

## The Importance of a 'No Wrong Doors' Approach

### To meet diverse needs and include all

When older people, a Neighbourhood House and a Health Service sat down to discuss forming a partnership that would strengthen people's ability to live and age well in their hometown longer, we were not 100% sure what results we'd deliver. Each partner knew what legacy they sought, but none of us were quite sure how it would all work out.

**For our community members**, the legacy they sought was to pioneer an alternative to the old senior citizen centre concept. To ensure that older people had a place of their own where people could socialise, learn and enjoy life; ideally without the burden of governance that had crushed so many Senior Citizen Centres or Probus Clubs in the past decade.

**For the health service**, the legacy they were seeking was to build health literacy, raise awareness of their services, and develop pathways and practices that would strengthen connections between the community and the health service.

**For the neighbourhood house**, the legacy we were seeking was to strengthen existing community-led activities for older people, build capacity to strengthen early intervention across all demographics in our town, and better contribute to the health and wellbeing eco-system available to support people living with chronic disease in our community.

The objective was to establish a place-based Living and Ageing Well Hub in Clunes; seed hubs in neighbouring towns and share our learning in a way that others could replicate. One of the difficulties we encountered as we sought to do this, was the sheer breadth of the target population, and the diverse needs within. No one door could meet the needs of older people in our community, meaning that to deliver a place-based solution (rather than just a segment of the target population) we either needed multiple Living and Ageing Well Hubs, or a way to clearly connect relevant spaces.



### Which 'door' is the Hub?

Both Central Highlands Rural Health and Clunes Neighbourhood House might be hubs for Living and Ageing Well activity and information, but the remit of each organisation is much broader. Only Attitude. Ageing Well in Clunes is focused solely on meeting the needs of older people. However, as it evolved, it was clearly a space where people wanted the emphasis to be on social activity and connecting. It is not resourced to deal with more complex aspects of ageing and reluctant to include any clinical overtones. Was this a problem? In the end, we don't think so.



## Attitude. Ageing Well in Clunes

A Living and Ageing Well Hub doesn't need to be all things to all people. What it needs to be is a place where older people – as many older people as possible – congregate mindfully. The term mindfully is important here. Emphasised by the community members who helped Attitude. Ageing Well in Clunes evolve, the use of the word 'mindfully' highlights that while the activities undertaken in the space may primarily be about social connection, it's done with appreciation of the factors that help people live and age well. It's also done with eradication of the factors that erode living and ageing well – such as ageism and dependence.

So, is it enough to have a Living and Ageing Well Hub in a town like Clunes? Can a hub alone have an impact on the quality of people's lives and their ability to live longer in their own home as they age? Not really.

## Links to other 'doors'

As people age their needs change. This influences the 'doors' they need to enter, as well as the 'doors' they feel comfortable approaching. Through this project each partner has become more conscious of the importance of links between our organisations; as well as links between other important touchpoints such as the local pharmacy. We've explored ways to illustrate that we are connected, as well as processes to better align practices (such as referrals). These include:

1. Signage and Noticeboards
2. Shared training experiences for both staff and volunteers
3. Shared communications in internal and public publications or online
4. Mapping of processes across organisations including data collection
5. Shared events and promotions; such as the 'Have you thought about...?' pavilion at the local Agricultural Show or the Big Clunes Christmas Party
6. Introductions; one-on-one or via events like the Healthy Conversations.

## Outcomes achieved

Through these links it's been possible to see how a place-based approach can result in real impact for people, particularly those living with complexity associated with ageing or chronic disease (themselves or loved ones they care for). Early results include:

1. **7028 attendances** – with many people participating in four or more activities a week - due to Programming & Better Promotion
2. **Better Outcomes Across Services** because practitioners can track support to determine patterns
3. **Improved effectiveness** such as the ability to contact vulnerable people easily (during an evacuation) across services due to shared contact systems between community-led activities and the Neighbourhood House.

## Legacy for all

The Living and Ageing Well in Hepburn project has achieved many outcomes, some we did not even envision when we first formed our partnership. Twelve months is a short timeframe to achieve so much, but it's been done off the back of a rock-solid foundation that meant we were project ready.

What this project has highlighted is the potential for a place-based approach to living and ageing well to lead towards an age-friendly town. What's possible once that is achieved, is up to us to envision and aspire to. But we all suspect it might involve shades of blue\*.

*\*Reference: Wikipedia: A blue zone is a region in the world where people are claimed to have exceptionally long lives beyond the age of 80 due to a lifestyle combining physical activity, low stress, rich social interactions, a local whole-foods diet, and low disease incidence.*

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