



Clarence Keep Connected Initiative

Final Report June 2020

Executive Summary

Measures announced by Federal and State Governments in response to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis involved restrictions and closures affecting Council business. However, Council continued to provide services and adapted many of its programs to meet the needs of the community. Council was well-placed to respond through its various programs including asset management, cultural and community activities.

In addition, Council moved swiftly to seek a meaningful targeted response to the evolving emergency. To make sure the response was well-considered and appropriate to community needs it was important to ask what people were experiencing and seek input as to suitable ways to respond. The scale and quality of responses indicated that this was a beneficial process. It also reflected the value placed on City assets, programs and activities.

The *Clarence Keep Connected (CKC)* initiative was developed as a result of the enactment of Council's Business Continuity Plan and had specific positive outcomes, including:

- Improved connections with Council – evidenced by engagement with Your Say and new contact points with Council
- Increased volunteering with Council – evidenced by many new offers to give time to others

Community input indicated the importance of:

- Access to natural areas
- Employment and finances
- Mental and physical health and wellbeing
- Social wellbeing and support
- Responsive Council services; and
- Continued communication of Council activities and responses

In response to community input it is recommended that Council:

- **Communicate *Clarence Keep Connected* key findings** through a range of targeted media including Your Say, print media, and social media
- Continue to **provide mechanisms for communication** about Council responses and to receive community feedback
- **Support economic recovery** through Council's financial support initiatives and economic development strategies
- **Support community and cultural recovery and provide responsive Council services** where possible by continuing to adapt, identify and work in partnership with other organisations
- **Communicate and support economic and social recovery** through the Southern Region Social Recovery Action Plan (see Attachment C) and Economic Recovery Plan (in development.)

Many Council activities can be continued as part of this response. Some additional activities may be required as part of the Recovery Plan. (For more detail on specific activities see Attachment B.)

Background

As part of Council's Business Continuity Plan (BCP) a project working group was established by the Leadership Group (Mayor, Deputy Mayor and General Manager) consisting of the Deputy Mayor and key Council staff from the community, cultural and strategic development teams. The working group aimed to gain a clearer understanding of the emerging issues facing the residents of Clarence and to work on short, medium and longer-term strategies and actions to help with community resilience and recovery.

A CKC initiative project plan was developed and focused on 3 key areas:

- The health, wellbeing and safety of individuals, organisations and businesses;
- utilising multiple communication channels; and
- maintaining and developing strong partnerships.

An interim feedback report was tabled at the Council meeting on 27 April providing progress on the first two weeks of the initiative between 3 April and 17 April 2020. An update was provided to Council in early May. The initiative closed on 11 May.

What we did

Several key questions were developed to help engage with the community, and a variety of methods developed to inform and enable widespread individual, organisation and business participation. A priority was to reach the whole community, considering those who may be isolated in their homes or neighbourhoods, and those unable to access technology. Engagement methods included:



Your Say online survey <https://www.yoursay.ccc.tas.gov.au/>



A dedicated phone line 6217 9740 to Community Development Team



New email community@ccc.tas.gov.au to Community Development Team



60 Corflute signs installed across City advertising phone and web



Letterbox drop across Clarence of open letter and *Neighbour Connection Card*

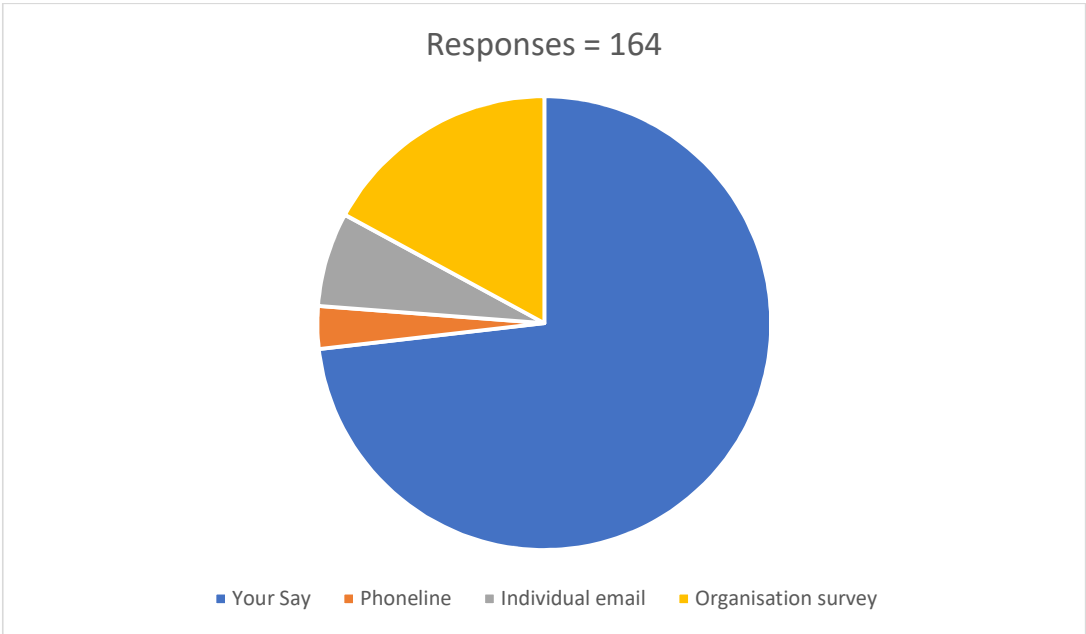


Email and survey for local organisations and businesses



Write to Council address c/- Julie Andersson, Community Development

Engagement with the Clarence Keep Connected initiative was as follows:



The scale and depth of input from the community indicated a strong desire to hear from Council during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis; to tell their stories; and to be involved in providing suggestions, information, and assistance.

The need for passive and active recreation, cultural and community activities, and a focus on mental and physical health, especially during severe economic downturn, was consistently shared.

It is a positive confirmation to Council that the City already has many high-quality assets, activities and programs that support the health, wellbeing and safety of individuals, organisations and businesses. This has been evidenced by the numbers of people using council assets where possible and participating in programs and activities.

Key findings

Individual Responses

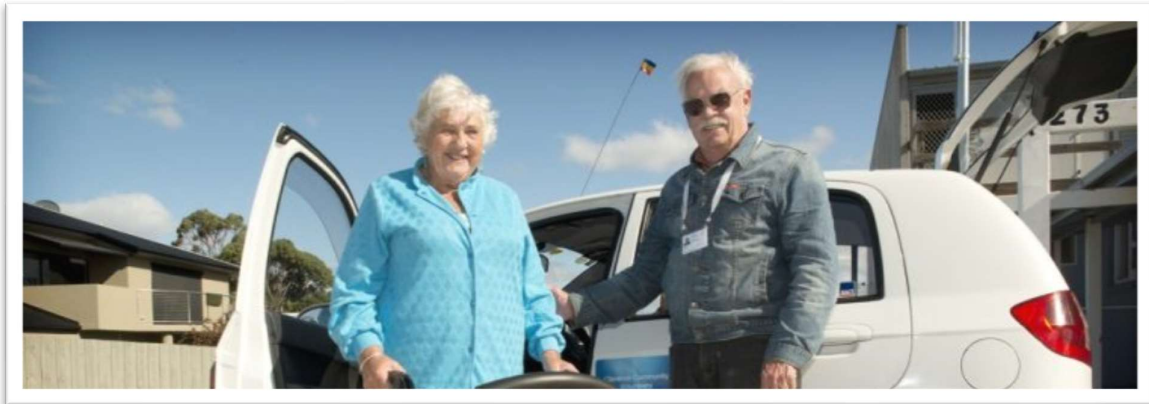
An analysis of the data received from 136 individual participants in the initiative revealed several common emerging issues and needs affecting the community at this time. (For more detail on individual responses see Attachment A.)

	Social isolation <i>"Loss of income, losing jobs, social isolation, can't see kids and family interstate, getting covid-19 and getting sick, parents and aunts dying too soon, other people in the community dying, economic recession/depression in Hobart, etc..."</i>
	Economic hardship <i>"Our jobs aren't secure and we are petrified we won't have jobs in the future. Scared of the economical impact on our beautiful state."</i>
	Access to natural spaces and areas <i>"Being able to use the mountain bike parks. Being able to walk on all reserves. Though I am SUPER happy that the Clarence Beaches are open. We are so grateful for this as we have a dog. Also great that Natone Hill is available. Thanks! It really helps!!!"</i>
	Impacts on mental health <i>"Heightened anxiety. Always on edge managing and mediating household relationships. Ensuring whole household abides by rules."</i>
	Less ability for physical exercise <i>"Daily exercise gets body working, helps sleep at night and having a daily routine which starts with exercise means a more positive start to the day. Word games, jigsaws, reading & watching documentaries help mental health & emails connect me to others."</i>
	Need for increased connections, particularly for older or isolated people <i>"The inability to attend normal social/education groups such as U3A and Seniors at Rosny Library means not just social disconnect but also a lack of mental stimulus and the feeling of well-being one derives from these encounters. Shopping is stressful."</i>
	Need for targeted services around waste, shopping, childcare, volunteering <i>"Hard waste and green waste collections. Now's the time for a good spring clean. Well considered capital expenditure by council on most pressing assets, not just for the sake of activity."</i>
	Connecting and helping others <i>"Keep up the good work...connection and community care is vital for wellbeing."</i>
	Understanding what Council is doing in response to the pandemic <i>"Email newsletters with plans for future activities, preferably free ones, continue regular cleaning/sanitising, hold rates demands for those left jobless, send flowers to health services, aged care to show appreciation & let them know they are not forgot."</i>

Volunteering

In addition to answering a range of targeted questions, individual respondents were invited to indicate their capacity and willingness to volunteer to assist others in the community.

57 people identified they had capacity to volunteer and help others combat social isolation and access community supports. Council's Community Volunteer Service is processing all offers of assistance to support older isolated adults and people with chronic illness and disabilities in the City. Other offers of support are being referred to Volunteer Tasmania EV (Emergency Volunteer) CREW for processing.



Organisational responses

An analysis of the data received from the 28 organisations participating in the initiative reflects similar themes to the individual surveys. (For more detail on organisational responses see Attachment A.) Additional themes emerged including:

	Concern about increased racism
	Access to affordable and emergency housing
	Localised transport services
	Information on available tracks and trails
	Signage on shared pathways
	Provision of community grants and flexibility in grant acquittal
	Promotion of healthy choices for oral health

Summary of impacts and challenges

What the community misses most are social connections and physical and cultural activities. They also emphasised the need for Council to communicate to, and on behalf of, the community.

The greatest change or impact reported by the community on their health and wellbeing at this time has been a decline in mental and physical health, and access to support. Additionally, recommendations from the community to help cope with the COVID-19 pandemic include looking after your own mental and physical health, doing activities such as gardening and playing music, and helping others.

When asked what challenges individuals and/or their households will face in the longer term (6-12 months from now) as a result of the current COVID-19 pandemic, participants cited financial, mental and physical health, isolation and social connections as being important.

Organisations raised additional concerns relating to housing and homelessness, racism, and transport.



Council response and recommendations

Communication

People have expressed the need for Council to communicate expectations about community behaviour as well as Council activities and responses. There are several elements to Council's communication delivery:

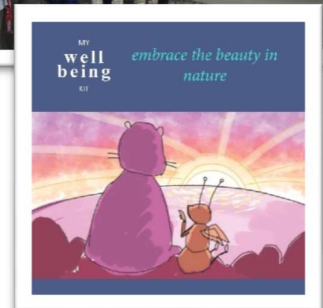
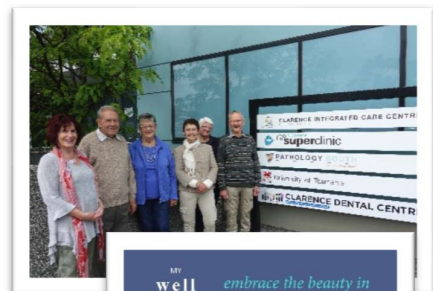
- Providing the feedback loop to community to let them know Council has heard them;
- providing ongoing communication regarding expectations of community behaviour;
- providing ongoing communication regarding Council activities and responses, and;
- providing channels to continue to listen to the needs of the community.

Social recovery

Through its Asset and Community Services workgroups, Council has a range of services and programs that align with or can be adapted to address issues identified through the survey. Medium and long-term delivery of outcomes associated with the initiative will need to be considered in conjunction with the annual Council budget discussions for the 2020/21 financial year.

Council's role in short, medium and longer-term actions that support the CKC initiative feedback include:

- Continuing to align/adapt existing Council services and programs to respond to issues identified;



- identifying longer-term initiatives in line with the Southern Regional Social Recovery Plan, and
- working in partnership on community-led recovery strategies.



Economic recovery

A range of strategies could be developed to support people at this time of economic hardship. Some strategies suggested are:

- Freezing or reducing rates
- Improving support for local business through localised campaigns
- Loosening regulations on some businesses (e.g. food trucks)

Provide responsive Council services

There were many suggestions made for how Council can support the community at this time. Suggestions such as:

- Monitoring hand sanitising in shops
- Provision of a targeted waste service
- Provision of seed / seedlings to encourage gardening



Council could consider these suggestions to improve community wellbeing as part of the recovery effort.

For more detail please see Attachment B

Budget implications

The costs associated with the development and delivery of CKC were redirected from existing budget accounts. The total cost of setting up and delivering the project was \$7,081.10.

Short term actions are being delivered through reallocation of existing budgets and re-focussing currently funded programs.

Medium and long-term delivery of outcomes associated with the initiative will need to be considered in conjunction with the annual council budget discussions for coming 2020/2021 financial year.

Conclusion

Clarence Keep Connected was a valuable community engagement initiative that assisted Council to listen to the current needs of the community. It has provided Council with significant input to direct our responses to the COVID-19 emergency. It has also validated much of the work that Council does in relation to our natural resources, culture and community. Council has an opportunity to use this work in connection with the Southern Region Social Recovery Plan to provide a tailored and appropriate response.

Attachment A - Responses to questions

Through the consultation methods, seven questions were asked of individual respondents and three of businesses and organisations, with responses collated in a combined table. Key themes that emerged along with selected individual comments are set out below:

How are you and your household currently being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic situation?

Key Themes

- Self-isolating, working from home and home-schooling
- Isolation / loneliness / loss of social support and social interaction / loss of freedom to go out
- Loss of work / employment / income
- Concern about accessing food. Shopping is stressful.
- Physical activity and mental health - Limited access to exercise / recreation
- Concern for physical health and illness
- Concern for isolated elderly loved ones
- Experiencing stigma and challenging attitudes

Feature Comments

Due to social distancing I am unable to attend the (Name) Group on Mondays. Which is one of the times I am able to get face to face support. Plus it gives my wife, (Name) a period of respite where she can relax...

I have lost all employment with two jobs. I have been unwell with a virus for three weeks that may be COVID but am unable to be tested as I have not travelled. I lost a job today due to extended absence due to illness.

Coping well. We have many interests including music, music lessons, reading, gardening and home maintenance. Still too much to do.

(Name) is finding great support from the local community believes very tight knit and people are helping each other in Lauderdale.

The inability to attend normal social/education groups such as U3A and Seniors at Rosny Library means not just social disconnect but also a lack of mental stimulus and the feeling of well-being one derives from these encounters. Shopping is stressful.

What immediate needs do you have as a result of the COVID-19 social distancing measures? (e.g. help with picking up food etc.)

Key Themes

- Food / grocery shopping and mail is a key need – many are finding online shopping helpful and getting support from friends and family
- Increased use of pathways causing challenges in sharing restricted spaces
- Need access to natural areas for recreation and exercise
- Children connections / respite from childcare / social connections
- More garbage / green waste collection
- Social isolation and mental health concerns
- Financial and help with costs eg rates

Feature comments

I've been able to do all that I need for me and have been helping neighbours/ friends who are isolating

We're all good. We can and would like to assist others

Hard waste and green waste collections. Now's the time for a good spring clean. Well considered capital expenditure by council on most pressing assets, not just for the sake of activity.

What are you most missing due to current social distancing measures?

Key Themes

- Face to face interaction with family and friends
- Exercise / surfing / sport / Natural areas / parks / skate parks / mountain bike tracks
- Eating out / cafes / restaurants / going to gigs / theatre / church / library
- Changes to children's education / schooling and care
- Freedom and lifestyle

Feature comments

Being able to use the mountain bike parks. Being able to walk on all reserves. Though I am SUPER happy that the Clarence Beaches are open. We are so grateful for this as we have a dog. Also great that Natone Hill is available. Thanks! It really helps!!!

The children's routines and school life, time with family and friends, exercise flexibility. Going to work, seeing my parents, laughing with locals.

What changes, if any, have you experienced to your health and wellbeing?

Key Themes

- Mental health concern - worry / stress / anxiety / depression / despair / sad / grief / angst/ dissatisfaction
- Lack of exercise and physical activity
- Weight gain and increased consumption of food and alcohol
- Sleep difficulties
- Connection and isolation
- Patience and pressure
- Access to health care and concern about health conditions
- Uncertainty about rules / restrictions

Feature comments

I am finding it hard to get motivated to do anything that is not essential. I could be making much better use of my (plentiful) time doing things about the house ... but I can't be bothered!

Heightened anxiety. Always on edge managing and mediating household relationships. Ensuring whole household abides by rules.

Positive - more time to devote to my own health and wellbeing. Negative - communal anxiety and grief; pressure on working parents of young children.

All for the better, no problems at all. Improved exercise, eating, sun exposure, weight loss. Except missing grandchildren desperately, but that isn't and won't be a mental health issue - we cope via telechats.

Drinking much more-no ill effects yet!

What are some of the things you have done or would recommend to others to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic situation?

Key Themes

- Keep active / exercise – if possible, go outside, walk every day
- Keep in touch with people / connect with neighbours – use social media / online tools to connect face to face
- Think of others and be kind
- Gardening / get into the backyard
- Online resources / learning / music / singing
- Cooking bread / tasty food / preserving
- Personal development – mindfulness /pray / patience / goal setting / planning / keep a routine / help others / respect / get space
- Talk about your concerns / Be real – if you're not okay, reach out, don't beat yourself up

- Comedy / games / hobbies
- Eat healthy food / avoid alcohol
- Personal hygiene
- Pick up litter

Feature comments

Stick closely to a normal daily routine, spend increased time outdoors exercising, stay engaged with a broad group of friends/family.

Focus on acts of kindness for others, we dropped a note, chocolate and felt heart (1,000 Hearts project) in the letterbox of everything neighbour and started a Facebook group for our block. There's a group of us not checking on our elderly neighbours.

Daily exercise gets body working, helps sleep at night and having a daily routine which starts with exercise means a more positive start to the day. Word games, jigsaws, reading & watching documentaries help mental health & emails connect me to others.

Keep getting up and dressed and taking pride in our homes. Keep in touch with friends and family by calling or FaceTiming. Try to exercise every day. Smile. Say hi when you go for walks if you pass people instead of avoiding eye contact.

How do you think that Clarence City Council can better support the community at the moment?

Key Themes

- Ensure continued / improved access to bushland / parks / beaches / tracks. Try to remove closures.
- Communicate / provide and share information / let community know what is happening / share resources / clear messaging / help people understand the rules
- Organise volunteers to support those who need help / look out for those not on internet and help them connect / support people with transport for shopping / call elderly / isolated
- Increased waste services as there is increased need / bring forward annual clean-up
- Online arts and performance / exercise and yoga
- Keep community connected
- Reduce / freeze / cancel rates – contain spending
- Check in with business owners / encourage new business ideas / encourage people to support local business / link to online opportunities
- Free native plants / seedlings
- Encourage / enforce clear social distancing
- Monitor dog management and provide more spaces for dogs
- Monitor use of environment / open spaces
- Monitor cleanliness of toilets / availability of hand sanitiser in shops

Feature comments

Food vans, community scavenger hunt.

I work in the arts. I would like to think that, when this is all over, CCC would see the potential of the arts to reinvigorate the community. Start planning now for events next Spring/Summer that have broad appeal and involvement. Celebrate community.

Keep up the good work...connection and community care is vital for wellbeing

... being prepared for a return to normalcy eg stressing importance of community groups and links such as libraries; perhaps having a community forum (s) post this period to allow people to provide feedback to prepare for any recurrence

Email newsletters with plans for future activities, preferably free ones, continue regular cleaning/sanitising, hold rates demands for those left jobless, send flowers to health services, aged care to show appreciation & let them know they are not forgot.

What are the challenges that you and your household will face in the longer term (6-12 months from now) as a result of the current COVID-19 pandemic?

Key Themes

- Loss of employment / work / income
- Financial implications
- Mental health emotional strain / physical health and wellbeing
- People dying
- Schooling and childcare
- Socialising and re-establishing friendships
- Restriction to freedoms / changes to interactions
- Restricted travel opportunity

Feature comments

Adapt to a new way of life. There will be massive changes.

Our jobs aren't secure and we are petrified we won't have jobs in the future. Scared of the economical impact on our beautiful state.

Money, bills, education, finding new work, health impacts (we are fat!)

Loss of income, losing jobs, social isolation, can't see kids and family interstate, getting covid-19 and getting sick, parents and aunts dying too soon, other people in the community dying, economic recession/depression in Hobart, etc...

My main concerns are the children, and the impact that the restrictions that we have now might have on their education, socialisation and general mental health.

An email address was provided for community feedback. Emailed comments are summarised as follows:

- Consider changing name of Rosny to Rosny Point
- Provide signage for cyclists on shared pathways
- Concern about loss of “leg push” equipment at Bellerive
- Request for continuation of *Fitness in the Park* program
- Provide information about the *Tangara Trail*

Organisational feedback

An email was sent through Council’s community and business networks and a simple three-question survey was provided. 28 responses to the survey were received. Here is a summary of feedback provided:

How is the current situation affecting your organisation's ability to deliver its services?

Key themes:

- Closure/reduction of services and move to online platforms
- Finding ways to connect with communities – especially those with low literacy, ESL or limited access to and skills with online platforms
- Loss of income
- Increase in racism towards migrants
- Impact on mental health

What needs has your organisation identified in the Clarence community?

Key themes:

- Keeping active
- Connect to others to share stories, provide social contact
- Access to affordable and emergency housing

What do you think Clarence City Council could do to assist your organisation in addressing those needs?

Key themes:

- Council to act as a central hub for information dissemination on services, service changes, funding opportunities etc. and consider alternative methods of delivery i.e. video, audio files via MMS
- Provide information on how to access safety net services
- Localised transport services – shuttle bus between suburbs
- Online support and online connection with others in the community
- Assist in promotion of healthy choices and routines, hygiene for safety, oral hygiene
- Provision of community grants
- Flexibility in acquittal of existing grants
- Shuttle services between suburbs
- Assist young people to gain skills in use of technology to stay connected

Attachment B - The following table provides a matrix of identified issues and short, medium, and longer-term actions and recommendations.

Issue	Short (2 months)	Medium (3 to 6)	Longer-term (7 to 12+)
Provision of community grants and flexibility in grant acquittal	Developed a Community Grants package	Implement the Community Grants package	Evaluate community grants package
Economic hardship	Hardship policy for people having trouble with payments Commitment to zero rate increase	Development of economic/business development strategies	
Need for targeted services around waste	Consider targeted waste management strategies		
Access to natural spaces/areas	Continue to provide and improve access to natural assets ★	Asset/Natural Resource Management budget dependent Initiate discussion with PWS regarding consistent approach	Continue to provide. Adjusted capital works programs
Information on available tracks and trails	Provide information in various formats ★	Continue to provide	Continue to provide
Signs on shared pathways	Provided appropriate signage where requested	Assess permanency of relevant signage	
Understanding what Council is doing in response to the pandemic	Develop an ongoing communication response online and in hard copy in the context of the recovery plans	Clarence and Southern Regional Social Recovery Committees developing a coordinated approach to council's overall actions and communication	Continue to provide communication to the community
Need for targeted services around shopping, childcare, volunteering	Children's Services remain open and adapting to online communications ★ Council's volunteer service adaptations and connections with Volunteer Tasmania ★		
Connecting and helping others Social isolation	Neighbour Connection card ★ Volunteer Service – older adults and people with disability ★	Finding Solutions Forum – People with Disability★	

Need for increased connections, particularly for older or isolated people	Live Well. Live Long program – community radio adaptation★ Arts and cultural initiatives online Support for Community and Men’s Sheds	Get Going Guide – older adults★ Continue to provide/adapt Community and Cultural programs ★ Food Connections Clarence program – contributing to social eating programs, access to packaged meals, supporting local businesses and schools* Continued support of Heemskirk Community Garden initiatives ★	
Less ability for physical exercise	Congestion on pathways mitigated by signage Fitness in the Park sessions online and face-to-face when safe	Review signage Fitness in the Park / physical activity program★ Out and About Program – fully funded partnership with all 4 Neighbourhood Centres for older adults (65+ years) ★	Review capital works programs.
Impacts on mental health	Information on access to relevant organisations – Live Clarence★ My Wellbeing Kit ★ Wellness Wednesday – online promotion Live Clarence ★	Access to community and cultural programs that support mental health and wellbeing★ Development of additional activities in partnership with mental health sector	
Promotion of healthy choices for oral health	Promote Council’s oral health films using social media★ Promote <i>Choose Water</i> campaign★		
Localised transport services	Volunteer program ★– redirect Council staff resources to assist	Volunteer program dependent upon Govt directives	Conduct planned Transport Solutions Forum ★

Access to affordable and emergency housing		Continue involvement in Homelessness partnerships ★	Conduct planned Housing Solutions Forum ★
Concern about increased racism	Racism Stops with Me promotions★ Welcoming Cities activities★ Regional Mayors' statement	Partner with relevant NGOs for information campaign	Engage with local Multicultural community through new stakeholder group

★ Denotes existing programs or adaptable programs of Council