

# Media Release

**The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP**

Leader of the House

Minister for Health

Minister for Health Infrastructure

Minister for Ambulance Services



Friday, 19 April 2024

## CHAMPIONING COMMUNITY VOICES IN THE LATROBE VALLEY

The Allan Labor Government is making sure locals across the Latrobe Valley remain central to public health in the region, as the role of the Latrobe Health Advocate concludes after six successful years of community engagement.

Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas today thanked the Latrobe Health Advocate Jane Anderson and her team for their dedication to improving health outcomes in the region – having been established in 2018, following the 2014 Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry to provide a trusted and independent voice for locals.

Ms Anderson's important work has involved more than 400 community conversations with 924 locals, participating more than 1,500 events and regularly communicating with around 1,000 stakeholders about community concerns.

From working with the local community, experts, researchers, and policy makers Ms Anderson has helped improve access to general practitioner and palliative care services, develop more accessible transport, improve community engagement in projects for the transitioning energy economy, improve mental health and address social isolation.

A localised focus to health will remain with the Department of Health supporting the Latrobe Advocate to transfer key functions to the Gippsland Region Public Health Unit (GRPHU) – allowing this important work to continue and better integrate with the wider public health network.

Formed in 2020 to support the localised management of COVID-19, local public health units now have a much broader remit – working with the Department of Health to keep their communities healthy as part of a decentralised model that reflects changes in the delivery of healthcare across Victoria.

Public health units use local knowledge, community-based relationships, and direct engagement to effectively tailor and deliver public health initiatives and respond to incidents and issues.

The GRPHU also deliver programs for chronic disease prevention and health promotion activities via partnerships with local organisations in community health, women's health, local government and Primary Health Networks.

The GRPHU will now work alongside the Gippsland Primary Health Network, Latrobe Valley Authority and Latrobe Health Assembly to deliver community engagement and communication for the Latrobe Valley.

### Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Mary Anne-Thomas

*"Jane Anderson has been a fearless advocate for the Latrobe Valley – I want to thank her for her dedication to championing the health and wellbeing needs of locals as we work to ensure the legacy of her work continues."*

*"During the pandemic we established local public health units, including one for the Gippsland region – the units are now permanent, helping us deliver the best health outcomes for communities across Victoria."*

### Quotes attributable to Latrobe Health Advocate Jane Anderson

*"I am grateful to have had the opportunity to contribute to the changes that have been occurring in the Latrobe Valley."*

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*“The community voice is far more influential than in the past, service providers are working closer together, and services are being designed in response to people's experiences. There is still more to be done and I will work with the Public Health Unit and others to ensure community engagement and systems change remains a priority.”*