



SHIRE OF EXMOUTH

PUBLIC HEALTH PLAN

2026-2031

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Acknowledgement of Country

The Shire of Exmouth respectfully acknowledges the Baiyungu, Thalanyji and Yinigurdira people of the Ningaloo mob as the Traditional Custodians of the land and sea country on which the Shire conducts its business and pays respect to their elders past, present and emerging.



Shire President's Message



Matthew Niikkula

Shire President

As Shire President, I am pleased to support the Shire of Exmouth's Public Health Plan, which highlights our commitment to the health, safety, and wellbeing of our community. This plan provides a framework for addressing local public health priorities, promoting safe and sustainable living environments, and ensuring that the needs of residents, visitors, and workers are met. The Shire values collaboration with community members, stakeholders, and service providers to achieve positive health outcomes and build a resilient, vibrant community. Together, we can continue to foster an environment where everyone can enjoy a high quality of life and a strong sense of wellbeing.

CEO's Message



Ben Lewis
Chief Executive Officer

The Shire of Exmouth is committed to supporting the health and wellbeing of all residents, visitors, and workers within our community.

This Public Health Plan outlines our approach to promoting safe, healthy, and sustainable living environments, in line with legislative requirements and best practice standards. Through collaboration with community members, businesses, and other stakeholders. The Shire aims to identify local health priorities, implement effective strategies, and monitor outcomes to ensure a resilient and thriving community. We are proud to provide leadership in creating an environment where everyone can enjoy good health and quality of life.





What is a Public Health Plan

Public health planning is a proactive and systematic approach to improving the health and well-being of communities. It involves assessing local health needs, setting priorities, and developing evidence-based strategies that promote sustainable and equitable outcomes. By focusing on prevention and long-term resilience, public health planning aims to reduce risks, enhance quality of life, and strengthen community capacity to respond to future challenges. Our Public Health Plan outlines our role as a local government in Western Australia in implementing public health planning in partnership with State Government, community service providers and stakeholders. As required under Part 5 of the Public Health Act 2016, the priorities and actions outlined in our plan, aligning with the State Public Health Plan 2025-2030 priorities.

Consistent with the State Public Health Plan 2025–2030, this plan takes a holistic approach to health, considering health promotion, health protection and environmental health. This means supporting healthy lifestyles, helping keep the community safe from health risks, and creating environments that support people to live well every day.

In Exmouth, protecting and caring for this environment is a key priority and is considered in all areas of planning and decision-making. This approach reflects a shared understanding that a healthy environment is fundamental to the health, wellbeing and future of the Exmouth community.

Exmouth's Environment and Public Health

Natural Environment

Exmouth's natural environment is globally significant, encompassing the Ningaloo Reef, Exmouth Gulf, and Cape Range National Park. These ecosystems provide essential services that support community health, including clean air and water, food resources, and opportunities for physical activity and mental wellbeing through nature-based recreation. They also underpin the local economy via tourism and fisheries.

However, environmental health risks exist. Climate extremes, marine heatwaves, and biodiversity loss can affect food security, water quality, and livelihoods. The region's subtropical desert climate and remote location increase vulnerability to heat stress, emergency events, and limited access to health services during natural disasters.



Protect water quality and sanitation systems to prevent disease.



Monitor climate-related health risks (heat stress, vector-borne diseases).



Promote active lifestyles through safe access to natural spaces.



Collaborate with conservation initiatives to maintain ecosystem services.



Engage Traditional Owners to integrate cultural and environmental knowledge.



Built Environment

Exmouth's built environment includes residential areas, tourism infrastructure, community facilities, and transport networks guided by the Local Planning Scheme and Strategy.	provide opportunities for social connection and physical activity.
Recent developments focus on housing supply, marina expansion, and multi-use community facilities such as the Ningaloo Centre.	Infrastructure priorities include affordable housing, improved roads and footpaths, waste management, and universal access.
Public spaces like parks and foreshore areas	These elements influence health outcomes by shaping access to services, opportunities for active transport, and environmental sustainability.



Ensure safe, affordable housing to reduce overcrowding and promote equity.



Enhance connectivity and active transport options for physical activity.



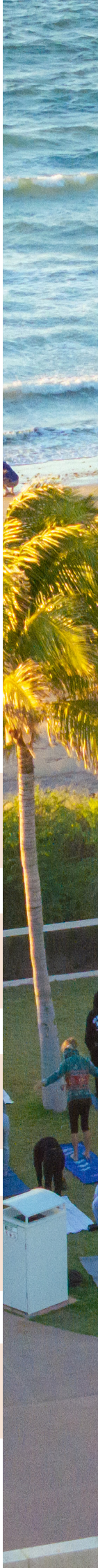
Maintain green spaces for mental health and community cohesion.



Integrate emergency facilities into health response planning.



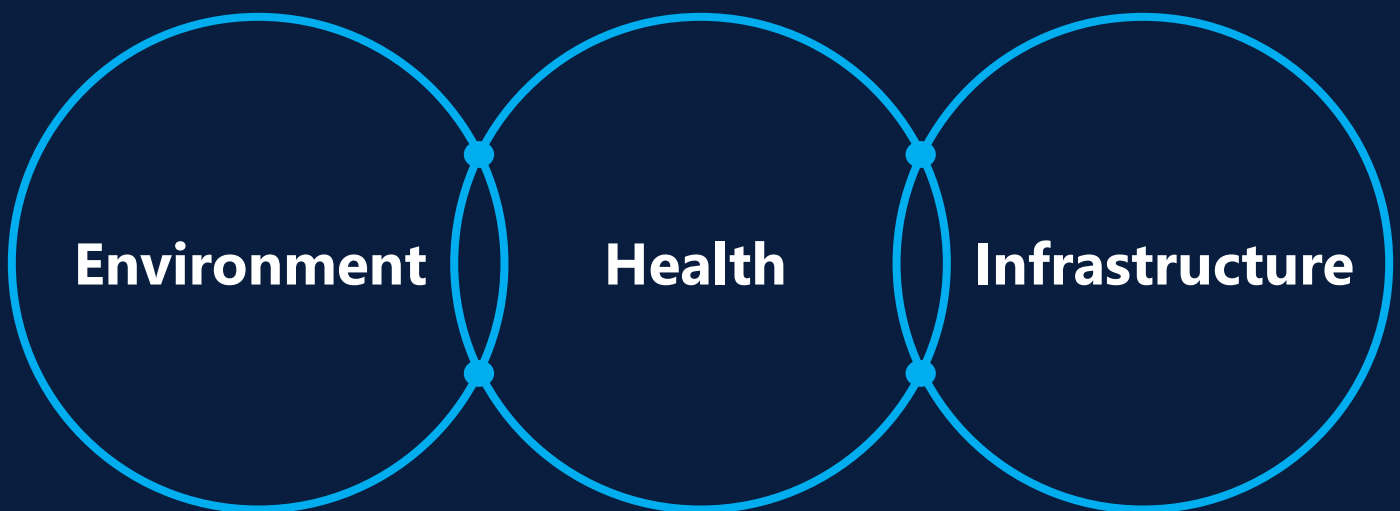
Implement sustainable waste and water management to prevent health risks.





Integration

Public health planning in Exmouth must align environmental sustainability with health objectives. By leveraging natural and built assets, the Shire can foster resilience, equity, and wellbeing, ensuring that both ecosystems and infrastructure support long-term community health.





Community Health Behaviour & Risk Factors



**Mental
Health**



**Harmful
Alcohol
Use**

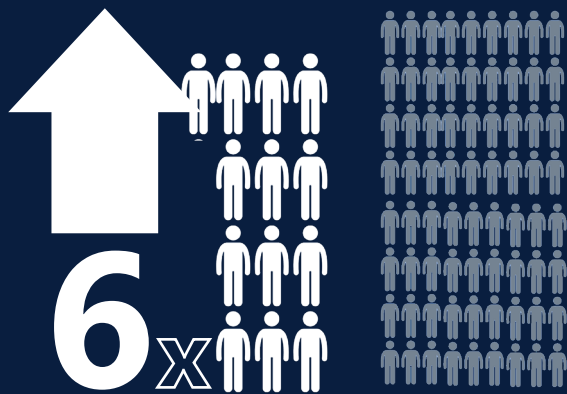


**Environmental
Health
Concerns**



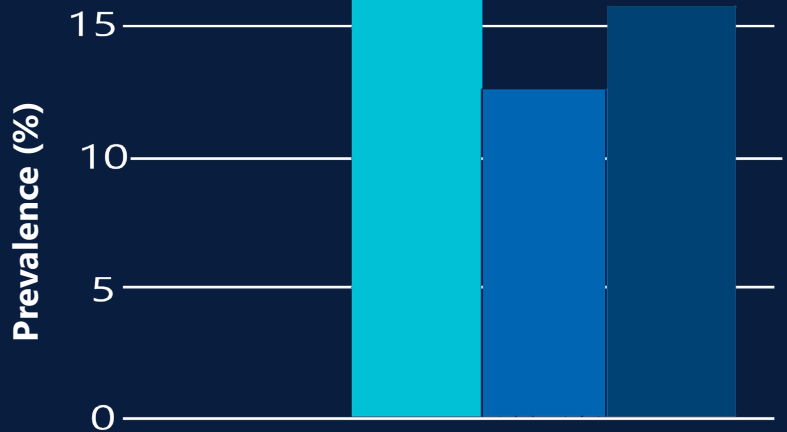
**Social
Isolation**

Mental Health



Seasonal population growth

Exmouth's population swells from ~3,000 to 18,000 during tourist seasons, placing strain on local health services. Residents report long wait times and limited continuous care, contributing to increased stress and anxiety. [\[Source\]](#).



Prevalence (%) of mental health conditions by sex, 16 years and over, Shire of Exmouth, 2020.

● Female ● Male ● Persons

Suicide rates in very remote WA areas are more than double those in major cities, highlighting vulnerability in regions like Exmouth. [\[Source\]](#).

Harmful Alcohol Use

17%

Of WA adults binge drink

While fewer young people are drinking, of those who reported drinking in the last week,



drank at levels considered high-risk for adults.



25.9%

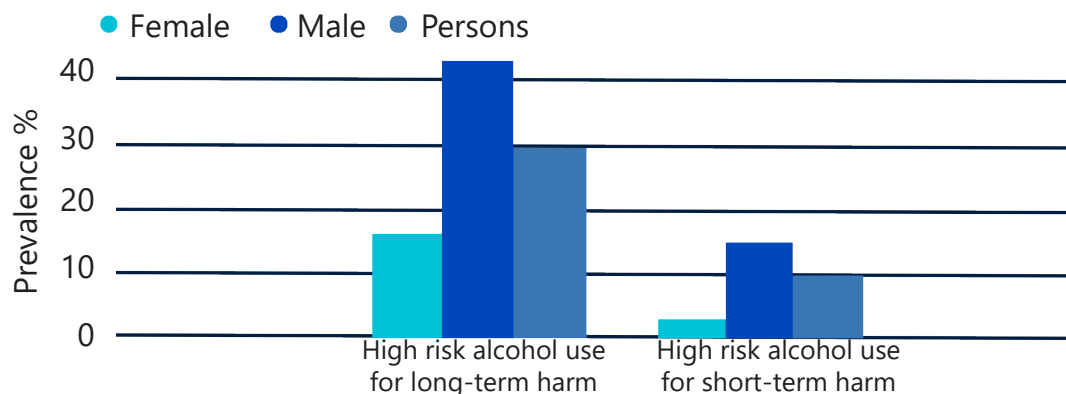
Western Australians drank alcohol in quantities that placed them at risk of injury, at least once a month in 2019.

Statewide, approximately 17% of WA adults report binge drinking (4+ drinks for women or 5+ for men in a single session)—a level consistent with national averages. [\[Source\]](#).

Early alcohol initiation is a concern: More young people in WA are choosing not to drink alcohol. Over the last 20 years, alcohol use among young people aged 12 to 17 years old has significantly decreased (from 74% in 1999 to 41% in 2017). [\[Source\]](#).

Harmful Alcohol Use

WA alcohol use prevalence across age groups, illustrating patterns of risky consumption. 2020 health profile from Department Of Health.



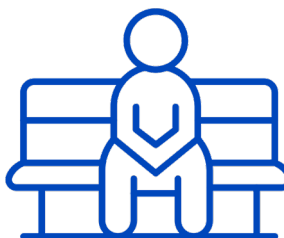
Social Isolation

25.9%

of Australians are experiencing loneliness

[\[Source\]](#)

Among Western Australians aged 65+, 36.2% live alone, indicating elevated risk of social isolation.

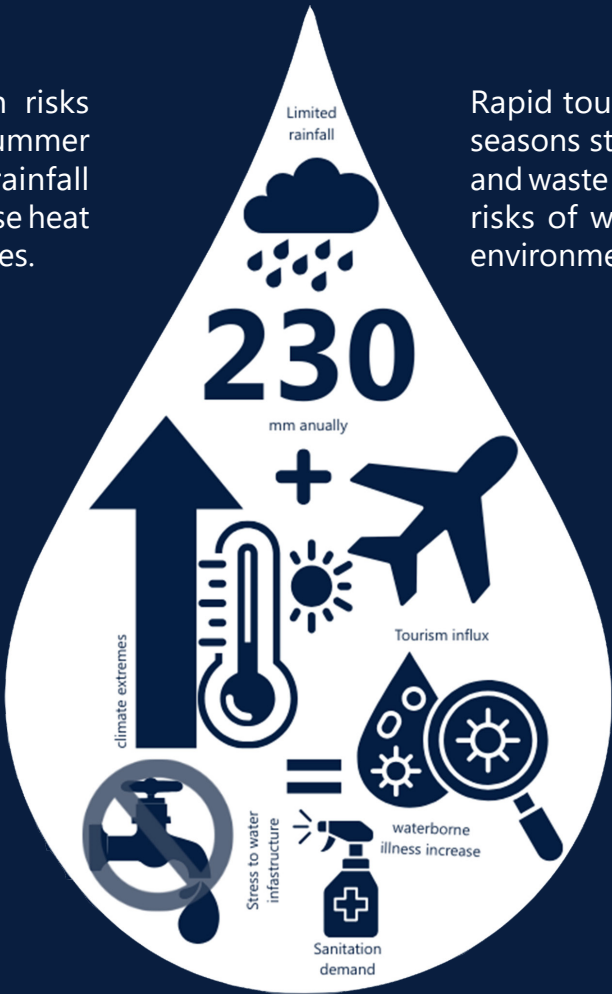


Social isolation and loneliness can harm both mental and physical health and may affect life satisfaction. They are concerning issues in Australia due to the impact they have on peoples' lives and wellbeing



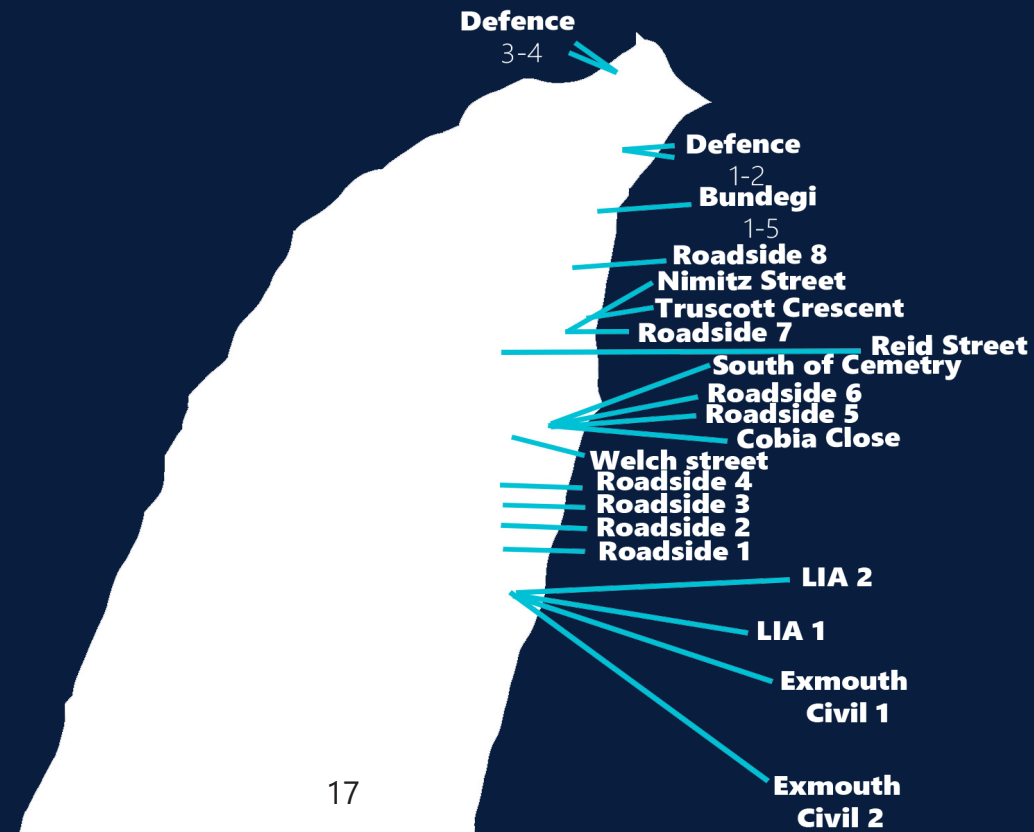
Environmental Health Concerns

Exmouth faces public health risks from climate extremes: high summer temperatures and limited rainfall (≈230 mm annually) can increase heat stress and vector-borne diseases.



Rapid tourist influx during peak seasons strains water, sanitation, and waste infrastructure—posing risks of waterborne illness and environmental contamination.

Ongoing monitoring of water quality, sanitation, pest control (e.g., mosquitoes), and waste management is critical.



Health Status Profile

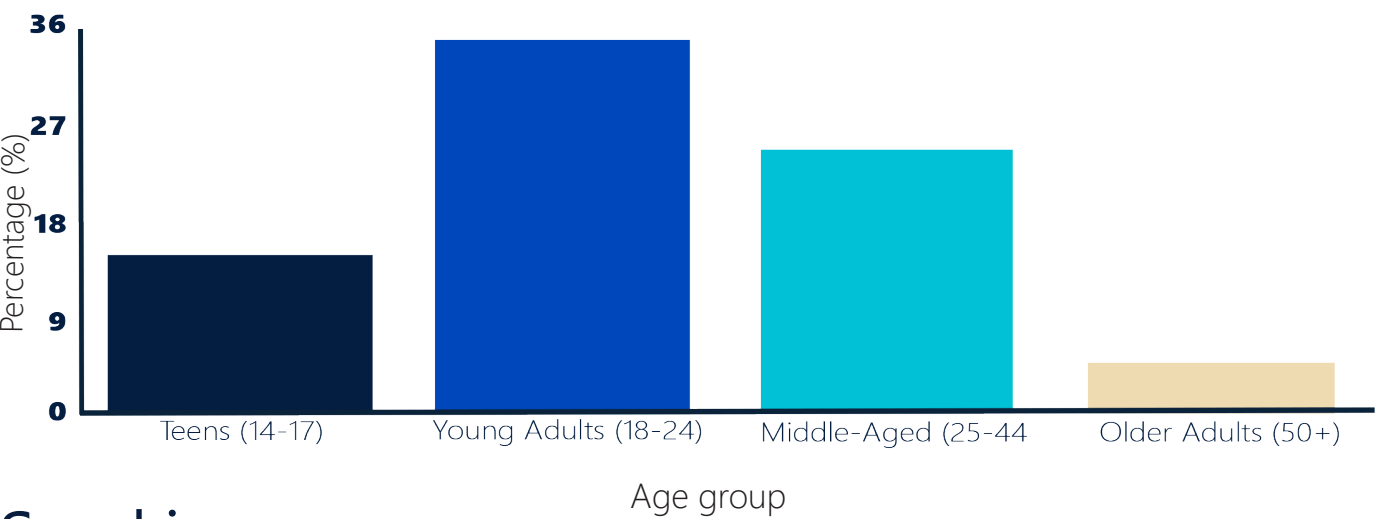
Drug Use

Around **16–18%** of Australians aged 14+ report past-year illicit drug use; in WA, it's approximately **15–17%**, with remote/regional areas in WA showing slightly higher rates. [\[Source\]](#), [\[Source\]](#).

Emerging WA trends highlight significant methamphetamine use ("ice") in regional areas, although Perth's IDRS surveillance shows varying use among people who inject drugs [\[Source\]](#), [\[Source\]](#).

Cannabis is the most commonly used illicit drug in WA, followed by increasing use of methamphetamine and cocaine in regional areas. [\[Source\]](#), [\[Source\]](#).

Illicit Drug use by age group Australia



Smoking

In WA, **~11%** of adults were current smokers in 2022. [\[source\]](#), [\[source\]](#)
Daily smoking is more

prevalent in remote WA: **20%** in remote/very remote vs **7%** in major cities. [\[source\]](#), [\[source\]](#).
The WA Health and Wellbeing

Surveillance System confirms regional smoking rates exceeding the WA average. [\[source\]](#), [\[source\]](#).

Prevalence (%) of current smoking by sex, 18 years and over, Shire of Exmouth, 2020

Category	Prevalence (%)	Estiamted Number	RSE (%)	WA prevalence (%)	Comparison to WA
Current Smoking					
Females	14.8	169.0	23	9.7	higher
Males	18.7	224.0	21.4	11.9	higher
Persons	16.8	393.0	22	10.7	higher

Alcohol Use

73% of WA residents aged 14+ consumed alcohol in the past year; **~26%** engaged in risky single-occasion drinking (5+ standard drinks monthly). [\[Source\]](#), [\[Source\]](#).

In WA regions like Gascoyne (including Exmouth), per capita annual alcohol use is 14.9 L, equating to ~3.3 standard drinks/day—higher than the WA average of 2.6 drinks/day. [\[Source\]](#)

In rural and remote areas, individuals are ~1.4x more likely to exceed alcohol guidelines than in major cities. [\[Source\]](#)

Regional West Australians' alcohol use is particularly high

Region	Per capita consumption	Standard drink equivalent (per person per day)
Kimberley	16.1 litres	3.5 standard drinks
Gascoyne	14.9 litres	3.3 standard drinks
Goldfields	14.9 litres	3.3 standard drinks
Esperance	14.7 litres	3.2 standard drinks
Augusta-Margaret River-Busselton	14.2 litres	3.1 standard drinks
Pilbara	12.3 litres	2.7 standard drinks
State Average	11.9 litres	2.6 standard drinks

Overweight & Obesity

In 2022:

26% of children and adolescents aged 2-17 were living with overweight or obesity.

66% of adults aged 18 and over were living with overweight or obesity. [\[source\]](#).

Rural/remote australians experience elevated obesity rates, often above the national average. [\[source\]](#), [\[source\]](#).

Prevalence (%) of overweight and obesity by sex, 5 years and over, Shire of Exmouth, 2020.

Category	Prevalence (%)	Estimated number	RSE (%)	WA prevalence (%)	Comparison to WA
Obesity					
Females	40.7%	546.0	9.5	32.2	higher
Males	40.3%	574.0	9.6	31.6	higher
Persons	40.5%	1,120.0	9.5	31.9	higher
Overweight					
Females	26.6%	356.0	8.7	31.4	lower
Males	35.8%	510.0	7.5	38.7	lower
Persons	31.3%	866.0	8.0	35.0	lower





How the Plan was Developed

The Shire of Exmouth's Public Health Plan was developed through a structured, staged process aligned with the State Government's public health planning framework. The project commenced with **pre-planning and evidence gathering**, including establishing governance, engaging Toyah McCarthy Consulting, reviewing demographic profiles, auditing health infrastructure, and aligning with the State Public Health Plan. This was followed by **community and stakeholder engagement**, which involved staff workshops, induction packs, and a six-week community consultation survey supported by focus groups and event-based engagement. Insights from these activities informed **draft plan preparation**. Engagement data was analyzed and actions were refined through workshops with the internal working group and early feedback from the Department of Health. The draft plan then progressed to **endorsement**, undergoing Executive and Council review, public advertising for comment, and final adoption at an Ordinary Council Meeting. Finally, the plan was published on the Shire's website and submitted to the Department of Health, with a **monitoring and evaluation framework** established internally to guide ongoing reporting and continuous improvement.

Community Consultation



Engagement and communications plan



Internal staff workshops, stakeholder workshops



Six week public survey



Targeted meetings with clubs, groups, stakeholders, working groups

Community consultation was a central component in developing the Shire of Exmouth's Public Health Plan, ensuring the voices of residents and stakeholders shaped its priorities.

The process began with a detailed Communications and Engagement Plan, followed by staff workshops and induction packs to build internal awareness.

A six-week community survey was launched online and promoted at local

events, complemented by targeted focus groups and meetings with community service organisations, existing working groups, and key stakeholders to capture diverse perspectives.

This inclusive approach provided valuable insights into local health needs, behaviours, and priorities, which informed the development of actionable strategies within the plan.



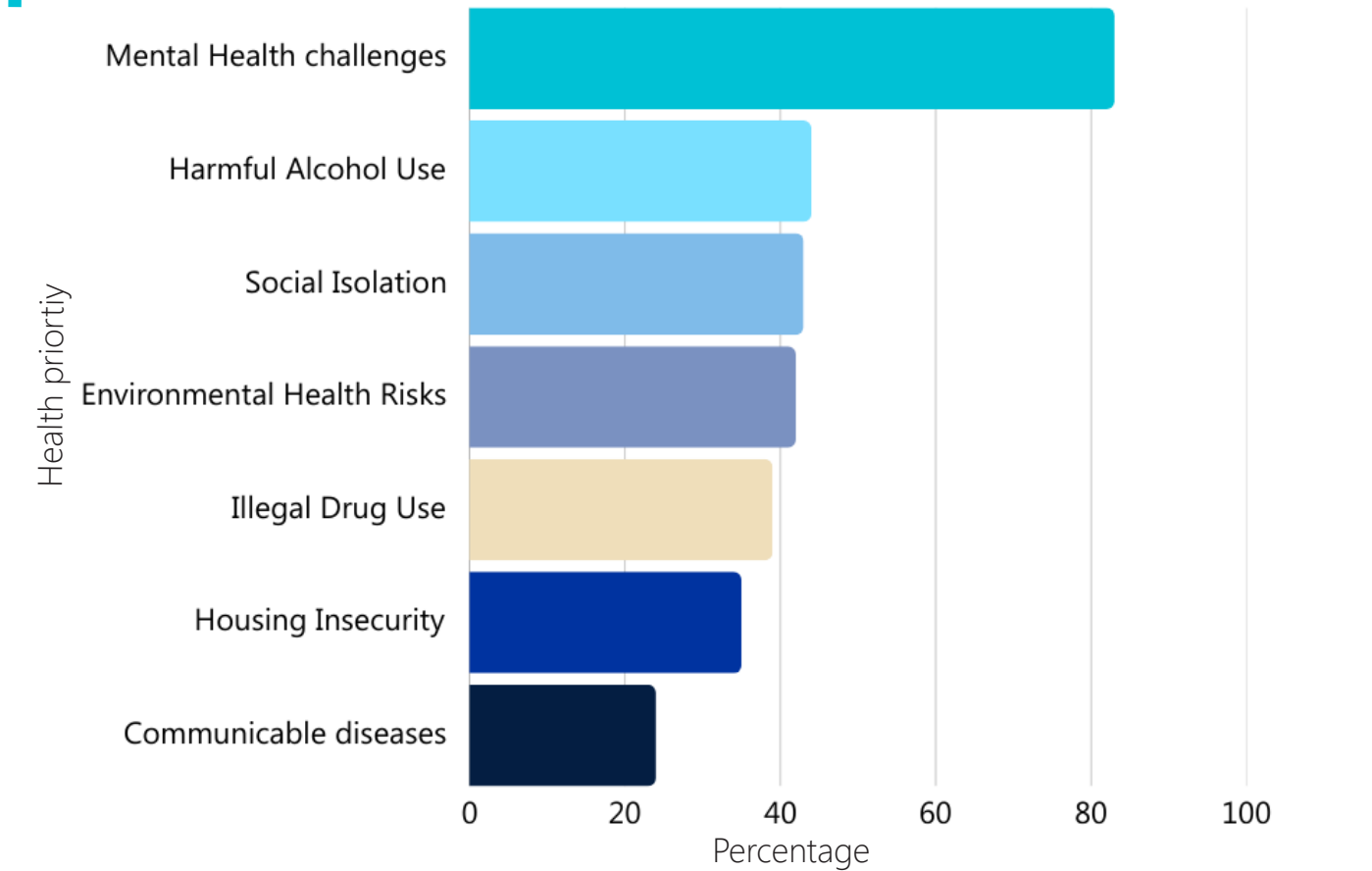
Community Health Priorities

The community consultation survey revealed clear priorities for health and wellbeing in Exmouth. Mental health challenges emerged as the most significant concern, identified by 83% of respondents, reflecting stress, anxiety, and depression as pressing issues. Social isolation was the second-highest concern (43%), highlighting

the need for initiatives that foster community connection. Environmental health risks such as water quality, mosquito control, and wastewater management ranked third (42%), emphasizing the importance of infrastructure and preventive measures.

Substance-related issues also featured prominently, with illegal drug use (39%) and harmful alcohol use (44%) identified as major challenges. Housing insecurity (35%) and communicable diseases (24%) were additional concerns, pointing to broader determinants of health

Top health issues
Mental health challenges (stress, anxiety, depression) were the most significant concern, followed by social isolation, environmental health risks, and substance use.



Additional Observations

Barriers
Limited access to health services and the cost of healthy options were the most common obstacles to healthy living.

Alcohol Use
Most respondents drink weekly, with some reporting 4–6 nights per week. Smoking prevalence is low overall, but daily smokers exist.

Physical Activity
82% of respondents meet the recommended 30 minutes of daily activity, with many active 5–7 days per week.

Implications for the Plan

These insights reinforce the need for strategies that:



Prioritise Mental Health

offering support and social connection programs.



Remove barriers

Improve access to affordable health services and healthy lifestyle options.



Provide support

Address harmful alcohol use and substance-related harms.



Movement

Promote active living through infrastructure and community programs.

As a local government, the Shire of Exmouth is one of many stakeholders contributing to the determinants of Exmouth community's health and wellbeing. The Shire role is shaped by the needs identified through community consultation; movement promote active living through infrastructure and community programs. and formulation of strategies including this Public Health Plan. This ensures that actions are impactful, collaborative, and aligned with the aspirations of the community as outlined in the Strategic Community Plan 2023-2033.

Delivery of this Plan will be supported by strong and ongoing partnerships with the Department of Health Chief

Health Officer, WA Country Health Service, local community service providers, community organisations and other relevant State Government departments and stakeholders.

The Shire recognises that improving public health outcomes is a shared responsibility and will work collaboratively to align local actions with State priorities, access relevant guidance and expertise, and contribute to a coordinated approach to public health planning and reporting.

Reporting and evaluation

The Shire will adopt a practical and ongoing approach to reporting and evaluation to ensure the Plan remains relevant, responsive and effective.

Progress will be reviewed annually and reported on as legislatively required to Department of Health. The Shire will utilise existing reporting frameworks and processes to monitor implementation, track achievements and identify opportunities for improvement.

This will enable regular reflection on what is working well and where adjustments may be needed. In line with legislative requirements, the Public Health Plan will be comprehensively reviewed every five years, at which point it will be updated and replaced to reflect emerging priorities, new evidence and the evolving needs of our community.

The Shire's Role

The Shire of Exmouth's public health priorities are closely aligned with the directions of the State Public Health Plan 2025–2030 as identified below:

Across all priorities and actions, the Shire is guided by the overarching objectives of Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing, and equity and inclusion, ensuring a strong focus on cultural respect, fairness and improved health outcomes for all members of the community.

The Public Health Plan 'Strategic Alignment' is based on the Shire of Exmouth Strategic Community Plan 2023-2033



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1

Priority 1: Inclusive and connected communities

Supports the State priority to **promote** strong, connected communities and healthier environments.

2

Priority 2: Active and Healthy Communities

Aligns with the State priorities to **prevent** chronic disease, communicable disease and injury, and to **enable** partnerships that support health and wellbeing.

3

Priority 3: Healthy and Resilient Environments

Reflects the State priority to **protect** communities against public and environmental health risks, strengthen emergency management, reduce disaster impacts and respond to the health effects of climate change.

Priority 1 Inclusive and connected communities

State Public Health Plan alignment

Promote: Foster strong, connected communities and healthier environments.

Shire of Exmouth actions Our actions to achieve Priority 1

Priority 2 Active and Healthy Communities

State Public Health Plan alignment

Prevent: Reduce the burden of chronic disease, communicable disease and injury.

Enable: Leverage partnerships to support health and wellbeing.

Shire of Exmouth actions Our actions to achieve Priority 2

Priority 3 Healthy and Resilient Environments

State Public Health Plan alignment

Protect: against public and environmental health risks, effectively manage emergencies, reduce disaster impacts and lessen the health impacts of climate change.

Shire of Exmouth actions Our actions to achieve Priority 3

- 1.1.** Actively promote positive mental health and wellbeing messages in the community. E.g. Act, Belong, Commit partnership.
- 1.2.** Deliver a range of events and programs that are accessible and encourage social connection, inclusion and participation.
- 1.3.** Promote the Youth Centre and Shire's library programs, to deliver youth programs directly to promote health and wellbeing messages to young people.
- 1.4.** Facilitate events and activities that promote and encourage physical activity . e.g. Walking Group. Fun runs, trails.
- 1.5.** Encourage a range of free or subsidised physical activity programs and/or events at Shire facilities and public spaces.
- 1.6.** To actively promote the Shire's existing trails and walking routes.
- 1.7.** Develop relationships with Aboriginal Community Control Organisations (ACCO) to share key public health messages prepared by ACCOs.

- 2.1.** Encourage active transport and recreation by promoting safe, accessible and well maintained footpaths, end of trip facilities, walking routes and trails throughout the Shire.
- 2.2.** Engage with the community to raise awareness about the benefits of healthy and sustainable food choices and practices on staying healthy.
- 2.3.** Upgrade existing smoking signage at all parks and reserves to include smoking and vaping messaging.
- 2.4.** Work in partnership with community groups, clubs and organisations to deliver and support mental health and alcohol and other drug awareness and education initiatives.
- 2.5.** Deliver and promote alcohol and smoke-free events and activities for Shire organised programs, activities and events.
- 2.6.** Promote awareness of falls and early intervention strategies to reduce falls and injuries among senior population, using existing State Government promotional resources.
- 2.7.** To strengthen partnerships and advocacy with State and regional health providers to improve community access to primary and mental health care within the Shire.

- 3.1.** To uphold and enforce Local Government statutory responsibilities under the WA Public Health Act 2016, ensuring the protection of public health across the Shire.
- 3.2.** Continue the Shire's mosquito management program through monitoring, control measure and community education to prevent mosquito borne illness.
- 3.3.** Deliver and support preventative measures that build community resilience by facilitating education and participation in initiatives addressing environmental health risks, climate impacts and communicable diseases, prioritising vulnerable populations.
- 3.4.** Promote and strengthen dust mitigation education and strategies to community, business and industry.



Adopted by Council 30 June 2026 (CD 06-0626)