

Nillumbik Community Pandemic Recovery Plan 2021-22





Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

Nillumbik Shire Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people who are the Traditional Custodians of Land known today as Nillumbik. We pay respect to Elders both past and present and extend that respect to other Indigenous Australians.

Image: Hurstbridge shop front

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A Message from the CEO

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant and enduring impact on all aspects of life around the world. The social, health and economic impacts have stretched all of us as we have had to respond to new and challenging situations.

Through the collective experience of this pandemic, the Nillumbik community has proven that it is strong, resilient and caring. I would like to thank all of you for the role you have played in keeping our community safe, and supporting those around you through these incredibly challenging circumstances.

Through all phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, Council has continued to support the Nillumbik community through the adaptation of services and programs, so that people can continue to access what they need and stay as connected as possible. As we move from response to ongoing recovery, we need to look further ahead at how we can best rebuild and reconnect.

The *Nillumbik Community Pandemic Recovery Plan 2021 – 2022* outlines the initial response we have provided, along with the actions that Council will take to ensure we can recover as restrictions continue to ease and life shifts to a 'COVID normal'.

The plan is based on four main themes which guide the recovery process:

1. Inclusion
2. Healthy Environments
3. Healthy Behaviours and;
4. Employment and Education

Actions stated in the plan span across a number of areas of Council, and will be supported by State and Federal Government initiatives, and those delivered by community organisations and our local partners. Collaboration is a key principle of any work we do, and is especially the case for pandemic recovery.

It is important to note that although everyone has been affected, some people and groups are more vulnerable to the effects of such a disaster as this pandemic. As such, many of our recovery efforts focus on supporting those who are more at risk of the negative health, social and economic outcomes that have presented themselves.

As we rebound from such a historical and life changing event, we must work collectively to protect our health and that of our community.



Carl Cowie
CEO

A Message from the Mayor

Since early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged many of our previous assumptions and affected every aspect of our lives.

The resilience and resourcefulness of the Nillumbik community has been demonstrated on many occasions, whether in the face of fire, flood or now, global pandemic. Nevertheless, the challenges of the past 18 months have been like nothing we've previously experienced and have taken a large toll.

The pandemic continues to ravage much of the globe and our international borders are not expected to reopen until mid to late 2022. While we in Australia have done very well in comparison so far, we need to recognise that we are far from out of the woods.

The *Nillumbik Community Pandemic Recovery Plan 2021 – 2022* states our focus for the short to medium term recovery process. Longer term approaches will be embedded in key strategic documents such as the Council Plan and the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan. It is the result of Council's efforts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the pandemic's effect on our community, informed by Council's experience in responding to community needs and feedback on issues of importance

For all its undoubted challenges, the pandemic offers opportunities for finding new and improved ways of going about our lives. The plan reflects a commitment to embedding these improvements and building on them.

Throughout the pandemic, Council has been working closely with the Commonwealth and State governments, as well as local partners, to deliver the necessary support and services to our community. This approach is reflected in the plan, which highlights Council's critical role in service delivery and in advocating to other levels of government on behalf of our community.

It will be a critical roadmap as we, alongside our community, navigate the recovery phase and beyond.



Cr Peter Perkins
Mayor

Introduction to the plan



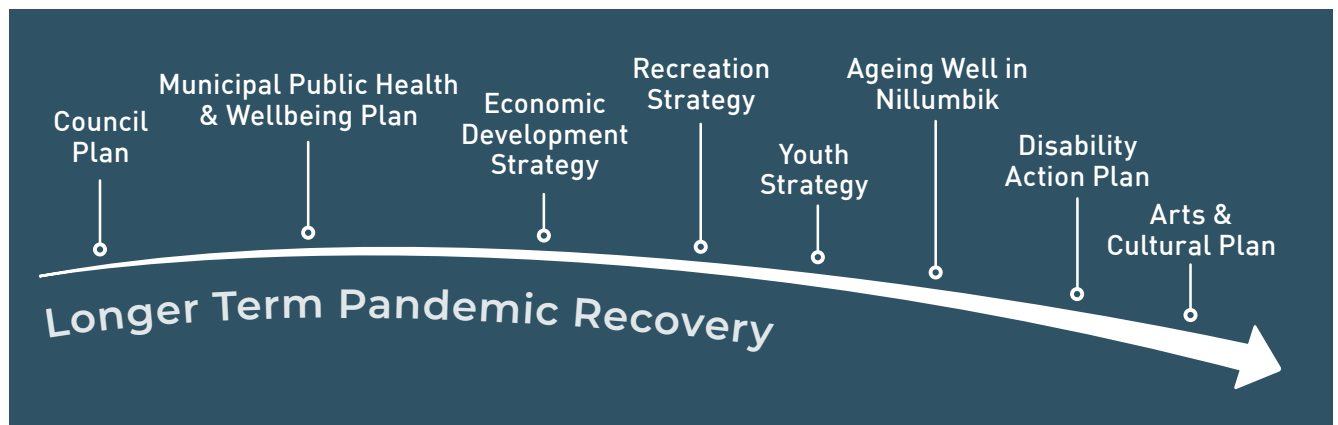
Image: People planning in a workshop

The Nillumbik Community Pandemic Recovery Plan 2021-22 seeks to outline how Council has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the approach we are taking to continue to support the community through the recovery process.

We recognise that pandemic response, relief and recovery are all dynamic. There is no way to set a point from which recovery began, and we cannot predict if response will need to occur again in the future. Therefore, we are committed to shift and adjust our approach where required, based on local need and the direction of the Victorian Government.

This plan states our focus for the short to medium term recovery process. Longer term approaches will be embedded in key strategic documents such as the *Council Plan* and the *Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan*, as well as other relevant documents.

We will review and report on this plan at 30 June 2022 to evaluate what has been implemented and its effectiveness.



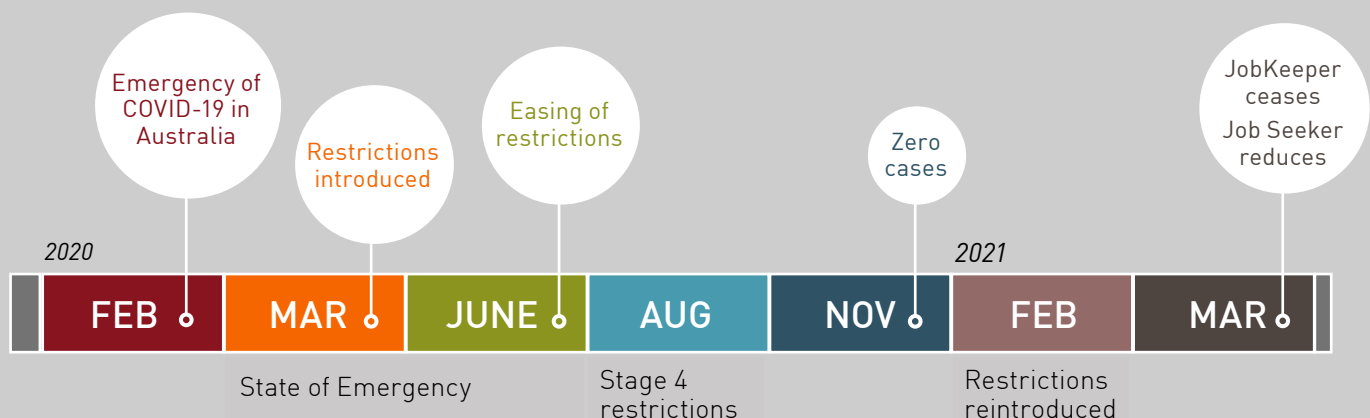
In Victoria, the COVID-19 pandemic has been managed by the State through the emergency management legislation (State of Victoria, 2013), the State Emergency Management Plan (Emergency Management Victoria 2020), and intergovernmental and interagency processes and protocols developed under these plans.

Management of the Pandemic has been informed by the Public Health and Wellbeing Act (State of Victoria, 2008) and the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Act (State of Victoria, 2020) designed to extend the State of Emergency powers and controls on a monthly basis.

In concert, these acts and plans, and the actions taken to implement them, have kept most Victorians free from the risk of contracting COVID-19.

Timeline of the COVID-19 pandemic

The following timeline highlights some key milestones of the COVID-19 pandemic, since its emergence in Australia in 2020.



How this plan was developed

A series of documents were developed to better understand the impacts of COVID-19 on the community. Primary sources include:

- Together in Nillumbik COVID-19 Community Survey Findings (Nillumbik Shire Council, 2020g) which sought to understand the nature of impact on the Nillumbik community.
- COVID 19 Business support for Nillumbik, Respond, Recover, Thrive (Nillumbik Shire Council, 2020a).
- Nillumbik Recovery Plan, COVID-19 Literature Review (Boyce, 2021) which sought to better understand the nature of potential impacts of COVID-19 on the Nillumbik Community from a theoretical perspective.
- Nillumbik COVID-19 Workshop Summaries (2021a).
- Nillumbik Recovery Plan Actions (2021b).

In addition, the Local Government SenseVIC Pulse (June 2020 Wave) findings on COVID-19 (CSBA., 2020) were also considered.

A series of consultations were undertaken to better understand the nature of impact, potential recovery activity and support plan development.

This Plan is informed by literature and consultation and provides guidance on local responses required for recovery.

Although the Plan takes a strengths based approach we have tried to clearly identify the issues that arose from the pandemic in Nillumbik, and the likely impact these issues have had, and will continue to have, on the local community.

Nillumbik’s approach to recovery

Focusing on resilience

Nillumbik’s approach to recovery is underpinned by the concept of resilience.

Resilience is a psychological concept which broadly is a measure of a person’s robustness, or capacity to ‘bounce back’ after being placed under pressure or stress.

Resilience can just as easily be applied to communities as it can to individuals, and is frequently used in a community disaster context to define how a community might respond and to better understand and measure how a community is fairing.

Community resilience in a disaster context is a developing field of academic research designed to better support our understanding of what occurs in communities and how they function in disaster contexts.



Figure 3: A Model for Community Disaster Resilience (Arbon, Gebbie, Cusack, Perera, & Verdonk, 2012)

Principles guiding recovery

Community-led process

The active involvement of the community is essential and we will work in partnership with the community, recognising the varying needs of people as they experience recovery in different ways and at different stages.

Individuals and communities are resilient

When individuals and communities are provided with information and resources, they are able to make informed choices and manage their own recovery.

Levels of recovery operations

Recovery operates at multiple levels of government and in collaboration between a range of agencies and organisations. Operational and strategic decisions relating to the recovery process will be made through already existing governance procedures.

Accessible and inclusive communications

Coordination and communication between the community, key agencies and Federal, State and Local Governments will assist in ensuring the success of recovery activities for the affected community.

Roles of organisations and agencies

Recovery is not the exclusive domain of any single agency. All agencies and organisations willing to participate have an important role to play. Recovery is a whole-of-government and a whole-of-community process. The recovery process will build on existing structures and relationships.

Key recovery directions 2021-22

Four key themes have been identified for Nillumbik to inform future pandemic planning and recovery. These themes are based on responses from the Together in Nillumbik COVID-19 Community Survey Findings and are centred on the social and economic impacts that emerged during the pandemic and include:

Inclusion

This theme relates to social inclusion and participation in all aspects of community life, with a focus on those who may be more disadvantaged or vulnerable, or may be physically isolated due to where they live or limitations they may have.

Healthy environments

This refers to the physical and social environments in which people and communities exist in, which promote healthy behaviours and positive health outcomes.

Healthy behaviours

These behaviours include those which a person, groups or communities engage in that promote health and are protective factors for ill health or chronic disease.

Employment and education

This theme relates to schooling and education of all types, employment, volunteering, business support and the promotion and stimulation of the local economy.

Image: Rural road in Nillumbik



The following table highlights the key recovery directions to guide Nillumbik’s short to longer term recovery:

Inclusion	Healthy Environments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive opportunities in clubs for volunteering through disability, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) community, low income and gender equity lenses • Inclusive opportunities to support and sustain local business • Support for social inclusion opportunities for low income residents • Increasing opportunities for partnership between organisations, improving their capacity to deliver local and inclusive programming • Bridging the digital divide to better support inclusion across all ages and abilities • Return of face-to-face opportunities as soon as possible within restriction parameters • Support seniors to more easily adapt and connect through available technology • Provide connection opportunities for those who are socially isolated through volunteering, food bank activities and local news (2021a). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support local groups, sporting clubs and businesses to implement COVID-safe practices • Encouraging and supporting informal recreational access to the built environment. These would support healthy practices such as gathering for social events in the outdoor spaces, and provide opportunity for people of all incomes to participate • Promote engagement with nature through informal and formal opportunities • Support safe engagement in formal spaces through supporting and extending trading opportunities • Support sports and recreation clubs through sharing opportunities for accessing financial assistance (grants), community marketing of available clubs, help support those on low incomes and those who are isolated to participate, and skilled support to assist clubs in developing and implementing COVID-safe plans.
Healthy Behaviours	Employment and Education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved access to clubs, services and supports that promote wellbeing and health • Improved access to services that provide informal and formal early intervention opportunities • Improved access to physical activity and exercise opportunities • Improved access to fresh food • Promote local services that provide food relief and connect those in need • Promote and support home food growing • Promote available family violence support services. • Improved access to services and support for those with psychological vulnerabilities, including to drug and alcohol services • Improved access to financial counselling and housing support services for those experiencing significant distress and dislocation. 	<p>Council developed an Economic Development Strategy (2020e) during the course of the pandemic to support the local economy. Rather than repeat actions agreed in that strategy, the Recovery Plan seeks to highlight key themes and objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve economic development practices and programs to assist local businesses • Enhancing the visitor economy, showcasing natural, recreational and cultural strengths • Promoting learning access across the life-course to promote an increasingly resilient workforce; and • Working across Council to increase opportunities for people with a disability to participate as volunteers in Council activities. • Council responded with a range of measures documented in Respond, Recover, Thrive (Nillumbik Shire Council, 2020a). These programs were designed to support the community during lockdown, with a prospective ‘bounce-back’ occurring within a six month period. Some of the likely impacts have not yet been experienced. <p>Council delivered the Art in the Time of COVID-19 program which offered a timely injection of employment opportunities for artists to do what they do best, create art. The program employed 163 artists through a Live Streaming, Written and Exhibition program that has engaged an audience of over 50,000. Council was successful in obtaining a six month Arts Recovery resource through the Working for Victoria Scheme.</p>

Supporting inclusion

Social inclusion covers factors that determine how well an individual can participate in their community.

Social inclusion is one of the main 'social determinants of health' and plays a significant role in community wellbeing. It is particularly important from a built environment and service perspective to ensure that everyone can access services; for example, people with a disability can physically access services; people who speak a language other than English can source the information they need; services are culturally appropriate and safe for all people including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People; people in low income households have equal opportunity to access basic resources; and people of all genders and sexualities have equal opportunities in workplaces and social situations.

What we know about COVID-19 impacts on inclusion	What we know about the Nillumbik community
Isolation can result in mental health issues.	➔ Only half of the population could get help from neighbours.
Key vulnerable groups are older people, low income households, those with a disability, those in rural areas, people who live alone, those with low literacy and those with limited communication skills.	➔ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 per cent of the population live in rural areas. • In the years prior to COVID-19 there was a declining sense of feeling valued by society. • The number of older adults in Nillumbik is increasing over time. • The socioeconomic index for Nillumbik is quite high, and the area is fairly affluent, however there are still pockets of disadvantage.

There are three key areas of social inclusion identified as experiencing notable impacts from COVID-19: Disability and caring, gender equality and volunteering.

1. Disability and caring

Those who have a disability, health condition or injury lasting for 6 months or more, more commonly experience a range of impacts (2020 Together in Nillumbik Community Survey):

53%	Concern that they or their family will contract COVID-19 (40% no disability)
22%	Couldn't afford services (7% no disability)
22%	Didn't know what services were available (11% no disability)
23%	Need financial relief packages (12% no disability)
15%	Need support to connect to Federal and State financial relief (8% no disability)
10%	Need delivery of food packages / ready-made meals (3% no disability)

Source: 2020 Together in Nillumbik Community Survey

2. Gender Equality

Consistent with international data, females bore the majority of the burden for caring and learning support activities. Together in Nillumbik 2020 survey findings and Census data show that females more commonly experience a range of impacts or are in high risk sectors.

The Together in Nillumbik survey showed that males were less likely to identify the need for support and had lower incidence of reporting psychological distress, but were more commonly heavy drinkers (2020).

26%	Concerned about the impact of remote learning on children (18% males)
11%	Have to juggle home, caring, work and schooling activities (3% males)
30%	Engaged in childcare (23% males)
65%	Perform 5+ hours domestic work per week (40% males)
Females are more commonly employed in industries impacted by COVID (health, carer and clerical).	

Source: Census

3. Volunteering

Many traditional volunteering opportunities closed throughout the pandemic, increasing the social isolation of regular volunteers. Clubs identified the impact of COVID-19 on both club finances and their capacity to retain and attract volunteers to support viability (Recreation Department, 2020). healthAbility identified the benefit of volunteers engaging people who are vulnerable, and volunteering was identified as an important mechanism both Council and local community groups could use to better support the local community.(Nillumbik Shire Council, 2020g).

Supporting healthy environments

Healthy environments include both built and social aspects of our community that promote health, wellbeing and resilience.

These include infrastructure and activities available to residents and visitors that can contribute to improved health outcomes, such as community centres and cultural facilities. Safety is also an important aspect of a healthy environment, which has implications for Council through public space management such as vegetation maintenance (sightlines) and lighting (Community Profile, 2020).

What we know about COVID-19 impacts on healthy environments	What we know about the Nillumbik community
Access to public space was one of the only opportunities for interaction and exercise during lockdown periods.	➔ Most of the population live within 400 metres of public open space.
Perceptions of safety have declined.	➔ This was declining prior to COVID-19, although the interpretation of public safety has shifted from physical structures (eg uneven footpaths) and fear of other people to fear of getting sick.
Access to the internet is critical for maintaining connections during periods of lockdown.	➔ The proportion of households with access to the internet has been increasing over time (nine in 10 as at 2016).

During the pandemic, communities were limited in their capacity to safely access environments that support health, and in their capacity to safely distance when engaging in healthy behaviours and activities in the built and natural environments. The main impacts of COVID-19 on healthy environments were:

Sports clubs	Informal spaces	Transport and mobility	Environment and natural spaces	Formal spaces
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in income (memberships, fundraising) Unable to undertake usual activities (deliver value to members). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased usage of informal spaces (public open space) for gatherings and participation opportunities for those on low incomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase/improvement in delivery of care boxes and food parcels, library books, and medication Increase in assistance to those with limited internet skills to order online Increase in programs supporting checking in on vulnerable neighbours, encouraging public catch ups, and regular phone catch ups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in use of these spaces Increase in programs encouraging food production at home Switch to virtual engagement with nature. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in support for local businesses to provide outdoor opportunities (mobile trading, outdoor dining, and shop local campaign).

Supporting healthy behaviours

Behaviours such as smoking, excess consumption of alcohol, consuming an unhealthy diet and physical inactivity have an impact on health. High blood pressure and high cholesterol also influence health, and may also potentially be modifiable through behaviour change. The Literature Review (Boyce, 2021) identified challenges with people maintaining healthy behaviours under stressful conditions: excessive alcohol consumption, smoking or taking drugs in harmful ways; being able to maintain exercise routines or continue to eat in a healthy manner; and continue to access and eat healthy foods.

Some residents found eating healthily and being active on a regular basis more challenging during the pandemic, as they were not engaged in sports clubs, responded to stress with different eating habits and may not have had access to the same physical activity opportunities as they normally would.

What we know about COVID-19 impacts on healthy behaviours	What we know about the Nillumbik community
Pandemics can result in increased anxiety and depression.	➔ Prior to COVID a third were experiencing anxiety or depression. During COVID-19 28% ranked one or more mental health measures as 'all the time'. 25% want mental health support (Together in Nillumbik Survey).
Caregivers encounter more stress.	➔ Carer responsibilities disproportionately undertaken by older adults and females.
Can result in family conflict.	➔ Incidence of family violence was increasing prior to COVID-19.
Mental health impacts can increase due to reduced exercise and reduced healthy eating.	➔ Prior to COVID-19 over a third were not undertaking sufficient physical exercise, very few were meeting fruit and vegetable consumption guidelines. Many residents don't have easy access to mental health services due to long distances to services and limited transport options.
Increased alcohol intake can result in preventable mortality and can occur in times of high stress.	➔ The rate of ambulance attendance for alcohol intoxication was increasing prior to COVID-19. 43% of residents were drinking more alcohol during COVID-19 restrictions (Together in Nillumbik Survey).





Some important considerations about potential COVID-19 impacts in these areas are:

Alcohol and other drugs	Access to services and support	Mental health	Healthy eating and physical activity
<p>Factors associated with increased drinking during the pandemic are (Neill et al., 2020):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • heavier drinking pre-pandemic • middle age • average or higher income • job loss • eating more • changes to sleep • stress and depression. <p>Increased drinking was also found to be linked to more severe symptoms of depression or anxiety (Tran, Hammarberg, Kirkman, Nguyen, and Fisher, 2020).</p>	<p>Groups identified as potentially experiencing access challenges are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who had services withdrawn due to COVID-129 restrictions - people with a disability and older adults • People with pre-existing psychological conditions or vulnerabilities • Indigenous young people • Young mothers • Those with chronic diseases • Those with undiagnosed illnesses as a result of inability to access medical care • Young people, and • Those vulnerable and at educational risk in school settings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early intervention is important to prevent long-term health impacts • Sports clubs may benefit from mental health first aid training. 	<p>Some positive developments in this space due to the pandemic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food parcels have been sourced by a range of agencies and delivered by agencies, friends and neighbours throughout the pandemic. • Residents have been encouraged to grow fresh food in their gardens • Online exercise offerings were beneficial for some members of the community • Some residents used the pandemic as an opportunity to spend more time outdoors being active in the local area.

Supporting employment and education

Employment impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown are secondary impacts with significant economic consequences. See the Literature Review (2021) in Section 6.2 for more detail.

The Economic Development team provided targeted support for local businesses in response to the pandemic. Local artists were supported through the Art in the Time of COVID-19 program which offered a timely injection of employment opportunities for artists.

What we know about COVID-19 impacts on employment and education	What we know about the Nillumbik community
Women were more likely to be impacted by unemployment and less likely to be able to access JobKeeper payments.	 In 2020, over 2,000 residents of Nillumbik were on JobSeeker payments.
Take-up of JobKeeper was higher in certain industries: 55.9% accommodation and food services, 36.9% healthcare and social assistance, 34% education and training.	 29% of Nillumbik's workforce are in these industries. 25% of Together in Nillumbik survey respondents were in receipt of JobKeeper or JobSeeker as a result of the pandemic.
Employment is protective against mental illness, depression and despair.	 During COVID-19 almost half of respondents (48%) switched to working from home, 8% were unable to work at all and 43% experienced a decrease in income.
Education teaches resilience and provides opportunities.	 Educational performance is high with students in Nillumbik schools outperforming the Victorian average in all years except Year 7. The rate of Nillumbik's population with a Bachelor degree is increasing.

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic's primary impact should be understood as the actual health impact on some residents and the threat to the maintenance of good health and well-being of others.

The Victorian response to the COVID-19 pandemic focused on primary health harm prevention.

This approach was taken as a result of the severity of the likely impact on vulnerable communities, the contagious nature of the disease, the unknown nature of people who may be 'super-spreaders' and the rapidity of spread following 'super-spreading events' in the community.

Significant secondary impacts resulted from protecting the community from infection.

Primary health impacts

COVID-19 has and continues to pose a significant risk to the health of most people in the Victorian and Nillumbik community.

COVID-19 poses a particular risk to those working in settings where the risk of infection is high, and to vulnerable members, particularly older people and those with compromised health or pre-existing health conditions.

To the end of January 2021, 136 Nillumbik residents had acquired COVID-19 (Department of Health and Human Services, 2021b).

97 cases

occurred in aged care settings (71.32% of total cases) including 36 staff, 47 residents and 14 others

13 deaths

were directly related to COVID-19 outbreaks in aged care settings in Nillumbik (9.55% of total cases) (Department of Health and Human Services, 2021a).

Those who experienced severe bouts of COVID-19 could have faced long periods of time in induced comas breathing with ventilator support. A portion of those who recovered, will experience what is now known as 'Long COVID', which is typically a range of changing symptoms that persist across a reasonably long period of time (Carfi, Bernabei, Landi, and Group, 2020; Darley et al., 2020; Wise, 2020; Yelin et al., 2020). The nature and duration of Long COVID is an evolving area of medical research (Boyce, 2021).

COVID-19 will continue to pose a risk to everyone in the community until the vaccination rollout has been completed. The vaccination schedule for Victorians has been announced including priority for those at risk in workplace settings and those living and working in congregate care facilities, commencing 22 February 2021.



Image: Art in the Time of COVID, Montsalvat

Figure 1: Number of COVID-19 cases in Nillumbik Shire by date

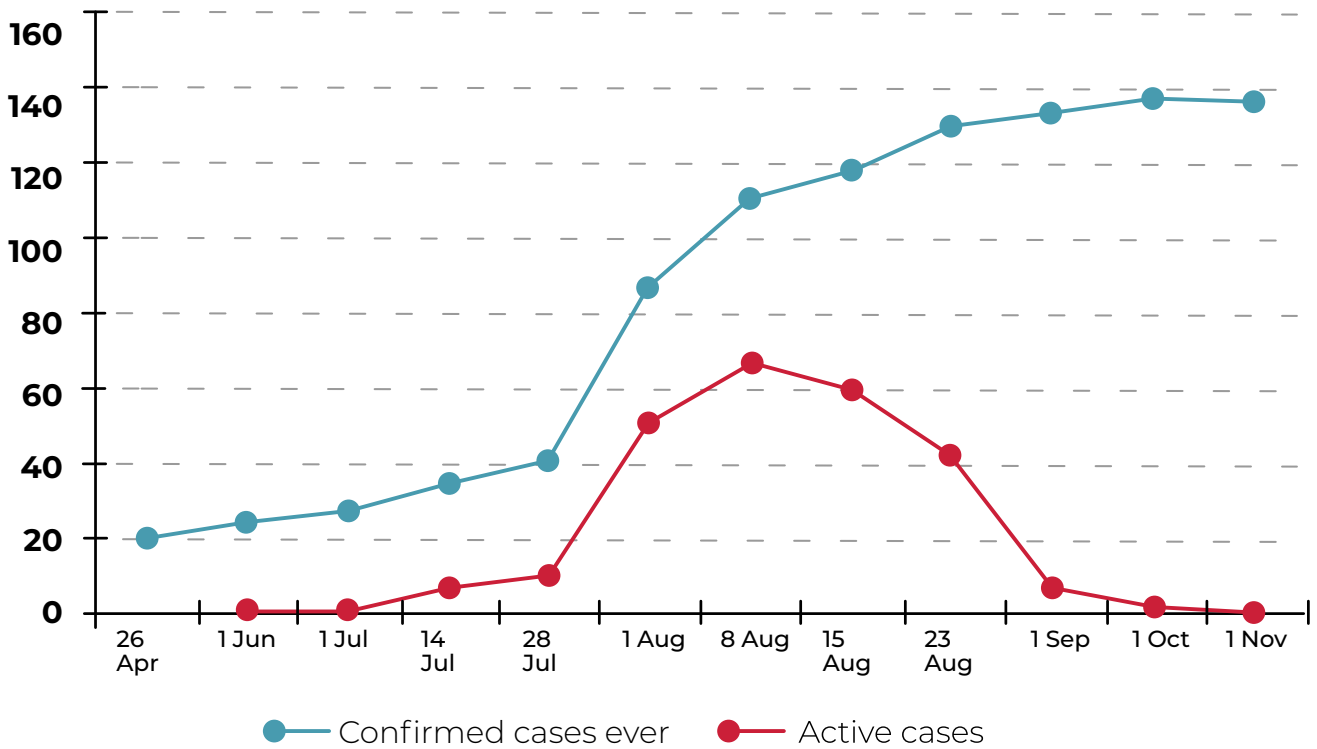
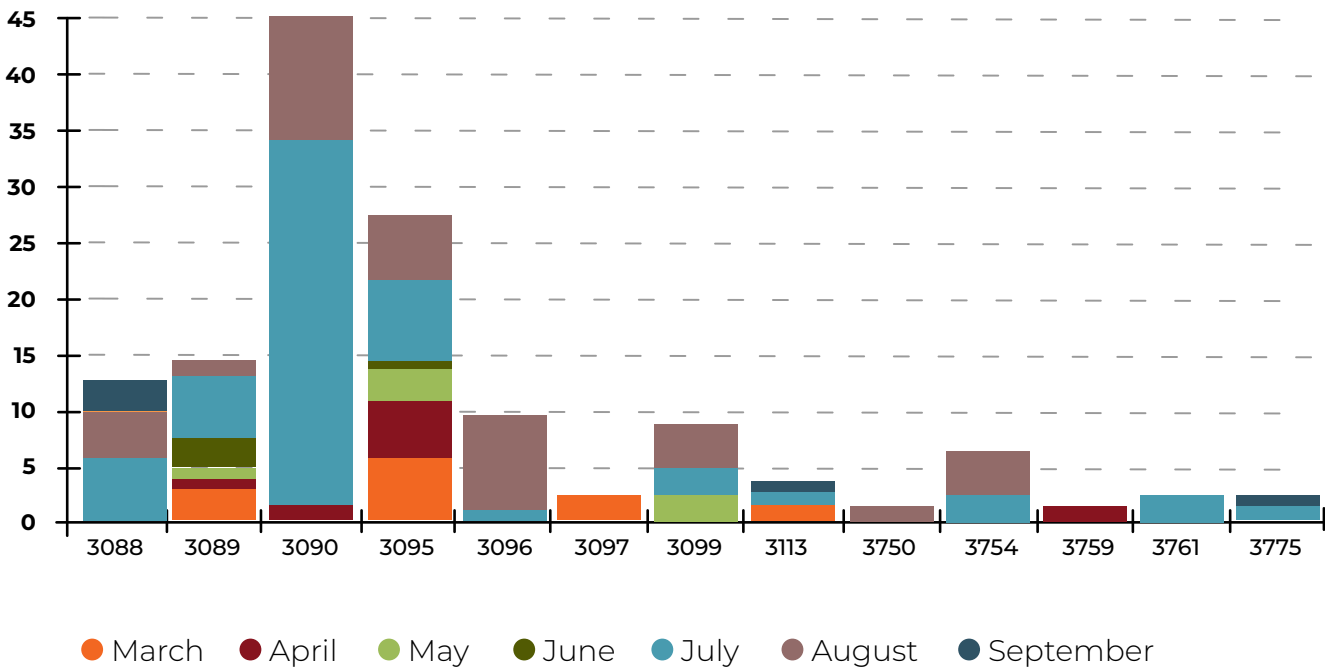


Figure 2: Number of COVID-19 cases in Nillumbik Shire by postcode and month



Economic impacts

Initial impacts and responses

Significant secondary economic impacts were clearly felt in the early months of the pandemic due to emergency orders restricting opening to essential businesses only.

Commonwealth and State economic support programs were developed or enhanced in response. These programs protected many Nillumbik residents from deeper and more sudden economic impacts. Given scheduled withdrawal of most programs, and the reduction of the level of JobSeeker payments, these programs may have only deferred the economic impact of the pandemic.

Despite these programs, some community members have fared significantly worse than others. As a result of the economic impact of lockdown, some:

- Lost livelihoods as businesses ceased trading for long periods of time or forever
- Live in communities reliant on tourism have only just commenced trading again
- Worked in businesses not eligible for JobKeeper
- Were refugees who were not eligible for JobKeeper or JobSeeker assistance
- Worked in industries where remote work was not an option and lost their jobs as a result.

Local economic impacts

Nillumbik has a three tier economy:

- A robust highly skilled and well paid workforce that works outside the municipality, characterised by relatively low unemployment
- A smaller more fragile local economy employing approximately 13,315 persons (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016), of which two thirds worked in industries that were likely to be impacted in the pandemic and eligible for JobSeeker in the accommodation and food services, tourism, healthcare and social assistance, education and training, retail trade and construction sectors
- A significant low income population with 17.47 per cent of the population, recipients in receipt of a pension or benefit (age and disability pension, JobSeeker and sole parent).

Only 2.2 per cent or 880 of 35,567 persons of working age were unemployed as at June 2020 compared to a state wide rate of 7.1 per cent.

Similarly, within the internal economy the unemployment rate only rose to 2.93 per cent during the peak of the shutdown.

Unequal impacts for those on more limited incomes

The COVID-19 supplement doubled income and the non-discretionary expenditure of JobSeeker recipients. The last available data indicates that approximately 6 per cent of Nillumbik residents were dependent on JobSeeker (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

Despite having additional costs and a range of services withdrawn, aged and disability pensioners received limited additional assistance throughout the pandemic.

Interest rates have been at their lowest point in living memory, thus limiting potential earnings to support livelihoods of self-funded retirees.

Economists have been particularly concerned about the impact of the pandemic on women. Initial Treasury modelling on the take-up of JobKeeper program (Boyce, 2021; Equity Economics, 2020; Treasury, 2020) illustrated that while women were more likely to lose their jobs as a result of the pandemic, they were less likely to be eligible for JobKeeper. The JobSeeker benefit peaked at two thirds of JobKeeper payments and reduced more rapidly over the September to March 2021 period.

Refugees and international students were not entitled to statutory income support and their circumstances are likely to be dire.

Continuing economic impacts

Economic losses are still mounting and the repercussions of the pandemic will continue to be felt for months, and possibly for years to come.

Garnaut (2021) is predicting at least a four year period for recovery. The length and depth of the economic impact of COVID-19 depends on the ease or difficulty of 'bouncing back', and the monetary and fiscal choices made by Government.

On 31 March 2021 a number of factors coincide that may result in community members being particularly vulnerable to economic shock. These include the:

- end of the JobKeeper program;
- end of the eviction moratorium;
- end of bank mortgage payment relief
- lowering of the JobSeeker rate.



Image: Outdoor dining in Eltham

Social, health and wellbeing impacts

Economic stress has an impact on wellbeing, in turn causing emotional and personal stress. As did the long period of lockdown, with school and workplace closures and rescheduling of all but urgent medical appointments.

The Literature Review canvassed the likely impacts found in Australian and overseas research of populations facing similar economic impacts and lockdown restrictions.

Secondary well-being impacts included:

- Health conditions that went undiagnosed or where the diagnosis came late
- Stressors faced by people and families where some adapted better than others
- Stresses on families due to limited access to other mediating influences beyond immediate family, including of extended family support, and mediating influences of friends, social and work connection
- Stressors relating to home schooling, and supervising home schooling while maintaining employment, where some parents adapted better than others, as did some students
- Particular difficulties for vulnerable young people including children on the autism spectrum or with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Distinctly different responses to alcohol and drug intake where some people stopped imbibing whereas others coped through increasing levels of intake
- A rise in unhealthy eating behaviours that arose from stress and the inability to undertake sufficient daily physical activity making people more vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19
- Projected and local increasing levels of family violence in families under new and different stresses as well as significant economic stress
- Job related stresses and mental distress in the health care, social care, residential care and age care workforces for frontline workers
- An increase in anxiety and depression, particularly for those exposed to stressors who were less resilient, or who had greater exposure through direct economic or health impacts
- A reduction in the capacity of many to volunteer due to their age and vulnerability
- A withdrawal of services from vulnerable people as volunteers and services withdrew home based service delivery
- The impact of extended social isolation, particularly for at risk older people whose sense of disconnection and loneliness, increased risks for physical and mental decline, substance use, emotional despair, and death.

To better support the community and manage and mitigate impact, Nillumbik Shire has decided to concentrate its recovery response across four domains: Inclusion; healthy environments; healthy behaviours; and employment and education.

Initial COVID-19 Response



Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Nillumbik Shire has been guided by the Municipal Emergency Management Plan (Nillumbik Shire Council, 2020d).

Activities designed to support recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic have been guided by the Nillumbik Relief and Recovery Plan (Nillumbik Shire Council, 2019b).

The Relief and Recovery Plan principles that guide the development of recovery plans are that recovery should be:

- A community led process;
- Start from the premise that individuals and communities are resilient;
- Include all levels of government in recovery operations; and that
- Council works in partnership with key agencies to promote recovery.

The Relief and Recovery Plan provides guidance on the development of specific recovery plans, to tailor responses to local circumstances and local need.



Image: Playground closure signage used during COVID lockdown

What we did – 2020



Strengthening partnerships

Pandemic Recovery Taskforce, Local Services Network, Community Connect Network, Banyule Nillumbik Emergency Relief Network



COVID-19 communication

regular communication and updates on COVID-19, State restrictions, service disruptions and cancellations



Grant programs

including business support grants, community grants, social connection grants



Outdoor dining

encouraging Nillumbik residents to support local businesses by visiting our local cafes and restaurants



Mask distribution

for vulnerable community members



Delivery services

ongoing delivery of services for older and vulnerable community members including community transport and delivered meals



Shop Local campaign

including free delivery service for businesses and residents



Fee subsidies

and suspended debt collection activities and charging of interest for overdue payments



Pivoting to online program delivery

through online options in order to connect virtually



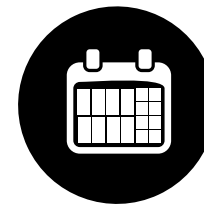
Community support

brochure to assist community in accessing support services



Nillumbik Parenting Hub

supporting parents, carers and grandparents of children and young people



Events and activities

including Art in the Time of COVID, Live July and Youth Takeover

Staff wellbeing

Nillumbik recognises the importance of leading by example by supporting staff wellbeing throughout response and recovery.

Staff are often residents too, and by supporting staff wellbeing the organisation can:

- Help demonstrate desired behaviours amongst the community
- Ensure staff are well supported to perform community support roles
- Foster professional development
- Support staff through changing environments.

Nillumbik Shire supports staff wellbeing by:

- Interpreting Federal and State Government guidelines within the context of varying roles and responsibilities, and communicating these interpretations to staff in a timely manner
- Providing staff with flexible work arrangements through the pandemic restrictions and beyond, as we move towards a 'COVID normal'. This includes considering the needs of the customer, the business, the team and the individual
- Regular check-ins with staff who live alone during periods of stay at home restrictions

- Supporting staff with working from home through provision of:
 - IT equipment to work remotely
 - Flexible work options to support periods of homeschooling and caregiving
 - Leave to attend COVID testing sites
 - Virtual health and wellbeing, education and professional development
- Undertaking staff wellbeing surveys
- Providing the necessary technology for staff to continue their roles remotely (as required)
- Providing on-call telephone psychological support services for staff.

Staff recovery will be supported through:

- Recognition of professional development
- Upskilling through pandemic response activities.

Image: Nillumbik Shire Council offices in Greensborough



Recovery grants

Council resolved at Future Nillumbik Committee Meeting on 9 February 2021 the allocation of unexpended 2020/21 Triennial Event funding toward community recovery through the delivery of an internal and external recovery grants program.

The internal Pandemic Recovery Grant Program offered financial support for teams within Council to assist with the delivery of projects and initiatives that align with the *Nillumbik Community Pandemic Recovery Plan 2021-22*.

Projects were required to align with one of the four key themes identified in the Together in Nillumbik Survey findings (Inclusion; Healthy environments; Healthy behaviours; and Employment and education).

Applications have been assessed and awarded by an Internal Pandemic Recovery Taskforce and projects to be commenced by 30 June 2021.

Successful projects included:

Projects	Description
Mental Health First Aid for Community Leaders	Provide 30 community leaders from sport and recreation clubs, community groups and youth programs/services with the opportunity to undergo Mental Health First Aid certificate training.
Emergency Resilience and Recovery Video Series for Communities	Info video series for residents to prepare and recover from emergencies – targeting vulnerable demographics.
Be in Motion – Exercise at Home	Exercise booklet in collaboration with Aligned Leisure. Program designed for older adults.
Live and Age Well Nillumbik – Resource Guide	Update, print and distribute resource guide for older adults, translated into three different languages.
Pop-Up Recording Studio	Two day pop-up for music recording, mixing, and mastering for young musician.
National Volunteer Week Events Support Project	Supplementary project created to support the ‘National Volunteer Week’ events in order to mitigate risks and adapt to COVID-19 impacts.
Community Garden Relaunch Program	Purchase of tools and equipment to establish and grow community gardens in Eltham and Panton Hill.
Your Ground Project	Secure “Your Ground” partnership with CrowdSpot and Monash YXX Lab. Documenting lived experiences of women regarding public and recreational space.
Place Shapers	Place making program engaging up to 12 local community members to participate in an eight week program at the Hurstbridge Community Hub.
Creative Industries Business Development Program	Business education program for creative industries – shifting hobbies to business. Four-to-six week workshops with online resources.
Nillumbik UNmuted	Four business breakfasts across municipality, with story sharing on adaptation through pandemic.



Nillumbik's external grants program, the **Nillumbik Recovery Fund**, aims to support eligible local community organisations, groups and businesses who have been impacted by COVID-19 via three available grant streams:

Community Services Brokerage Grants – grants of up to \$500

Funding for local service providers and community organisations to meet the needs of individuals and families experiencing adversity due to COVID-19.

Community Recovery Project Grants – grants of up to \$5,000

Support for local community organisations, groups and businesses to deliver community-led projects or events that support community recovery and resilience from COVID-19.

COVID-19 Community Quick-Response Grants – grants of up to \$2,000

Support for local community organisations through quick one-off payments to assist with the impacts of COVID-19.

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