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# SERVICES FOR RURAL LIVEABILITY

SUMMARY REPORT

RURAL COUNCILS VICTORIA | AUGUST 2019



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## INTRODUCTION

Urban Enterprise was engaged by Rural Councils Victoria (RCV) to prepare a research report into the delivery of services that contribute to liveability.

The report draws on primary research, literature reviews, case studies and consultation, to identify trends in rural service provision, demand for services and best practice principles that could be applied to Rural Victoria.

This project supports RCV objectives to build capacity in rural areas and identify the most effective approach for improved service delivery across rural communities.

## KEY LIVEABILITY FACTORS

There are four main liveability factors which have been found to be the greatest influences on the attraction and retention of population in rural and regional areas.



**LIFESTYLE**



**ENVIRONMENT**



**ECONOMY**



**CONNECTIONS**

The provision of, and accessibility to, services in rural communities is critical in supporting these factors and improving liveability.

## SCOPE OF SERVICES

The research seeks to understand the factors which influence service provision in rural communities, quantify which services are considered most important to residents in terms of liveability, and provide direction on alternate models of service provision. This includes a review of the following sectors and services:



### HEALTH

Hospital/Medical Centres  
Primary Health  
Allied Health  
Pharmacy



### EDUCATION

Kindergarten  
Primary School  
Secondary School  
Tertiary (inc. TAFE)



### RETAIL/FINANCE

Supermarkets  
Other Shops  
Banking  
Post Office



### PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Buses  
V/Line Trains





# THE CHALLENGE

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Rural Victoria has a population of 724,000 residents across 37 municipalities, comprising 11.7% of Victoria's total population in 2016. However, Rural Victoria is receiving a declining share of the state's population and regionalisation and demographic trends are placing pressure on the sustainability of population and labour forces in many smaller settlements.

Rural councils and communities face specific – yet common – challenges to service delivery, impacting on the liveability of residents, including:

**LACK OF ECONOMIES OF SCALE AND A CRITICAL MASS CREATES INEFFICIENCIES IN SERVICE DELIVERY**

**LARGE DISTANCES AND TIME REQUIRED TO DELIVER SERVICES IMPACTS THE ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICES**

**LACK OF COMPETITION FROM PRIVATE SERVICE PROVIDERS, AS WELL AS FREQUENT MARKET FAILURE, INCREASES THE COST OF SOME SERVICES**

**DIFFICULTIES IN THE RECRUITMENT OF PROFESSIONAL STAFF AND SKILLED CONTRACTORS CREATES JOBS AND SKILLS SHORTAGES, AS WELL AS SERVICE GAPS**

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Importantly, the role of RCV and Local Government is generally limited to a supporting or facilitating role for services included in project scope, rather than provider/supplier. As a result, a focus on advocacy, funding, research and training is recommended.

While Federal and State programs exist to support rural service provision, many programs either have limited funding available or are not suited to meet the particular requirements of rural Victorian communities.







## ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

To provide more detailed, targeted analysis of the issues and opportunities, Urban Enterprise conducted primary research surveys of RCV member councils and rural Victorian residents.

Input was received from 23 RCV member councils and 505 rural Victorian residents.

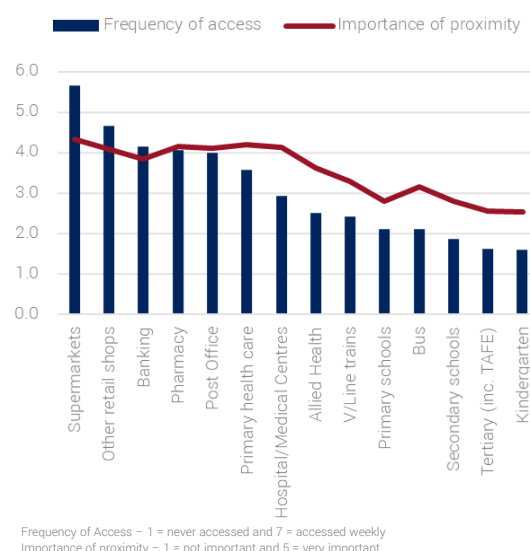
### COUNCIL SURVEY FINDINGS

- Service delivery to rural communities to retain and improve liveability and influence population attraction and retention is a high priority by 96% of councils
- The absence of transport services was noted as a significant issue for liveability
- The relative lack of health-related services in rural communities is also impacting Councils' ability to attract and retain population
- Most rural councils have sought to implement alternative solutions to address gaps in services, primarily through facilitating local transport services and mobile service

### RESIDENT SURVEY FINDINGS

- Almost 70% of rural residents would consider moving out of rural Victoria to improve their access to services, the majority of whom would be likely to move to a regional centre
- Most services are accessed in regional centres or rural centres requiring at least 30 minutes travel time. In many cases, more than an hour travel is required to access services
- Rural residents highlighted a recent reduction in local retail and banking services as the greatest loss of services in their communities

- Retail/finance and primary health care were identified as the most frequently accessed and most important service sectors (see figure below). Retention of these services in rural communities are important given that other smaller services often seek to co-locate with retail anchors (e.g. supermarkets) and primary health care facilities and are unlikely to remain if those services are lost or relocated



**The survey findings confirm the close relationship between service provision, liveability and population attraction and retention.**

**The research highlights the prospect of further regionalisation of population and services if a minimum level of service provision is not maintained in smaller towns and rural areas.**

**In situations where services are not provided in a distributed network, it is critical that residents can physically access services in nearby towns and cities through an effective and reliable transport offer.**



## BEST PRACTICE

11 alternate service delivery examples across Rural Victoria were examined to ascertain common success factors and best practice principles that could be applied to enhance service provision across Rural Victoria.

Case Study	Service Sectors
Smythesdale Business, Health & Community Hub	  
Lexton Post Office	
Loddon Library Agencies	
Hairdressing Social Enterprise	
Loddon Mallee Integrated Cancer Services	
Community Transport Network (Buloke)	
Yackandandah Service Station	 
Devenish Community Hotel	
Wimmera Western District Volunteers	 
Rupanyup Community Retail Hub	
Uniting Wimmera	

## KEY FINDINGS

**CASE STUDIES OFTEN SOUGHT TO PROVIDE SERVICES IN SMALLER TOWNS WHERE ‘MARKET FAILURE’ WAS AN ISSUE AND A COMMUNITY HAD IDENTIFIED A MAJOR RISK TO THE ONGOING VIABILITY OF A TOWNSHIP.**

**MAINTAINING CORE SERVICES THAT FACILITATES A HIGHER LEVEL OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (E.G. SUPERMARKETS, POST OFFICES, ETC.) WAS IDENTIFIED AS A CRITICAL FACTOR THAT HELPS UNDERPIN LIVEABILITY.**

**TRANSPORT IS USED PRIMARILY AS AN ENABLER BY PROVIDING ACCESS TO KEY SERVICES IN NEARBY AREAS AND IS A COST-EFFECTIVE WAY OF PROVIDING SERVICES TO THE COMMUNITY.**

## COMMON SUCCESS FACTORS

Several common themes which contributed to the success of these case studies have the potential to guide future initiatives in rural Victoria. These include:

- Co-location of public and private services within a common facility, which generates efficiencies and provides a focal point for the community
- Making efficient use of Council-owned buildings and infrastructure to support flexible and adaptive use of otherwise underutilised assets
- Community ownership and support, which is often a more effective way to generate funds, respond quickly to gaps in service provision and achieve community ‘buy-in’
- Establishing a professional model and/or evidence base, which is critical in obtaining government support and leveraging state/federal funding
- Gaining council support can assist in the delivery of services (i.e. funding), streamline approvals (i.e. building approvals) and bring other stakeholders together.





## CONCLUSIONS

This research confirms the importance of ongoing service delivery in rural Victoria to the ability of rural areas to attract and retain population. Primarily, the research demonstrates the importance of liveability to rural communities, particularly through the availability of local retail and health services, and the ability to regularly and reliably obtain transport to higher order services in larger towns and cities.

Although RCV and Councils have limited opportunity and scope to intervene in the direct provision of these services there are a wide range of case studies that identify an important role for local government in facilitating initiatives which address service gaps and respond to market failure in smaller towns.

RCV and Councils also have an important role to play in advocating for improvements to service provision across rural Victoria and in towns large and small. Given the range of challenges faced by rural Victoria's councils, State and Federal government support is critical to enable co-ordination and collaboration between councils, provide funding for key services that can't be delivered by the market, and encourage innovation through specific programs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS



**SUPPORT INITIATIVES THAT ASSIST IN EITHER (A) MAINTAINING A MINIMUM LEVEL OF SERVICE IN RURAL TOWNS OR (B) IMPROVING ACCESSIBILITY TO SERVICES IN OTHER LOCATIONS**



**ENSURE A STRONG FOCUS ON INITIATIVES WHICH CAN ENHANCE BOTH SERVICE PROVISION AND SOCIAL CAPITAL, FOR EXAMPLE THROUGH COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP OF KEY ASSETS AND SERVICES**



**MAKE EFFICIENT USE OF EXISTING COUNCIL AND OTHER BUILDINGS AND INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENCOURAGE FLEXIBLE USE OF SPACE FOR BOTH PRIVATE AND PUBLIC PURPOSES**



**ENCOURAGE AND FACILITATE COLLABORATION BETWEEN LOCAL GOVERNMENT, OTHER LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT, PRIVATE INVESTORS AND VOLUNTEER GROUPS TO ESTABLISH PARTNERSHIPS FOR ALTERNATIVE SERVICE DELIVERY**



**ENSURE A HIGH LEVEL OF PROFESSIONALISM AND GOVERNANCE IS MAINTAINED FOR ALTERNATIVE MODELS**

