

ACTIVE
Merri-bek

Merri-bek
City Council

Active Merri-bek Strategic Plan 2026-2030

Our Direction

More People. More Active. More Often.

Active Merri-bek plays an important role in supporting the health, wellbeing and connectedness of the Merri-bek community.

Through our aquatic and leisure facilities, programs, community activities and partnerships, we create opportunities for people to **be active, connect with others, improve their wellbeing and participate in community life.**

The **Active Merri-bek Strategic Plan 2026-2030** sets the direction for our programs and services over the next four years. It responds to our growing and changing community and has been informed by community consultation, stakeholder engagement, participation information and local priorities.

Our Vision

A healthy, connected and active Merri-bek where everyone can participate, belong and thrive.

Our Mission

To improve the health, wellbeing and connectedness of the Merri-bek community through accessible, inclusive and community-focused aquatics and leisure opportunities.

The community outcomes we want to create

Increased Participation

More people participate in aquatic, leisure and physical activity.

Improved Health & Wellbeing

People are supported to live healthier, more active lives.

Connected Communities

People feel connected and have a stronger sense of belonging.

Inclusive and Accessible Places

People of all backgrounds, abilities and circumstances feel welcome.

Informed and Engaged Communities

People know what opportunities are available and how to get involved.

What We Heard

Our community shaped this Plan

The Strategic Plan has been informed by significant community engagement processes undertaken by Active Merri-bek.

1,025
community survey responses

74
community organisations invited to participate

Community Network Forums
across Brunswick, Coburg, Fawkner and Oak Park

1-to-1
stakeholder conversations

Community organisations involved included schools, health services, libraries, neighbourhood houses, sporting clubs, community groups and youth services.

Seven key themes emerged

Physical activity matters
There is strong interest in swimming, physical activity, strength and mobility, walking and opportunities to remain active throughout life.

Connection and belonging are just as important as exercise
People value our facilities as places to connect, develop friendships and feel part of their community.

Healthy ageing is becoming increasingly important
People want opportunities to remain active, independent and socially connected as they age.

Communities want inclusive opportunities
Programs and services need to reflect Merri-bek's diverse communities and provide welcoming opportunities for everyone.

Awareness is one of the biggest barriers to participation
People cannot participate in opportunities they do not know exist. Improving visibility and access to information is a major opportunity.

Community partnerships increase impact
Working with local organisations can strengthen participation, referrals, community reach and outcomes.

Health and wellbeing is no longer limited to leisure centres
Schools, neighbourhood houses, libraries, parks, community spaces and events all provide opportunities to bring activity closer to the community.

Our priority population groups

Particular focus will be placed on young people, older adults, women and girls, people with disability, culturally diverse communities, LGBTQIA+ communities, First Nations communities, and people experiencing social isolation or disadvantage.



Our Five Strategic Priorities

Where we will focus

Five strategic priorities will guide our programs, partnerships, community activation and service delivery from 2026 to 2030.



01. Maximising Participation

Creating more opportunities for people to participate throughout life.

We will support welcoming pathways into aquatics, leisure and physical activity, strengthen water safety pathways, increase opportunities for priority communities and use participation data and community feedback to respond to emerging needs.

02. Community Connection and Social Cohesion

Using aquatics and leisure to strengthen connection and belonging.

We will strengthen our facilities as welcoming community places, create opportunities for social connection, expand community activation and support initiatives that reduce isolation and build belonging.

03. Reducing Barriers to Participation

Making it easier for people to find, access and participate in opportunities.

We will improve awareness and communication, strengthen accessibility and inclusion, create clearer pathways into participation and work with community partners to reduce barriers.

04. Health & Wellbeing

Supporting healthier communities through lifelong activity.

We will support active lifestyles, healthy ageing, mental wellbeing, water safety and preventative health while strengthening partnerships with health and wellbeing organisations.

05. Asset and Environmental Sustainability

Sustaining quality facilities and responsible operations.

We will maintain and enhance aquatic and leisure facilities through effective asset stewardship, responsible operations and sustainable practices, ensuring they remain safe, welcoming and fit-for-purpose for current and future communities.

How We Will Deliver

From facilities to connected community hubs

Achieving the outcomes of this Plan requires more than delivering programs inside leisure centres.

Active Merri-bek will combine **programs, partnerships, community activation, outreach and engagement** to create more ways for people to participate and connect.

A locally focused approach

While there are common priorities across Merri-bek, each community has different strengths, needs and opportunities.

Our **place-based approach** will allow programs, partnerships and community activation to respond to local priorities across the municipality.



Creating pathways into participation

A key focus will be creating a connected participant journey:

Awareness → **Participation** → **Connection** → **Wellbeing** → **Community Involvement**

Our approach will be underpinned by four principles:

- Place-Based Delivery
- Community-Led
- Design Partnerships and Collaboration
- Communication as a Participation Tool

Five interconnected service streams

Aquatics and Water Safety	Learn to Swim programs • School swimming programs • Adult swimming pathways • Water confidence initiatives • Recreational swimming • Lap swimming • Aquatic fitness programs • Water safety education • Inclusive aquatic participation opportunities
Health and Wellbeing	Group fitness programs • Health club participation • Women's health initiatives • Walking groups • Active ageing programs • Strength and mobility programs • Falls prevention programs • Allied health partnerships • Health and wellbeing initiatives
Community Programs	Youth engagement • Community wellbeing initiatives • Programs for older adults • Disability inclusion programs • LGBTQIA+ programs • Multicultural community initiatives • Women's participation programs • Social connection opportunities • Intergenerational activities
Outreach and Community Activation	Community activation events • School engagement • Outreach programs • Community education • Community partnerships • Health promotion initiatives • Festivals and community events • Neighbourhood based programs • Place-based activities
Communication, Engagement and Awareness	Community awareness campaigns • Program promotion • Community storytelling • Sharing participant success stories • Community information sessions • Digital engagement • Referral pathways information • accessible communication practices • Community feedback and engagement

What Success Looks Like

Building a healthier, more active and connected Merri-bek

By 2030, success will mean more than simply increasing attendance.

We want to understand who is participating, who we are reaching, how people experience our programs and the difference participation makes to health, wellbeing and community connection.



We will measure our impact across five areas

Participation
More people participating, new people becoming involved and greater participation across our programs, services and community activities.

Community Connection
More opportunities for connection and belonging, stronger community engagement and deeper community partnerships.

Inclusion
Greater participation by priority communities and continued improvement in accessible and inclusive opportunities.

Health & Wellbeing
Participation in initiatives that support physical activity, healthy ageing, water safety and wellbeing.

Asset and Environmental Sustainability
Progress in resource efficiency, sustainable operations and environmental initiatives.

A living strategy

Progress against the Plan will be reviewed annually.

Community Network Forums, surveys, partnerships, program evaluation and participant feedback will continue to help Active Merri-bek understand emerging needs and adapt its approach throughout the life of the strategy.

By 2030

Active Merri-bek will be recognised not only as a provider of aquatic and leisure services, but as an important community asset contributing to the health, wellbeing, inclusion and connectedness of Merri-bek.

More People. More Active. More Often.