

Formalised Health Partnerships and Jointly Funded Health and Planning Positions

Wollondilly Local Government Area

Introduction

The local government area of Wollondilly, in south-western Sydney, will undergo significant population and housing growth in the next 20 to 30 years. The town of Wilton, within the Wollondilly Local Government Area (LGA), has been earmarked to accommodate much of the growth through the Wilton Junction Master Plan (2014), which provides for over 35,000 new people. A Health Impact Assessment of this Master Plan became the catalyst for an innovative working partnership between Wollondilly Shire Council and the South Western Sydney Local Health District.

Background

Wollondilly is located approximately 70km south-west of the Sydney CBD, adjacent to more populous LGAs such as Liverpool, Campbelltown and Camden. It has a resident population of approximately 51,000 people.¹

Wollondilly LGA is included in the Greater Sydney Commission Western City District Plan. The shire is a 'patchwork of agriculture, rural landscapes, bushland and separate towns and villages'² and proudly promotes itself as a rural LGA rich in natural landscapes. Wollondilly falls within the South Western Sydney Local Health District.

In 2014, the Wollondilly Shire Council participated in the Health Impact Assessment *Learning by Doing* program run by the Centre for Health Equity Training, Research and

Evaluation, an organisational collaboration between the *South Western Sydney Local Health District* and the University of NSW. The council's focus for this Health Impact Assessment was the Wilton Junction Master Plan. This work allowed the council and local health district staff to cultivate their shared interest in healthy built environment outcomes. This grew into a working relationship focused on research and policy development to build health considerations into land-use planning processes.

Towards the completion of the Wilton Junction Health Impact Assessment, the local health district approached the council with a focus on incorporating health considerations into council planning more broadly. This led to the creation of a jointly funded health-in-planning position between the council and the local health district. The aim of the position was to better understand the opportunities for land-use planning and place-making that could deliver health and wellbeing outcomes in Wollondilly. The Health in Planning Group subsequently engaged the Centre to undertake research on integrating health into council's planning processes.³

The new role – Senior Strategic Health Planner – commenced in January 2019. The position is based primarily in the planning team at the council and one day per week in the Healthy Places Team (Population Health) at the local health district.

A similar position also exists in other councils within the local health district, including Fairfield and Campbelltown City Councils.

Footnotes

1. Population ID, 2018, Wollondilly, viewed 30 November 2018, <<https://profile.id.com.au/wollondilly>>
2. Wollondilly Shire Council, 2017a, p.12
3. Hirono et al, 2017 & Crimeen et al 2018.
4. CHETRE p29

References

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Wollondilly Shire Council, *Create Wollondilly - Community Strategic Plan*, Wollondilly, NSW, 2017a, [http://www.wollondilly2033.com.au/assets/pdf/operationalplan/WSC_CSP2033\(2\).pdf](http://www.wollondilly2033.com.au/assets/pdf/operationalplan/WSC_CSP2033(2).pdf)

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http://www.wollondilly2033.com.au/assets/pdf/operationalplan/Wollondilly_Delivery_Program_including_Operational_Plan_2018_-_19.pdf

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Formalising health partnerships and projects

The relationship between the council and local health district has created unique opportunities to place health at the core of urban and regional planning in Wollondilly. The partnership offers a clear example of how multi-sectoral collaboration can improve commitment to health-based planning outcomes.

Wollondilly Health Alliance

In 2014, the Wollondilly Health Alliance was formed to address the ongoing health issues facing the Wollondilly community. The Alliance includes representatives from the Wollondilly Shire Council, South Western Sydney Local Health District and the South West Sydney Primary Health Network. The original focus of the Alliance was on the provision of accessible clinical care, however the growing momentum behind health-based planning encouraged the Alliance to form a 'Health In Planning' Working Group in 2017. This new working group formally enables the Alliance to consider healthy built environment projects and initiatives without the need for renewing Memoranda of Understanding.



Healthy Places Team visiting the sales office at Wilton New Town

South Western Sydney Local Health District - Healthy Places Team

Another initiative by the South Western Sydney Local Health District is the development of the 'Healthy People and Places Unit' and the Healthy Places team. Healthy places and spaces in south western Sydney need to be planned and built to influence physical activity levels, travel patterns, social connectivity, mental and physical health and wellbeing outcomes. The Healthy Places team works with built environment practitioners and policy makers (at state, regional and local levels) to shape the design of local neighbourhoods, streets and communities. People who live, work and play in the local government area are the 'end users' of places and spaces in south western Sydney. The Healthy Places team is also committed to finding meaningful ways to engage with local residents and community groups in the co-design of their streets and neighbourhoods. The team is guided by the expertise available in local councils.

Supporting Frameworks

Building health considerations into planning policies has required collaboration across council departments. While the Sustainable Growth team (strategic and growth planners) has been the main focus, others such as statutory planners and community outcomes officers have also been involved in work including a Health and Wellbeing Position Statement' in the council's *Community Strategic Plan (2017)* and more recently, the *Wilton Health & Wellbeing Strategy* (draft 2019 yet to be endorsed).



Wollondilly Shire Council is part of the Western Sydney City Health Alliance

CHALLENGES AND INSIGHTS

Challenges

- Bridging the professional differences between planners and public health professionals and finding co-benefits that tick inter-disciplinary boxes
- Working across two organisations, learning the language and policies and having accountabilities across both
- Balancing different priorities, agendas and expectations about what the partnership should focus on

The complexity of issues, alongside a lack of legislative 'hooks', can make it difficult for other councils to engage with the topic. A recommendation from the Centre for Health Equity, Training and Research to develop a Health Assessment Protocol is one example of how councils could address this issue.

Developing a council-wide appreciation and understanding of health-based planning requires ongoing effort. While there was strong support from several internal champions, building key partnerships and collaboration between the Strategic Planning team and other internal departments has been essential. Additionally, the inclusion of health-related considerations in the Community Strategic Plan and other key council documents demonstrates some

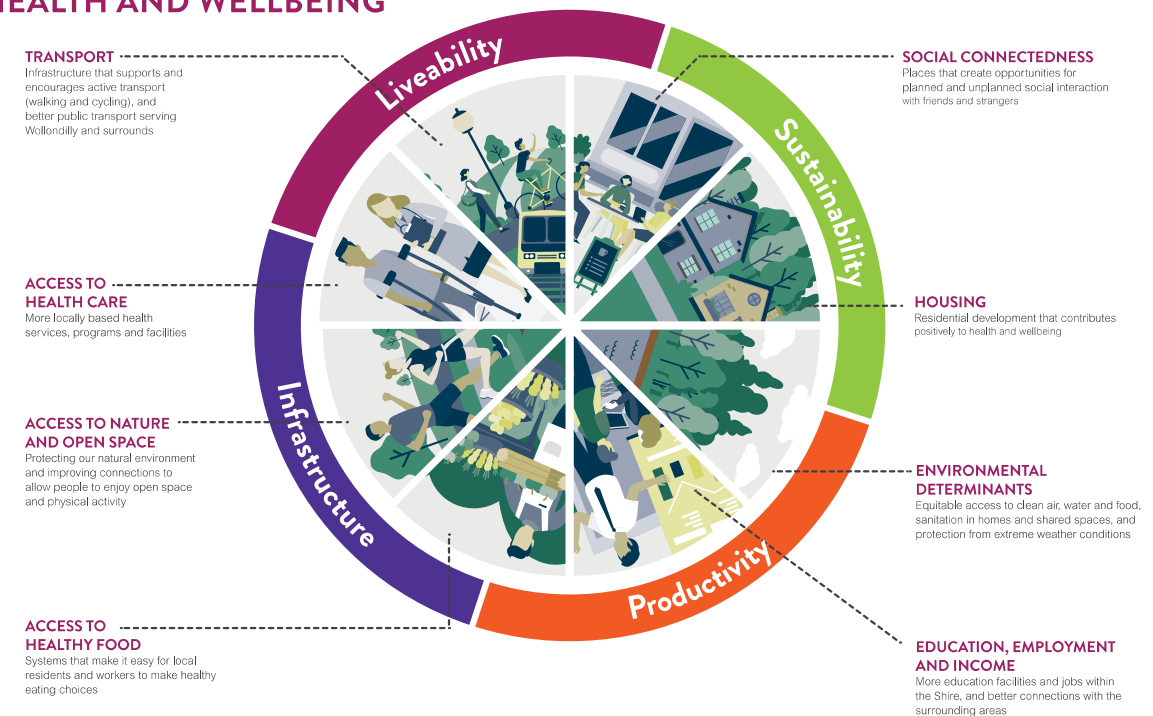
progress towards ingraining 'health in planning' principles, however as indicated by CHETRE, the development of a high-level health vision would 'create the impetus for health to influence and be considered at all other levels of planning'⁴.

Learnings

- Formalised working partnerships are important for clarifying roles and responsibilities. The MOU between the Wollondilly Shire Council and the South Western Sydney Local Health District strengthened their working partnership and incentivised knowledge sharing and expertise. Ultimately, this relationship has progressed a variety of health-based planning opportunities.
- A supportive base of colleagues has been crucial to the partnership. The initial connection sparked by the Learning-by-Doing course was subsequently driven by council and local health district staff with a keen interest in health planning outcomes.
- Other bolstering factors include a willingness to draw on external sources of relevant reference information such as the Healthy Built Environment Checklist and to use concepts such as 'social determinants of health' as a shared starting point for discussion.

DETERMINANTS THAT AFFECT HEALTH AND WELLBEING

PLANNING PRIORITY 6



Health infographic included in Wollondilly LSPS