



Advocacy **headspace** **service**



**Macedon
Ranges**
Shire Council

Macedon Ranges Shire

Acknowledgement of Country

Macedon Ranges Shire Council acknowledges the **Dja Dja Wurrung**, **Taungurung** and **Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung** Peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this land and waterways. Council recognises their living cultures and ongoing connection to Country and pays respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

Council also acknowledges local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander residents of Macedon Ranges for their ongoing contribution to the diverse culture of our community.

Artwork by Taungurung artist Maddi Moser. *Artwork used with permission.*



Contents

What we need	4
Advocating for a headspace Service in the Macedon Ranges	4
Background	5
Currently available local services	6
About the project	7
Benefits of the project	7
The headspace model	8
An innovative approach to youth mental health care	8
Key features of the headspace model	9
Expected project partners / partnership model	10
Lead agency	10
Support agencies	10
Proposed location	11



**For more information about Council's
2025 Federal Election priorities**

Scan the QR code or visit
mrsc.vic.gov.au/Federal-Election

What we **need**

There is an identified critical gap in accessible youth mental health services within the Macedon Ranges.

We are seeking federal funding to establish a headspace centre in the Macedon Ranges — a region experiencing a growing youth mental health crisis, with limited local access to services.

The Ask:

With a preferred location already identified, supported by headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation, to house a local headspace centre, **we are seeking \$2 million** to deliver a fit-out for the facility and staffing to provide integrated services that will support our youth aligned with national and state mental health reform priorities for local outcomes.

We are requesting funding to:

- Establish a local headspace service to meet the mental health needs of young people aged 12–25 in the Macedon Ranges.
- Support fit-out and staffing for a physical facility that can provide integrated services across mental health, physical health, alcohol and other drug support, and vocational services.
- Deliver a co-designed, community-led service model, backed by strategic partnerships and informed by local data, community need, and youth voice.

Why Now?

- Suicide among young people in Victoria rose by 85.7% in 2023 — and regional areas like Macedon Ranges are among the most affected.
- Current service models do not meet the demand, and travel to metropolitan services presents a significant barrier.
- This project is shovel-ready, supported by Council and community partners, and aligned with party commitments to strengthen and expand mental health services.

The Opportunity:

An investment in a Macedon Ranges headspace will:

- Deliver early intervention and reduce pressure on emergency departments
- Improve mental health outcomes for young people
- Support national and state mental health reform priorities
- Reflect a targeted and effective use of funding in line with current commitments to expand mental health access.

Background

Young people in rural and regional areas continue to experience poorer mental health outcomes and a higher risk of suicide compared to their metropolitan counterparts.

These disparities are driven by ongoing structural, social, and economic challenges, including limited access to services and increased social isolation. Recent data from the Victorian Coroner's Court reveals an alarming 85.7% increase in suicides among individuals under 18, rising from 14 deaths in 2022 to 26 in 2023. This sharp increase highlights the urgent need for accessible, youth-focused mental health support in regional communities like the Macedon Ranges.

Mental health conditions most commonly emerge during adolescence and early adulthood, with research indicating that 75% of people who experience a mental health disorder first show symptoms between the ages of 16 and 24. Providing timely support during this critical developmental stage is essential to minimising the severity of mental health issues and their broader impacts on education, employment, and relationships.

Council's *'Elevate' Youth Strategy 2018-2028*, co-designed with young people from the region, identified mental health as the most pressing issue for young people in the region, with survey participants reporting it as having the greatest impact on their lives. This local insight is further reinforced by findings from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, which highlighted the considerable disadvantage faced by young people in rural areas when accessing appropriate mental health support.

The geographical makeup of the Macedon Ranges presents unique challenges for young people seeking mental health support. Limited public transport between the shire's nine townships is a significant barrier, particularly for those with restricted transport options or mobility issues. Currently, young people in the Macedon Ranges may be required to travel up to an hour to access youth-focused psychological services at headspace. Compounding this issue, out-of-hours mental health support is virtually non-existent, with most services operating within a traditional, office-based, business hours model — further limiting accessibility for young people in need.

Bendigo Health, using data from the Victorian Agency for Health Information, has provided important and concerning statistics on mental health-related emergency presentations among children and young people from the Macedon Ranges between 2016 and 2021.

The data reveals a 56% increase in emergency mental health presentations between 2018–2019 and 2020–2021. Notably, 37% of these presentations involved children and young people who either self-referred or were referred by friends or family.

These figures highlight the urgent need for a dedicated local youth mental health service. Investment in such a service would not only support the early intervention and prevention of mental ill-health among young people in the Macedon Ranges but also alleviate pressure on the broader health system by reducing the number of emergency department presentations.

Currently available **local services**

Live4Life

Mental health education and youth suicide prevention model.

Branch Out

Mental health program for grade 5 & 6 students, parents and teachers.

Macedon Ranges Suicide Prevention Action Group (MRSPAG)

Partnership, advocacy and support.

Youth Mental Health First Aid

Fourteen-hour program delivered to the community 4 times per year. Additional courses specifically for teachers and youth service providers are also available.

Sunbury & Cobaw Community Health

Youth counselling and outreach.

Rural Health Connect

Bulk billed and low-cost access to psychologists via telehealth appointment.

Streatfield & Co Psychology

Psychology, mental health and telehealth services.

Relational Minds

Family focused services in psychiatry, psychology, functional recovery and mental health education.

About the **project**

Project partners have identified a critical gap in accessible youth mental health services within the Macedon Ranges and share a unified advocacy agenda to address this need. Together, we are advocating for the establishment of a locally based, facility-driven mental health service to increase access and support for young people and their carers. This initiative aims to ensure that young people can access the help they need within their own community, without the significant barriers of distance, transport, or service availability.



Benefits of the **project**



Reduced wait times

Decrease the time young people in the Macedon Ranges—and neighbouring local government areas—wait to access timely and appropriate mental health support.



Youth-led design

Ensure that the voices of young people remain central to the project through ongoing consultation. Initiatives such as the Macedon Ranges Youth Summit and youth advisory groups will be used to inform the design, delivery, and continuous improvement of services.



Suicide prevention

Help reduce the suicide rate among young people in the Macedon Ranges through early intervention, crisis support, and a connected care model tailored to local needs.



Reduced hospitalisations

Lower the rate of hospital admissions related to acute or crisis-level mental health episodes among young people by providing early intervention and local support.



Improved community wellbeing

Address current service gaps in mental health prevention and early intervention, with flow-on benefits for the wider community including increased inclusion, reduced social isolation, and improved educational and employment outcomes for young people.



Workforce development

Create employment opportunities within the region, attract qualified mental health and wellbeing practitioners to rural areas, and support the retention of staff in local services through career pathways and community connection.

The headspace model

An innovative approach to youth mental health care

headspace has established a nationally recognised model of care that is both effective and youth-centred, as detailed in the *Early Intervention in Psychiatry* journal.

Research shows that 75% of mental health issues emerge before the age of 25, highlighting the critical importance of early intervention.

By addressing mental health concerns during adolescence and early adulthood, headspace aims to prevent these issues from escalating into more serious, long-term conditions.

Recognising that this stage of life is a formative period, the headspace model provides holistic support that empowers young people to get back on track and build a strong foundation for the future. The service is built around four integrated core streams:

- **Mental health**
- **Physical and sexual health**
- **Alcohol and other drug services**
- **Work and study support**

This 'wrap-around' model ensures that any young person accessing a headspace centre receives comprehensive, coordinated care in a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment.

At the heart of the headspace model is the belief that, with the right tools and support, young people can build resilience and maintain their mental health and wellbeing. The model is also designed to benefit families, friends, and health professionals who play a critical role in a young person's support network.



Key features of the headspace model

Youth participation

Ensuring services remain youth-centric through active engagement of young people in design, delivery, and evaluation.

Family and friends involvement

Recognising the vital role of close personal networks in supporting recovery and wellbeing.

Community awareness

Building mental health literacy across the community to enable earlier identification and support.

Enhanced access

Offering walk-in support at low or no cost, reducing financial and logistical barriers.

Early intervention

Prioritising timely responses to emerging mental health concerns.

Appropriate, individualised care

Tailoring support to meet the unique needs of each young person.

Evidence-informed practice

Grounding services in the latest research and clinical evidence.

Service integration

Coordinating care across services to support recovery and continuity of care.

Supported transitions

Ensuring seamless referrals to other services when more specialised or long-term care is required.

The headspace model is internationally recognised as a leading example of innovation and best practice in youth mental health. Its success has led to the adoption and adaptation of similar models in countries across the world, demonstrating its global relevance and impact.

Expected project partners / partnership model

The project will be delivered through a collaborative, community-led partnership model that brings together key organisations with shared expertise, influence, and commitment to improving youth mental health outcomes in the Macedon Ranges. Each partner plays a distinct but complementary role in supporting the successful planning, implementation, and sustainability of the initiative.

Lead agency

Macedon Ranges Shire Council (Council)

Council will act as the lead agency, providing strategic oversight, coordination, and advocacy. Council's Youth team will ensure the project aligns with the 'Elevate' Youth Strategy 2018–2028 and will lead community engagement, policy integration, and support funding applications. sustainability of the initiative.

Support agencies

Sunbury and Cobaw Community Health (SCCH)

SCCH brings extensive expertise in mental health service delivery and community-based care. As a key service provider in the region, SCCH will contribute clinical leadership, operational insight, and may support the future delivery or co-location of services within the proposed model.

Macedon Ranges Suicide Prevention Action Group (MRSPAG)

MRSPAG is a well-established, grassroots community organisation with deep local networks and lived experience insights. They will play a crucial role in community engagement, awareness-raising, and co-design processes, ensuring that suicide prevention remains a central focus of the initiative.

Youth Mental Health Advocacy Group (YMHAG)

YMHAG is a youth-led advisory group that will guide the project from a lived experience and peer perspective. Their involvement ensures the service is designed with young people, not just for them. YMHAG will help shape communications, service design, and ongoing evaluation through a youth participation framework.

Proposed location

The Council-owned building at 47–49 Forest Street, Woodend, presents a highly suitable and strategic site for the establishment of a headspace service in the Macedon Ranges. Centrally located within the township, the building offers an ideal setting to provide accessible, youth-friendly mental health services.

The facility comprises sixteen rooms, including clinical consultation spaces, a staff room, reception and waiting areas, food preparation facilities, and two open breakout zones. With minor modifications, the space could be transformed into a safe, welcoming, and purpose-built environment tailored to the needs of young people.

Importantly, the site is located within a 10-minute walk of the Woodend train station, making it accessible via public transport. This significantly enhances service reach and independence for young people travelling from across the shire and beyond.



Images Layout of building (and view from outside).



