic Centre	• 50m pool • Intermediate pool • Toddlers' pool • Diving pool • Water slide	• Unisex accessible toilet • Lift chair for 50m pool	Managed under commercial contract	Good	17,182	239	74	\$37.39	\$2.25	\$39.63
Golden Square	• 50m pool • Intermediate pool • Toddlers' pool	• Accessible stairs	Council facility. Managed by a volunteer incorporated association	Poor	18,057	127	41	\$2.77	\$0.91	\$3.68

Aquatic Facility Summary (continued)

Aquatic Facility Site	Overview of aquatic features	Disability/ accessibility	Management model	Overall current condition	Total visits	Days open (assuming no cold weather)	Daily visits	Cost to City per visit per day above casual/season pass entrance fees	Cost to operator per visit per day above casual/season pass entrance fees	Total cost per visit per day above casual/season pass entrance fees
Goornong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 25m pool Toddlers' pool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Separate toilet facilities (possibly not DDA compliant) 	Non-Council facility. Managed by a volunteer Crown Land Committee of Management	Good	1,819	85	21	\$27.83	\$0.00	\$27.83
Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 51.5m pool Zero depth splash park Beach entry leisure pool Warm-water program pool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessible ramp for warm water pool Accessible ramp for 50m pool Beach entry into leisure pool Pool pod into warm water pool Changing places Accessible gym equipment 	Managed under commercial contract	Good	406,304	364	1,116	\$2.58	\$0.00	\$2.58
Heathcote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 25m pool Toddlers' pool 	No disability accessible facilities on site	Managed under commercial contract	Good	2,358	127	19	\$78.41	\$0.00	\$78.41
Marong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 25m pool Toddlers' pool 	No disability accessible facilities on site	Managed under commercial contract	Good	1,691	127	13	\$105.25	\$0.00	\$105.25
Peter Krenz Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 50m pool Multi-use pool Toddlers' pool Water slide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessible change room Hoist – warm water pool and 50m pool 	Managed under commercial contract	Poor	103,514	364	284	\$6.27	\$1.95	\$8.22

Aquatic Facility Summary (continued)

Aquatic Facility Site	Overview of aquatic features	Disability/ accessibility	Management model	Overall current condition	Total visits	Days open (assuming no cold weather)	Daily visits	Cost to City per visit per day above casual/season pass entrance fees	Cost to operator per visit per day above casual/season pass entrance fees	Total cost per visit per day above casual/season pass entrance fees
Raywood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 25m pool Toddlers' pool 	No disability accessible facilities on site	Non-Council facility. Managed by a volunteer Crown Land Committee of Management	Poor	* closed for the 2022-2023 season			* closed for the 2022-2023 season		
White Hills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 33m pool Toddlers' pool 	No disability accessible facilities on site	Council facility. Managed by a volunteer incorporated association	Poor	1,345	85	16	\$47.97	\$0.00	\$47.97

Notes:

Direct operational Costs

Operational costs are the direct costs to deliver the service and includes staffing costs, chemicals, goods, safety and compliance costs and utilities. Operational costs exclude any associated infrastructure costs such as capital works, assets renewal or maintenance works.

Cost to the City

Cost to the City includes direct operational costs paid for by the City and operational subsidies to support direct operational costs paid by the operator, less any offsets from the return of any betterment share. Betterment share is only applicable to facilities with management contracts where operators provide a guaranteed

sum to operate the facility. If the financial performance is better than the guaranteed sum the betterment is shared between the City and operator. However, the operator is responsible for all losses associated with any financial underperformance against the guaranteed sum.

Operator costs

Operator costs include any additional financial operating deficits above City subsidies or payments. Additional operator costs include any actual losses for CoM operated pools or losses due to financial underperformance of management contracts.

Facility notes

- Where there is no cost to the operator as part of contract management, a betterment return to the City is included from the facility financially performing better than the guaranteed sum of the contract
- Where there is a cost to the operator as part of contract management, a financial loss is included from the underperformance against the contract tendered sum
- Where there is a cost to the Committee of Management, a financial loss is included in operator costs underperformance against an actual net financial deficit

- Golden Square Swimming Pools operations is the only site that uses volunteers to replace paid direct service positions in reception, therefore staff costs are included in operator costs. Golden Square uses grant funding and out of season fundraising support operations
- Committees of Management further subsidised/support operational performance by out of season fundraising and savings to changes to opening hours to maintain financial viability
- White Hills Swimming Pool season operations were significantly impacted with closures and amended opening hours from staff shortages with the Committee of Management not requiring the full operational subsidy for the season

Impacts of COVID-19

The Arts and Recreation sectors have been hardest hit by COVID-19 lockdowns *(ABS, 2020).*

PUBLIC POOL CLOSURES* FROM 16 MARCH - 31 MAY 2020 RESULTED IN:



-\$346 million

immediate detrimental effect to the Victorian economy with ongoing further detrimental impacts.



-\$21 million

immediate detrimental effect to regional Victoria's economy with ongoing further detrimental impacts.



-\$6.9 million

detrimental effect on public health with further ongoing detrimental impacts.



-13 million

visits to public pools did not occur. Indirectly adversely affecting physical activity levels and mental health.



-8,000

aquatic industry staff missed out on water safety training.



-145,000

swim lessons were missed each week.



-\$523,000

average immediate detrimental economic effects on each aquatic facility's local community with ongoing further detrimental impacts.

Sourced from <https://lsv.app.accelerate.com/showDoc.cfm?DocID=336555> (page 9)

*It is noted that this data is restricted only to the 2019-20 financial year and that impacts carry over into the 2020-21 financial year.

**It is noted that adverse economic, health and social impacts could have been significantly greater in the face of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic had restrictions not been imposed. LSV and ARV remain supportive of all government efforts to protect the Victorian community.

Timeline showing COVID-19 restrictions

Regional Victoria

July 2020

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

August 2020

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

September 2020

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

October 2020

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

November 2020

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

December 2020

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

January 2021

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24

February 2021

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28

March 2021

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

April 2021

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

May 2021

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

June 2021

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

July 2021


Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	


August 2021

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

September 2021

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

 Pools open without restrictions

 Pools open with restrictions

 Pools closed

Sourced from https://lsv.com.au/wp-content/uploads/LSVARVStateofSectorReport2021_2021-12-07_07-16-23.pdf (page 20)

Facility closures during 2021-22

Metropolitan Melbourne COVID-19 facility closure

July	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14	15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 27	28 29 30 31
August	1 2 3 4	5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 27 28 29 30 31	
September	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 27 28 29 30		
October	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21	22 23 24 25 27 28 29 30 31	
November	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 27 28 29 30		
December	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14	15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 27 28 29 30 31	

Regional Victoria COVID-19 facility closure

July	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14	15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 27	28 29 30 31
August	1 2 3 4	5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 27 28 29 30 31	
September	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 27 28 29 30	
October	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 27 28 29 30 31		
November	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 27 28 29 30		
December	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14	15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 27 28 29 30 31	

● Pools open without restrictions on patron numbers
 ● Pools open with restrictions on patron numbers
 ● Pools closed

Sourced from <https://cdn.revolutionise.com.au/site/oyw7jp6niyyugdpc.pdf> (page 21)

Location of aquatic facilities in Greater Bendigo from city centre



Olympic 50m pools

- 1 Bendigo East Swimming Pool
- 2 Brennan Park Swimming Pool
- 3 Faith Leech Aquatic Centre
- 4 Golden Square Pool
- 5 Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre
- 6 Peter Krenz Leisure Centre

25m or less swimming pools

- 7 Elmore Swimming Pool
- 8 Goornong Swimming Pool
- 9 Heathcote Swimming Pool
- 10 Marong Swimming Pool
- 11 Raywood Swimming Pool
- 12 White Hills Swimming Pool

Public splash park

- 13 Long Gully Splash Park

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 10km. 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 Greater 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.

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, the 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 3, 154km² and Bendigo having much more dense provision with one pool per 300km².

Municipality	Community aquatic facilities	Municipal Population	Residents per facility
Ballarat	8 Community Facilities: 1x Wellness Facility 4x Outdoor Aquatic 3 Splash Parks	113,482	14,185
Greater Bendigo	13 Community Facilities: 2 x Wellbeing Facilities 10 Outdoor Aquatic 1 Splash Park	121,221	9,325
Greater Shepparton	5 Community Facilities: 1 x Wellness Facility 4 x Outdoor Aquatic	68,522	13,704
LaTrobe City	3 Community Facilities: 3 Wellness Facilities	77,086	25,695
Mildura Rural City	8 Community Facilities: 1 x Wellness Facility 7 x Outdoor Aquatic	56,969	7,121
Horsham	1 Community Facility: 1 x Wellness Facility	20,369	20,369
Wangaratta	3 Community Facilities: 1 Indoor Aquatic (at Stadium) 1 Outdoor Aquatic 1 Splash Park	29,740	9,913
Warrnambool	1 Community Facility: 1 x Wellness Facility	35,419	35,419
Wodonga	2 Community Facilities: 1x Wellness Facility 1x Outdoor Aquatic	43,183	21,592
AVERAGE			17,480

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

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 and 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 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 per cent of users will reside within a 5km catchment with the remaining 15 to 25 per cent coming from between 5km to 10km from the facility.

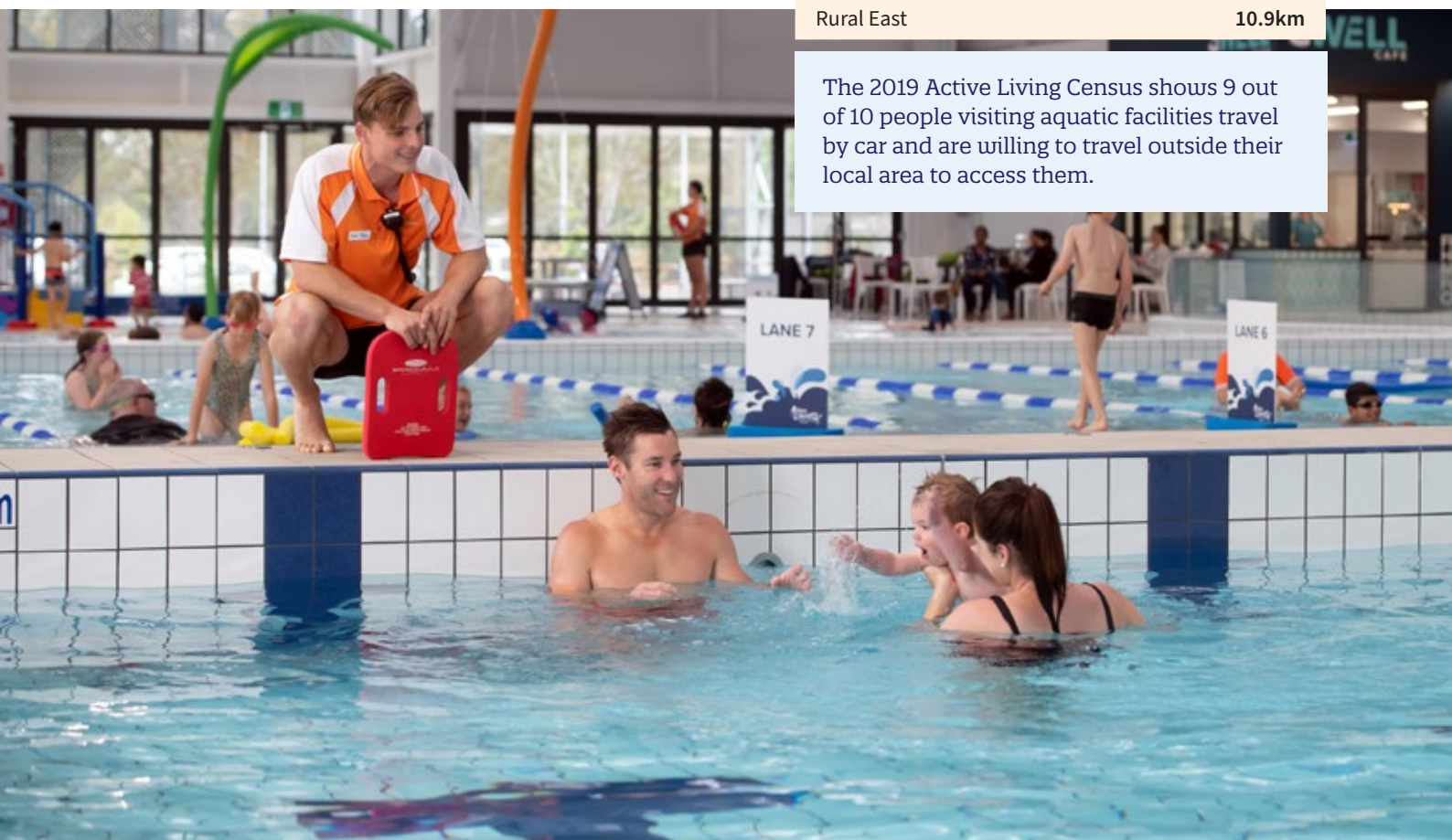
Regional facilities providing unique components and a larger number of activities will draw users from a wider catchment than a local/municipal facility.

How far do people travel?

The average distance residents travel to their swimming activity is 9.2km, ranging from 3km in Kangaroo Flat - Big Hill to 28km in Epsom - Ascot.

Bendigo	8km
Eaglehawk - Eaglehawk North - Sailors Gully	8km
East Bendigo	4.6km
Epsom - Ascot	28km
Flora Hill - Quarry Hill - Spring Gully - Golden Gully	6.3km
Huntly	14.1km
Kangaroo Flat - Big Hill	3km
Kennington	5.1km
Long Gully - West Bendigo - Ironbark	7.6km
Maiden Gully	11.3km
North Bendigo - California Gully	5.6km
Strathdale	14.6km
Strathfieldsaye	11.9km
White Hill - Jackass Flat	6.4km
Elmore - Rural North	25.5km*
Heathcote and District	16.8km
Marong - Rural West	12km
Rural East	10.9km

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 per cent of Australians and 7 per cent of Victorians had a pool at home; by 2018 this had increased slightly to 13 per cent of Australians and 9 per cent of Victorians. The data showed that the proportion of urban and regional households with a pool was the same (9 per cent)⁴.

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 per cent of Australians with kids aged six to 11 have a pool at home (up 2 per cent on four years ago), a figure that jumps to just over 23 per cent (up 3 per cent) 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 per cent of all swimming for recreation and leisure likely occurs at a private home.

How many domestic pools in Greater Bendigo?

The Victorian Government introduced new legislation in 2019 requiring all swimming pools and spas to be registered with Council by November 1, 2020. These laws are applicable to all swimming pools and spas capable of holding a depth of more than 300 mm (30 cm) of water, regardless of its age or status. This includes all permanent pools, above ground pools, indoor pools, hot tubs, wading pools and relocatable pools. Spa baths used for hygiene purposes are not required to be registered.

A recent audit from VAGO acknowledges that since the introduction of the regulations for private pool and spa safety that not all owners have registered their pools and spas with certified safety barriers.

This regulation has a number of required recommended actions from the audit. It indicates that Greater Bendigo has an estimated 4,500 pools.

The highest suburbs with registered pools include Strathfieldsaye, Maiden Gully, Bendigo and Strathdale.

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 per cent 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.

⁴ Roy Morgan Research, 2018 <http://www.roymorgan.com/findings/7811-australian-swimming-pool-ownership-september-2018-201811230555>



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 the average build of an Australian public swimming pool being 1968 there is a need to retrofit, redevelop and replace many of the older traditional pools.

Expectations of community aquatic facilities in the 21st 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 and 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?

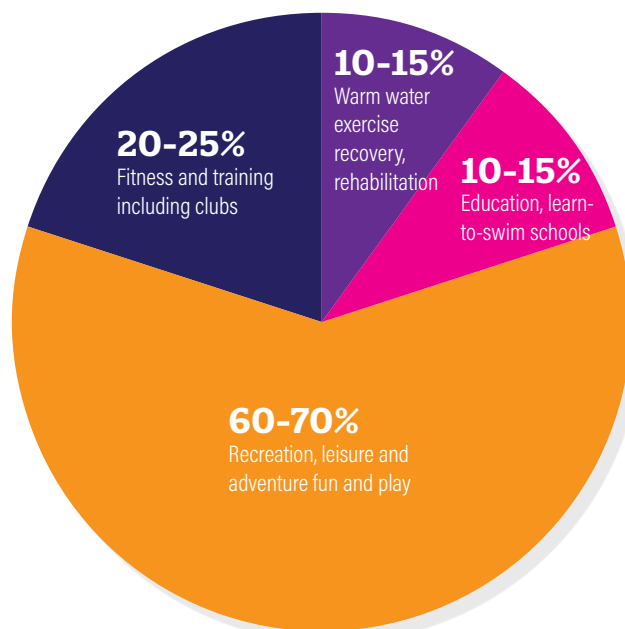
Aquatics and Recreation Victoria has defined the four typical aquatic market segments⁵. These are described as:

- **Recreation, leisure and 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 access⁶
- **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 meet the needs/wants of all users. As 90 per cent 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 most user types accommodated in one place. Planning needs to ensure that across the network all needs are met in the appropriate mix relative to the demand for specific aquatic activities.

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

Maximum aquatic facility utilisation



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-served with multiple facilities offering similar traditional pools near each other.

Greater Bendigo's current facilities mostly cater for the competitive/fitness and training market, and have limited capacity to meet therapy, education or recreation, leisure and 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:

⁵ *Indoor Aquatic & Recreation Facility Development Guidelines, Aquatics & Recreation Victoria (2011)*

⁶ ARV's Indoor Facility Design Guidelines - <https://cdn.revolutionise.com.au/site/bi2udirqewx5dlqr.pdf>



Recreation, leisure and 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 the highest percentage of members aged over 55 years which demonstrates the need/demand for this activity by older demographics
- With children, older people and people with a disability identified in Healthy Greater Bendigo 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 other community facilities that offer learn-to-swim classes, with these offering classes from infant through to primary school aged generally through week long summer intensive programming of VICSWIM.
- Many schools host swimming carnivals and swimming / physical education programs over summer months at 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 and training

- While only around one in five users want to participate in lap swimming, all community aquatic facilities (except Long Gully Splash Park) offer fitness and training facilities
- The City has six 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 two 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 and 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. Greater Bendigo currently has three swimming clubs.
- Faith Leech Aquatic Centre offers a regional facility for diving (accommodating both regular practice sessions and competitions)

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

- Investing in new or refurbished facilities that meet the needs of under-served market segments (especially health and therapy)
- Limit further investment in facilities that 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 aquatic services that 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 that will continue to impact on the utilisation of Greater Bendigo's community aquatic facilities include:

- Growth in domestic pools that 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 that require significant investment and take a long period of time to plan, fund and construct
- Increased requirements to comply with the Guidelines for Safe Pool Operations such as additional lifeguard staff, annual pool registration and increased testing requirements
- Providing a service that is responsive to weather variations experienced, especially during the fringe seasons
- Aquatic facilities are large energy consumers and therefore produce high greenhouse gas emissions. There is a need to decrease carbon emissions by increasing efficiencies

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 are accessible for all ages and abilities
- Adoption of Environmentally Sustainable Design and implement improvements that reduce energy consumption, cut greenhouse gas emissions and improve the return on investment in terms of community outcomes
- 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 (e.g. library services, early years, community programs, meeting spaces and / or educational facilities) to maximise usage and share the facility operational costs
- Continue to provide community-led management of swimming pools with financial, technical and operational support due to the opportunities to strengthen their community connections
- Work with service providers to ensure there are no gender barriers to participation

a Enhancing liveability and wellbeing

Liveability is one of the five outcomes in Healthy Greater Bendigo 2021-2025.

Healthy Greater Bendigo aims to achieve a community in the future that 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.

The City 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 that makes the most difference by meeting the needs of everyone in our community.

When community aquatic providers (usually Councils) are faced with developing or redeveloping an aquatic recreation facility, 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 that meets the needs of the other market segments.

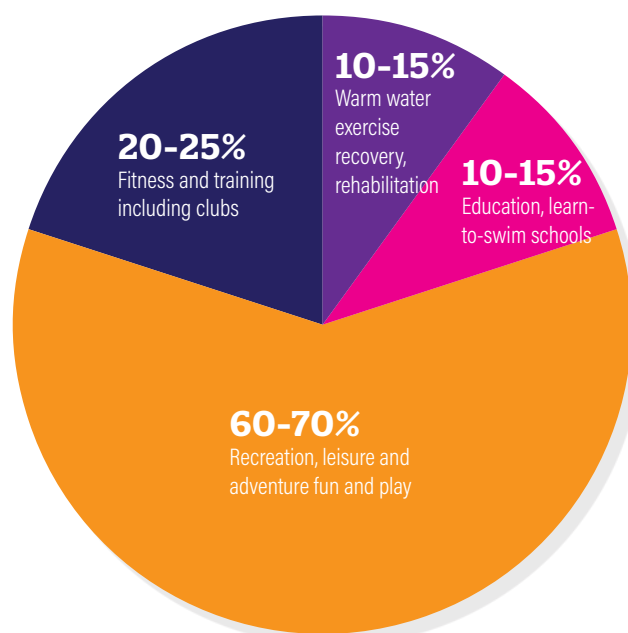
As described fully in section 7 of this report (see diagram), research shows that most people use aquatic facilities for recreation, fun, enjoyment, socialisation, education and therapy. Deep water (i.e. pools suitable for lap swimming) are often provided but only meet needs of only 20-25 per cent of 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 and Recreation Victoria acknowledge in its 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 below:

Maximum aquatic facility utilisation



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 the City will see gains in health and wellbeing outcomes, higher rates of facility utilisation, and reduced subsidies needed to offset the cost of aquatic recreation.

Level of development	Description	Catchment population estimate	Typical General Components
1	Rural	Under 10,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> shared competition and shallow water to reduced separate water areas dry/gym facilities as future development option usually linked to other community facilities to share management and operating costs
2	Local	10,000 - 40,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> limited program water combined with leisure water limited dry/gym facilities
3	District	40,000 - 70,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ability to separate program and leisure water larger dry/gym facilities additional limited amenities
4	Major	70,000 - 100,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> more extensive program and leisure water consideration of indoor 50m pool and complementary warm water pools increased gym and program space additional complementarity amenities, food and beverage
5	Regional	100,000 to > 150,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> extensive and varied program leisure water and attractions inclusion of indoor 50m pool and separate warm water pools wellness/health club and extensive program room inclusions complementary services and amenities, creche, food and beverage

“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



c. Equity of provision and access

The population of Greater Bendigo has been steadily growing at around 1.72 per cent 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. Further work is currently being completed on the City's Managed Growth Strategy which will provide a framework for how Greater Bendigo should grow to accommodate around an additional 80,000 residents to 2050 based on continued current rate of growth. It will be informed by a new Housing and Neighbourhood Character Strategy, and an update to the Commercial Land and Activity Centre Strategy.

In terms of 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 and have greater sensitivity to cost
- Whilst data shows 90 per cent 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, the City 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

Aquatics and 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

The City 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 will not be possible at all facilities given the upfront costs and limitations of existing facility design.

The 2022/23 cost of operations was \$3.87M which excludes maintenance, renewal and upgrade.

e. What is driving up costs?

1. 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 on supervision by parents and volunteers. The Royal Life Saving Society of Australia guidelines now require two accredited lifeguards on duty, depending on the access to Ambulance services at each facility.

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

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

2. 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.

Community-managed sites have not received operating grant increases in line with growing utility costs and as a result many undertake fundraising to raise the necessary 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 being implemented 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.

3. Asset maintenance

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

Current renewal allocations of between \$27-\$34M 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 2016⁸

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 \$50M 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 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 that have been used to develop long term asset management plans for community aquatic facilities, there have not been detailed, site-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 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 that are overdue at many facilities. For example, replacement of a concrete pool shell can cost in the order of \$7M and there is no allowance in the City'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.

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.

Council should undertake further detailed investigation of facilities that 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.

Good	Fair	Poor
Faith Leech	Brennan Park	Elmore
Goornong	East Bendigo	Golden Square
Heathcote	Marong (Good to Fair)	*Peter Krenz Leisure Centre
Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre		Raywood
Long Gully Splash Park		White Hills

*Peter Krenz Leisure Centre has been identified as being in poor condition. Asset audits indicate the aquatic components of this facility have approximately 10 years remaining asset life and staged renovation program is required at this site. Council has endorsed Stage 1 dry facilities concept design to progress to detailed design and construction when funding becomes available. Council's challenge is to attract funding for Stage 1 before attracting further funding for Stage 2 -aquatic facilities into the future.

The 2010 Aquatic Strategy recommended investment in those facilities that:

- 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 \$1.72M needs to be spent over the next 5 years on equipment maintenance. Urgent and essential maintenance has been completed with recommendations in this strategy indicating the priority sites strategically.

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 the 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. Each facility is required to have a water risk management plan approved, complete independent water tests and pay a public pools registration fee.

Council's Climate Change & Environment Strategy 2021-2026

Zero carbon emissions from Council's operations by 2020 will see action on transitioning off gas and additional solar opportunities, whilst ensuring water consumption monitoring and action.

Contractor vs Community Management models

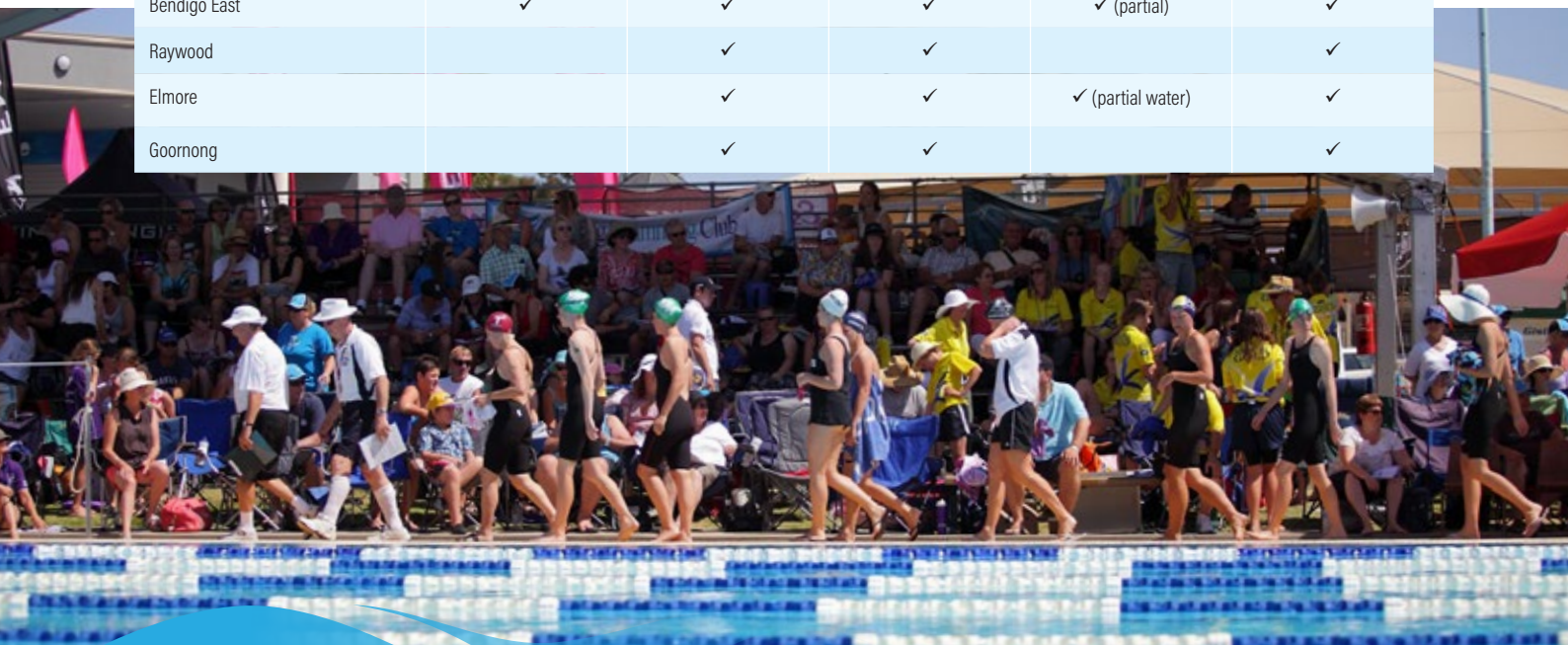
Greater Bendigo's aquatic facilities are managed either by a community committee or a contractor. Both management arrangements are supervised and supported by City staff.

Contract managed facilities (current providers: Belgravia Leisure and YMCA Victoria) 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 below 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 (e.g. YMCA) facilities.

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



f. Subsidising aquatic facilities

With annual attendance in 2022/23 of around \$634,000 visits at an operational cost of \$3.87M, visits are on average subsidised by \$33.90 per visit.

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.

Facility	Total cost per visit per day above casual/season pass entrance fees
Bendigo East	\$5.64
Brennan Park	\$37.59
Elmore	\$16.23
Faith Leech Aquatic Centre	\$39.63
Golden Square	\$3.68
Goornong	\$27.83
Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre	\$2.58
Heathcote	\$78.41
Marong	\$105.25
Peter Krenz Centre	\$8.22
White Hills	\$47.97

Refer to extended notes on pages 18-20.

In addition to annual subsidies, in 2019/2020 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.



g. 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 and 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 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. SHORT TERM STRATEGIC ACTIONS (ZERO TO FOUR YEARS)

The strategy and its recommendations have been developed in context of the principles. These are:

1. Equity
2. Accessibility
3. Promote wellbeing
4. Partnering
5. Sustainability

Operational actions (policy, customer programming and service arrangements)

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.

2) Accessibility

- i. The City'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.

3) Promote wellbeing

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

4) Partnering

- i. The City 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.

5) Sustainability

- i. The City'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. The City 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 (i.e. the market segments/demand for Recreation, Leisure and adventure 60%; Fitness and training 20%; Warm water exercise, recovery and rehabilitation 10% and Education, learn-to-swim schools 10%)



Major works (new and upgraded infrastructure)

A four-year action plan has been developed to define timelines for major projects that will implement this strategy in the short to medium term. The timeline for these proposed works is ambitious within the City's limited financial resources. Therefore, these major investments in new/upgraded infrastructure are subject to financial allocations to be considered as part of Council's annual budget process and are subject to change according to Council's competing priorities across all services, assets and other requests.

The following table, outlines key infrastructure changes proposed over the coming four years:

Renewal and Maintenance Works (swimming pool plant and equipment)

The City is proposing to spend \$2.488M on renewal across these facilities in accordance with asset management plans which have been developed for each site over a multi year plan. These investments support replacement of plant and equipment to ensure successful ongoing operation of these facilities.

Aquatic Facility Site	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Estimated total cost
Long Gully Splash Park	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	\$0
Bendigo East	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	Bendigo East Swimming Club relocates to Brennan Park	Removal of Bendigo East Swimming Pool structures	\$500,000
Brennan Park	Detailed designing	Detailed designing and funding requests	Closed for works	Relocation of Bendigo East CoM to an upgraded site	\$7M - \$9M
Elmore	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	\$0
Faith Leech Aquatic Centre	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	Major plant renewal (\$650,000)	\$650,000
Golden Square	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	\$0
Goornong	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	\$0
Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre	No major upgrades	Implement small scale ESD initiatives	Continue to implement ESD initiatives	No major upgrades	\$737,000
Heathcote	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	\$0
Marong	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	\$0
Peter Krenz Centre	- Functional design - Business & financial planning	Peter Krenz Centre Stage 1 (dry facilities) concept plans were endorsed at the August 2022 Council Meeting to proceed to detailed design and construction once funding is confirmed. Advocacy is ongoing to progress the Stage 1 redevelopment.			
Raywood	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	No major upgrades	\$0
White Hills		- Design of zero depth splash park - Construction of car park		- Construction of splash park and closure of White Hills swimming pool	\$4.3M

Notes:

1. Raywood Swimming Pool Committee of Management have the authority to determine the future operation and development of this Crown land-owned facility (not a Council-owned asset). At the time of updating the major works schedule it was not clear about the future direction of this facility and further consultation is required.



9. LONG TERM STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS (YEARS 5+)

This section of the strategy provides high level recommendations, along with site specific recommendations for facilities in the context of the hierarchy and principles.

Principle 1 - Equity

- i. Revise service levels to ensure community aquatic facilities are an appropriate scale for the catchment
- ii. Minimise duplication of services where the scale or distribution of facilities does not reflect community needs
- iii. Undertake local planning and analysis to identify catchment service needs and provide the appropriate facilities mix
- iv. Identify alternative fee structures which support access for groups who have identified poorer health outcomes including:
 - a. People with a disability
 - b. Culturally or linguistically diverse
 - c. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
 - d. People with low income
 - e. Older aged residents living at home

Principle 2 - Accessibility

- i. Transition from traditional lap swimming pool provision that meets the needs of fitness and training markets, to more diverse and inclusive facilities that cater for other aquatic market segments including leisure/fun/entertainment, warm water therapy, and aquatic education
- ii. Work with the 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
- iii. Undertake stakeholder engagement to identify opportunities that would improve accessibility. Initiatives already identified include:
 - a. Colour contrast for those who have vision impairment
 - b. Hearing loops and emergency strobe lighting to provide access and safety for people with a hearing difficulty

- c. Accessible parking and pathways close to entry point to improve physical access
- d. Crime prevention by environmental design to improve safety for females or other vulnerable people
- e. Increased water temperatures to assist users with low mobility in the water
- f. Change facility design to support safety and be appropriate for all genders
- g. Culturally appropriate/safe programs to increase participation from CALD, ATSI, LGBTIQ+ community members
- iv. Advocate for improved public transport connections to aquatic facilities and other community services/facilities
- v. Review and benchmark the City's Cold Weather Policy to better reflect community use patterns when temperatures are 22 degrees or below

Principle 3 - Promote Wellbeing

- i. Undertake place based planning (rather than aquatic facility planning) to identify needs of the community and consider all options (including aquatic, leisure and community programs) to achieve improved health and wellbeing outcomes
- ii. Utilise aquatic facilities to promote healthy lifestyles and support behaviour change to support the goals and priorities of Healthy Greater Bendigo
- iii. Support positive ageing initiatives through programming and facility design improvements
- iv. Undertake annual service planning to ensure program delivery reflects the needs identified within Healthy Greater Bendigo, Council Plan and other key strategic document

Principle 4 - Partnering

- i. Identify opportunities to provide more efficient services by:
 - a. Supporting community-led management models
 - b. Reviewing the financial and professional support provided at volunteer managed facilities
- ii. Seek a formal review of support provided to facilities that are the responsibility of DEECA
- iii. Build partnerships with health and community service providers to deliver services at community aquatic facilities and increase utilization of spaces
- iv. Partner with the community to design and/or deliver culturally appropriate/safe programs to increase participation of identified target groups (i.e. CALD, ATSI, LGBTIQ+ community members)
- v. Support the co-location of services to share costs, improve aquatic facility utilisation and enhance access to services (e.g. a library, health etc)
- vi. Identify ways to increase use of existing facilities through partnering to deliver programs, events and activities

Principle 5 - Sustainability

- i. Review operational practices to minimise waste
- ii. Continue investing in technologies that reduce consumption of non-renewable resources
- iii. When considering options for asset renewal or upgrade, minimize environmental impacts such as embodied energy; maximise energy efficiency and source low impact product alternatives
- iv. Undertake audits to identify:
 - a. Chemical dosing system age condition and replacement options
 - b. Environmental risks associated with chemical delivery and storage
 - c. Water quality – chemical and reticulation
- v. Use natural shade and landscaping solutions to provide cooler environments
- vi. Undertaking more detailed asset condition assessments to understand the condition of major assets such as pool tanks/shells and water reticulation
- vii. Investigate the feasibility of consolidating facilities that duplicate aquatic activities/services within a catchment
- viii. Prioritise investment according to:
 - a. Legislative compliance (safety of staff, community and environment)
 - b. Asset protection/preservation
 - c. Economic and environmental efficiency
 - d. Service enhancement
 - e. Aesthetic improvement
- 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 utilization and curb escalating costs



Site Specific Service Level Recommendations:

Hierarchy	Typical characteristics	Catchment indicators	Existing aquatic facilities	Site specific recommendations
Small Township	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. <i>Example: Community Halls</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primarily attract people from the township within which it is based, as well as some people from neighbouring townships. Up to 2km travel distance (or 25 minutes average walking time) for people based in the township. 	Elmore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retain base service level and community management Review level of financial and professional support needed/provided in consultation with DEECA as the responsible agency for Crown Land Committees
			Goornong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retain base service level and community management Review level of financial and professional support needed/provided in consultation with DEECA as the responsible agency for Crown Land Committees
			Raywood	<p><i>Raywood Swimming Pool Committee of Management has the authority to determine the future operations and development of this Crown Land owned facility. This facility did not open for seasons 2021/2022 and 2022/2023.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retain base service level and community management Review level of financial and professional support needed/provided in consultation with DEECA as the responsible agency for Crown Land Committees
Large or residential growth corridor township/suburb	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. <i>Example: Golden Square Recreation Reserve Pavilion</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primarily attracts people from the township within which it is based, as well as some people from neighbouring townships. Up to 2km travel distance (or 25 minutes average walking time) for people based in the township/suburb. 	Bendigo East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> After upgrades occur at Brennan Park, remove pool and relocate community management Return the Crown Land pool site back to the management of the State Government
			Brennan Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upgrade as an all year outdoor facility focused on fitness/lap swimming Create a community advisory group with key community groups such as LaTrobe University, Bendigo South East Secondary College and suburb community groups Consider renaming Brennan Park Pool in partnership with the community to acknowledge the combining of two services and suburban catchment of the service.
			Golden Square	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Golden Square Swimming Pool is retained as per the site master plan for Golden Square Recreation Reserve under the following conditions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - continued community management - a Council contribution of \$50,000 per season for operation and maintenance
			Heathcote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retain a base level of service. Investigate viability of moving to community-led management
			Marong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retain a base level service only given access to Gurri Wanyarra and Peter Krenz indoor facilities Consider opportunities for partnerships and co- location as Marong grows towards a forecast population of 8,000
			White Hills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement the aquatic facility actions adopted in the Bendigo (White Hills) Master Plan Transform facility to replace current aquatic infrastructure with a regional level zero depth Splash Park

Hierarchy	Typical characteristics	Catchment indicators	Existing aquatic facilities	Site specific recommendations
Municipal	Somewhat unique in terms of the range of experiences, activities and program offered within Greater Bendigo. Usually occupies strategically important and highly accessible locations. More often found within or close to the Bendigo urban area. <i>Example: Libraries</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primarily attracts people from across Greater Bendigo. Up to 10km travel distance (or 15 minutes average travel time via car) for people based in urban Greater Bendigo. For people based in rural Greater Bendigo, travel distances/times are likely to be greater. 	Long Gully Splash Park	No change
			Peter Krenz Leisure Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue advocacy for funding for detailed design and construction of Stage 1 Council endorsed concept plans. Reestablish the Community Reference group for Peter Krenz Centre as required throughout Stage 1 and Stage 2 redevelopment Maximise existing asset life to support a staged replacement over the longer term
Regional	Usually has a moderate level of uniqueness or significance connected variously with sport and recreation, cultural heritage, the arts or other special values.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attracts people from across Greater Bendigo plus central Victoria. Up to 2 hours of travel time by car. 	Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retain as premier regional facility Fund 100% asset renewal/ replacement of equipment commensurate with the scale of facility Investigate need to expand gym and wellness suites Invest in environmentally sustainable initiatives and technology to reduce energy consumption and work towards targets
			Faith Leech Aquatic Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain current infrastructure including provision of diving facilities - tower and diving boards - and water slide Consider reducing operating hours/ season due to proposed changes at Bendigo East Pool and Brennan Park, and access to other municipal and regional aquatic facilities Upgrade diving pool plant infrastructure, replace/renew water slide, upgrade water treatment system
State or national	Has a high level of uniqueness or significance connected with sport and recreation, cultural heritage, the arts or other special value.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attracts people Victoria and interstate. More than 2 hours travel time via car. 	No facilities exist or are proposed in this category	N/A