

Media Release

The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP

Leader of the House

Minister for Health

Minister for Ambulance Services



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NEW PROGRAM TO BUILD HEALTHIER VICTORIAN COMMUNITIES

The Allan Labor Government is making nutritious food more accessible to Victorians – putting fresh produce and healthy eating first for families across the state.

Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas today visited the Merri Food Hub in Glenroy to officially launch the new \$6.5 million VicHealth Local Partnerships for Food First program.

The initiative will establish nine partnerships with community and health organisations to build healthier, fairer and more sustainable local food systems for communities in Colac, Mitchell Shire, Frankston and Mornington Peninsula, Merri-bek, Bass Coast, Ballarat, Melbourne's west and the state's north east.

In Melbourne's north, the Merri-bek Community Food Alliance will expand its work helping local families access affordable and healthy food.

The funding will support the Merri Food Hub to run fresh food markets in Glenroy and Fawkner, alongside cooking playgroups for preschoolers and their families – making it easier for households to access and enjoy nutritious meals together.

The playgroups were also previously supported through the \$4.8 million *Growing Healthy Communities* VicHealth program and teach children about sustainable food practices using locally grown produce – skills they can take home and share with their families.

While in Ballarat, the local council will partner with Phoenix P-12 College and community organisations to provide nutritious school meals made with locally sourced products through a volunteer network.

On the Bass Coast, the South Gippsland Food System Alliance will back local farmers, and in Colac, a community partnership project will turn unused school land into a community-run farm.

The Local Partnerships for Food First program supports the goals of the *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023–27* which prioritises healthier eating by increasing access to affordable and nutritious food – with a particular focus on boosting fruit and vegetable consumption across the community.

The plan makes health prevention the priority for improving the health and wellbeing of Victorians, by taking collaborative action across all levels of government, health sector partners, organisations and communities.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas

"Everyone deserves access to fresh, affordable and healthy food – that's why we're investing in local food partnerships that make it easier for Victorians to eat and live well."

"These grants are helping communities across Victoria grow stronger local food systems – supporting families, local growers and community organisations to put fresh produce and healthy habits at the heart of everyday life."