



SHIRE OF COCOS (KEELING) ISLANDS

PUBLIC HEALTH PLAN

2026 - 2031



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Message from the Shire President

Welcome to the Shire's Public Health Plan. This represents a major milestone for our local government as the inaugural five-year health strategy developed by the Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

Ensuring our community needs are met requires seamless collaboration between the Federal Government, the Indian Ocean Territories (IOT) Administration, and Local Government, as each tier provides distinct services and infrastructure. Within this collaborative framework, the Shire retains direct oversight of issues affecting our immediate local areas. Minimising the impacts of public health hazards across our islands therefore demands a highly unified, coordinated approach.

Life expectancy in Australia ranks among the highest globally—thanks to historical advancements in infectious disease control, hygiene, sanitation, medical care, and safer environmental conditions—the challenges we face have evolved. Today, chronic non-communicable conditions, including heart disease, stroke, and various cancers, have emerged as the leading causes of avoidable mortality for Western Australians.

The Council of the Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands is deeply committed to protecting and promoting the health of both our residents and visitors. This Public Health Plan 2026 – 2031 explicitly identifies our local health needs and establishes Council's core priority areas for the next five years.

To prevent these public health dilemmas, the Shire takes active measures by integrating health considerations directly into urban planning and community services. We focus on creating environments that facilitate physical activity, support access to affordable and healthy food, emphasise shade and sun protection, uphold our statutory health protection duties, and design the built environment to reduce injury risks.

Our Strategic Community Plan serves as the foundational blueprint for meeting the current and future aspirations of our community. Reviewed on a regular basis, it provides the overarching framework that guides our funding and resource allocations.

Executive Summary

The purpose of this Public Health Plan (PHP) is to protect, improve, and promote the health and wellbeing of all residents and visitors across the Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands. Developed using an evidence-based framework, this plan acknowledges and responds to the unique environmental and geographical dynamics that shape life on our islands.

The establishment of this strategy relied on an extensive consultation process designed to align existing municipal priorities with community needs. This included working directly with Shire staff to isolate local public health risks, gathering advice from key institutional stakeholders regarding the challenges facing their clients, and integrating localised health data.

Through this comprehensive process, 14 distinct public health priorities were identified:

- Promoting the localised cultivation and consumption of healthy food.

- Enhancing food security and ensuring reliable access to high-quality fruit and vegetables.
- Mitigating coastal impacts and preventing flooding risks on Home Island.
- Safeguarding drinking water quality in close partnership with the Water Corporation.
- Advocating for improved transport links to the islands and enhanced transit between the two primary islands, particularly during evening hours, to support social and physical activities and foster respectful relationships between residents.
- Advocating for enhanced general medical and mental health services.
- Establishing designated smoke-free zones within local parks and outdoor public areas.
- Creating targeted programs and activities for young people to alleviate boredom and encourage meaningful social connections.
- Improving and expanding recreational facilities to ensure all community members have access to physical activity opportunities.
- Raising community awareness regarding the health impacts associated with smoking, vaping, and substance use.
- Providing lighting infrastructure on public ovals to facilitate nighttime games, sports, and community activities.
- Seeking funding and advocating for more adequate, sustainable housing infrastructure on both islands.
- Upgrading and maintaining dedicated walking tracks.
- Continuing to manage localised environmental risks, specifically white ant (termite) activity in buildings and community wasp encounters.

To address these 14 priorities, targeted strategies and action statements have been mapped across three core strategic pillars: Environmental Health Protection, Chronic Disease Prevention, and Enhanced Community Lifestyle. Each action statement is directly linked to performance indicators to ensure transparent monitoring. The Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands is dedicated to fostering a healthy, sustainable environment. Every Shire department contributed to the development of this plan and will remain actively involved in executing the Public Health Plan 2026 – 2031.

Acknowledgements: The Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands extends its sincere appreciation to the internal and external individuals, community members, and partner organisations whose input and support were vital to the development of this Plan.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 What is Public Health?

As defined under Western Australia's *Public Health Act 2016*, public health focuses on the wider health and wellbeing of the collective community. It represents:

"...the combination of safeguards, policies and programs designed to protect, maintain, promote and improve the health of individuals and their communities and to prevent and reduce the incidence of illness and disability." (State Public Health Plan for Western Australia, 2019)

This plan is a statutory requirement under the *Public Health Act 2016*. It outlines how our local government will address community needs by focusing heavily on promoting, protecting, and improving health outcomes while actively working to prevent disease.

By evaluating baseline health data and incorporating stakeholder and community feedback, this plan establishes clear municipal priorities. The Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands Public Health Plan 2026 – 2031 will guide the Shire's health agenda over the next five years, operating under a social model of health to protect and improve community wellbeing.

1.2 Objectives

- **Promote:** Foster strong, connected communities and healthier, more supportive environments.
- **Prevent:** Reduce the systemic burden of chronic disease, communicable disease, and injury.
- **Protect:** Safeguard against public and environmental health risks, effectively manage emergencies, mitigate the impacts of disasters, and lessen the health implications of climate change.
- **Enable:** Bolster public health systems and workforce capabilities, while leveraging strategic partnerships to support long-term health and wellbeing.

2.0 Health and Wellbeing in the Indian Ocean Territory

2.1 Self-Reported Risk Factors

Modifiable lifestyle factors are critical due to their direct relationship with preventable, chronic conditions. Proactively managing these risk factors can substantially lower the incidence and severity of chronic disease across the territory.

In 2009, Western Australia's continuous Health and Wellbeing Surveillance System (HWSS) captured baseline public health risk factors within the Indian Ocean Territory for adults (aged 16 and over) and children (aged 15 and under):

- **Vegetable Consumption:** More than four in five adults (85.6%) and two in five children (41.9%) did not consume the recommended daily serves of vegetables.

- **Fruit Consumption:** Nearly half of the adult population (45.4%) and approximately one in three children (29.5%) fell short of the recommended daily fruit intake.
- **Alcohol Use:** Nearly half of the adults (44.8%) who consumed alcohol did so at levels that risked long-term harm.
- **Physical Inactivity:** More than half of all adults (56.3%) and nearly half of all children (44.2%) did not engage in sufficient physical activity. The adult inactivity rate was significantly higher than the Western Australian state average (48.3%).
- **Hypertension:** One in five adults (21.9%) reported living with high blood pressure, a proportion significantly higher than the state average (17.0%).
- **Obesity:** One in three adults (33.1%) and 8.1% of children recorded height and weight measurements classifying them as clinically obese.

While certain risk factors across the Territory closely mirrored broader state trends without statistically significant variances, their prevalence remains a priority for local intervention because these behaviours represent highly modifiable risk factors for chronic conditions.

2.2 Socioeconomic Index for Areas (SEIFA)

The Australian Bureau of Statistics' Socioeconomic Index for Areas (SEIFA) measures the relative level of socio-economic advantage or disadvantage within a community based on metrics such as income, educational attainment, and unemployment rates. The index is structured around a national average score of 1,000; lower scores indicate higher levels of relative disadvantage, while higher scores indicate a relative lack of disadvantage.

Metric Indicator	Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands Value
Index of Advantage/Disadvantage Score	994
Rank within Australia	395
Rank within Western Australia	83

Socio-economic advantage is defined by access to material and social resources, alongside the capacity to participate actively in society. Conversely, disadvantage incorporates a range of Census-derived characteristics; a low SEIFA score typically reflects factors such as higher unemployment, lower household incomes, a higher proportion of residents with limited English proficiency, lower formal qualification rates, or a higher density of single-parent families.

A high score on the index does not automatically imply a high level of absolute advantage, but rather a distinct absence of disadvantage. Public health research consistently establishes a link between lower SEIFA scores and poorer health outcomes. While the overall ranking for the Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands sits relatively close to the national average, the baseline score of 994 confirms that pockets of distinct socio-economic disadvantage exist within the local government area. These

localised variations must be carefully considered when planning public health and wellbeing interventions.

3.0 Developing the Shire's Public Health Plan

Public health delivery operates across three core functional components:

- **Health Protection:** The regulatory management of human environments and behaviours to safeguard health. This includes preventing, identifying, and managing outbreaks of communicable diseases, alongside minimising health risks within the built environment.
- **Health Promotion:** The process of empowering individuals and communities to increase control over, and improve, their own health. Examples include targeted public education campaigns (such as smoke-free initiatives), falls-prevention programs, and physical activity strategies.
- **Disease Prevention:** Direct interventions designed to reduce the incidence and prevalence of disease or injury. Examples encompass infant and child health screenings, the enforcement of rigorous food safety programs, and national cancer screening registries.

The development of this Plan was further informed by complementary corporate strategies that support community wellbeing, including the Shire's Disability Access and Inclusion Plan, Positive Ageing Plan, and Local Planning Scheme.

The formulation of the PHP relied on data analysis, localised research, broad community and stakeholder engagement, and strategic priority setting. The foundational steps included:

- Project planning and scoping.
- Data analysis and strategic review.
- Evaluation of demographic profiles and SEIFA data.
- Review of existing Shire plans, local laws, and corporate policies.
- Assessment of current and emerging global, national, and state health priorities.
- Analysis of localised historical complaint and environmental health data.
- Community and stakeholder consultation.
- Establishment of long-term evaluation and monitoring strategies.

3.1 Consultation Framework

Community Survey: Distributed in both English and Cocos Malay to ensure total accessibility, made available to all residents in hard copy and online via the Shire's website.

Stakeholder Survey: Administered to key government and non-government agencies operating within the health, social services, and community wellbeing sectors, including the Indian Ocean Territories (IOT) Administration, the Cocos Keeling Islands Community Resource Centre (CRC), the Cocos (Keeling) Islands Police Service, and Cocos (Keeling) Islands Health Services.

The community and stakeholder consultation process has now been completed. Feedback received through the consultation process was reviewed and considered in the finalisation of the Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands Public Health Plan 2026–2031.

3.2 Priority Setting

The Public Health Plan 2026 – 2031 has been finalised following the completion of community and stakeholder consultation. Feedback received through the consultation process was considered in finalising the Plan, which is presented to Council for formal consideration and adoption.

4.0 The Shire's Role in Public Health and Wellbeing

Local governments hold critical regulatory enforcement responsibilities regarding health protection, mandated under state legislation including the *Public Health Act 2016*, the *Building Act 2011*, and the *Food Act 2008*, alongside all associated subsidiary regulations and standards.

Shire personnel execute a broad range of direct operational roles, including the delivery of public health education, sport and recreation programming, the maintenance of public parks and transport infrastructure, food safety monitoring, potable and recreational water quality sampling, vector control to mitigate mosquito-borne diseases, and tobacco and vaping compliance activities. Concurrently, broader local government functions, such as statutory land-use planning, exert a significant indirect impact on public health outcomes.

While Council is dedicated to protecting and promoting community health, it recognises that public health is a whole-of-government responsibility. Although the Shire acts as the primary facilitator of this Plan, successful implementation depends on sustained collaboration with all sectors of government, local service providers, community organisations, and the public. This collective approach is essential to positively influence health outcomes for residents, workers, and visitors across the territory. It must also be noted that localised budgetary parameters will naturally dictate the scale and pace at which certain identified programs and activities can be operationally deployed by Council.

5.0 Links to the Shire's Community and Business Plans

The Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands operates within a Strategic Planning Framework aligned with the Western Australian Department of Local Government's Integrated Planning and Reporting (IPR) Framework. This structure comprises a Strategic Community Plan, a Corporate Business Plan, and a supporting suite of Informing Strategies.

The Shire's Strategic Community Plan captures the community's long-term aspirations and future vision, established through extensive community engagement. This overarching plan organises community outcomes into four core pillars:

- **Environmental:** The community expresses a profound connection to the natural habitat—specifically our marine environments, foreshores, and beaches—while identifying coastal erosion and tidal inundation as critical areas of environmental concern.

- Cultural: Residents express deep pride in the unique heritage, cultural tapestry, and diversity of the islands, desiring expanded recognition and preservation of Cocos (Keeling) Islands' history through education, oral storytelling, and cross-cultural initiatives.
- Social: The community emphasises the importance of fostering a cohesive, safe, and positive environment to live and conduct business, acknowledging the essential role played by local community groups and volunteer networks.
- Economic: The community notes the vital importance of local education, professional training, schools, Shire-sponsored capacity building, and apprenticeships in driving economic sustainability and local employment opportunities.

The Corporate Business Plan operates in parallel with the Strategic Community Plan, translating community aspirations into specific operational commitments and deliverables. Within this Integrated Planning and Reporting context, the Public Health Plan 2026 – 2031 serves as a key Informing Strategy, ensuring that health priorities directly inform corporate resource allocations and financial investments.

6.0 Strategies and Pillars

At the State and Territory level, the Department of Health focuses primarily on the regulation and management of environmental risks within the natural and built environments that influence community safety. These areas encompass food safety, water quality assurance, asbestos management, tobacco control, safe chemical and pesticide applications, communicable disease surveillance, emergency management, and vector control.

In tandem, environmental regulatory frameworks govern broader impacts on public health, including noise pollution control, air quality monitoring, waste management practices, and macro-environmental factors such as climate change adaptation, sustainability, and biodiversity protection.

To protect and enhance community health at the local level, the Shire focuses its strategic delivery across two core operational tracks:

- Healthy Built and Natural Environments: The Shire is committed to developing neighbourhoods and public spaces that intrinsically promote positive health outcomes. This includes supporting safe local housing, robust waste management, high-quality recreational spaces, active dual-use transport paths, and advocating for enhanced local food security.
- Community Safety, Health, and Wellbeing: The Shire works to protect community safety and empower individuals by facilitating mental health partnerships, supporting targeted substance misuse campaigns, maintaining robust local disaster recovery frameworks, and championing the stability of clinical infrastructure.

7.0 Strategies / Action Plan Matrix

Strategy	Action Statement	Prevent	Expected Outcome	Time Frame	Shire's Role
Food Safety	Continue and expand the current food safety education program and provide food proprietors with a range of tools and training options to increase skills, knowledge, and understanding of 'best practice' food safety management techniques through face-to-face onsite training, group workshops, educational brochures, and online courses.	Foodborne illnesses	Food premises provide high-quality food to ensure the Shire's reputation as a desired visitor destination; positive relationships with food premises proprietors.	Ongoing	Lead
Healthy Eating	Educate the community about the benefits of growing fresh food locally and consuming a healthy diet; work towards developing environments that are conducive to healthy eating.	Poor nutrition	Increase health literacy among residents to create an educated community understanding the benefits of consuming a healthy diet.	Ongoing	Support State & Federal campaigns
Pest & Vector Control	Support an effective pest and vector control program with a focus on community education and capacity building.	Public & environmental health risks	Minimise the impact of mosquito-borne disease in the community by applying physical, chemical, cultural, and biological control management strategies.	Ongoing	Partner / Advocate

Pest & Vector Control	Develop and implement a 'Wasp Management Plan' in consultation with members of the community and Commonwealth Agencies to identify high-risk areas and inform treatment strategies. Conduct stakeholder consultations and review the plan annually.	Wasp attacks	A 'Wasp Management Plan' that addresses local risks to prevent nuisance; mapped notifications and analysed complaints to enable trend analysis and identify "at risk" localities, reducing overall incidents.	Ongoing	Partner / Advocate
Pest & Vector Control	In conjunction with key stakeholders, develop and implement a 'White Ant Management Plan' to identify high-risk buildings and inform structural treatment strategies.	Structural damage to buildings	Provision of safe housing; prevention of structural injury and damage during a high-wind event.	Ongoing	Partner / Advocate
Built Environment	Ensure land tenure is maintained and that sufficient housing is available for the local population on both islands.	Homelessness, overcrowding, and substandard living accommodation	Adequate, safe housing for island residents.	5 years	Advocate
Provision of Shade	Integrate adequate shade provision into relevant Council documents and policies; secure execution funding via budget allocations and grants.	Skin cancer	Promote sun-safe environments that reduce ultraviolet radiation (UVR) in the community and workplace; maintain and increase baseline shade fixtures.	5 years	Lead / Advocate
Active Living	Activate people of all ages by supporting local clubs, delivering a diverse range of programs, providing lighting to outdoor ovals to promote nighttime games, and seeking grant funding or corporate sponsorships.	Chronic conditions (cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, poor mental health)	A healthy and happy community participating in recommended levels of physical activity.	Ongoing	Partner

Active Living	Implement connected, safe footpaths and cycleways throughout the Shire; secure funding via grants/sponsorships and establish initiatives supporting long-term pathway usage.	Inactivity-related risks (obesity, poor nutrition, alcohol, and tobacco use)	Delivery of safe transport infrastructure supporting active transit and community movement.	5 years	Lead
Active Living	Advocate for better transport links between the two major islands, particularly during evening hours, to encourage shared social and physical activities between the residents of both islands.	Isolation and cultural/geographical disconnection	Respectful connections between island populations that foster a better mutual understanding of diverse cultures.	Ongoing	Lead / Advocate
Active Living	Create targeted programs and activities for young people to alleviate boredom and encourage meaningful social connections.	Youth boredom and associated antisocial risks	Active and engaged local youth demographics; stronger community bonds.	Ongoing	Lead
Asbestos (ACM) Management	Continue implementing the Asbestos Management Plan for Council assets and waste facilities; identify priority ACM settings (e.g., home renovations), provide safety information, and coordinate with Commonwealth representatives for licensed mainland disposal.	Asbestos-related illness	Sustainable and permanent disposal of dangerous ACM products off-island via mainland logistics pipelines.	5 years	Partner
Waste Management	Develop a 5-year waste management strategy for the Shire, reviewing disposal practices to ensure modern service delivery with a focus on composting, recycling, and reuse.	Groundwater contamination and pollution	Provide leadership and operational resources to ensure safe, environmentally considerate solid waste collection frameworks.	Ongoing	Lead

Tobacco & Vaping	Support initiatives aimed at smoking and vaping cessation; align with federal and state public education campaigns at the local level. Seek grant funding to raise awareness of smoke-free zones.	Chronic disease and respiratory illness	Create smoke- and vape-free environments; reduce community exposure to second-hand smoke.	5 years	Partner
Tobacco & Vaping	Continue to monitor and enforce compliance with the Tobacco Control Amendment Act 2009 across alfresco areas and enclosed public spaces; investigate expanding designated smoke-free zones via Local Laws.	Chronic disease and long-term preventable illness	Improved statistical respiratory health indicators locally; strong regulatory compliance by individuals and businesses.	5 years	Partner
Substance Misuse	Develop a management strategy to promote responsible alcohol consumption; enhance population health data collection/analysis, and foster partnerships with key agencies to enable delivery.	Alcohol-related harm, injuries, illicit drug use, and pharmaceutical misuse	Optimise community mental health profiles; protect community safety and prevent substance-induced trauma.	Ongoing	Partner
Mental Health	Identify, eliminate, and manage mental health hazards across municipal and community environments in consultation with field experts.	Psychological hazards and systemic stress	Prevent psychiatric harm and protect long-term mental wellbeing across all age cohorts.	Ongoing	Partner
Emergency Management	Review and refine Emergency Management plans in conjunction with government and non-government emergency services to ensure coordinated responses; establish Shire operational recovery procedures and maintain committee representation.	Disaster impacts and emergency infrastructure failure	Proactive emergency planning and preparation that mitigates or contains acute public health risks during an emergency situation.	Ongoing	Partner

Emergency Management	Identify vulnerable demographic cohorts at risk due to the acute effects of heatwaves, cyclones, flooding, and other natural disasters; distribute treasured preparedness information.	Negative disaster-exposure impacts on vulnerable residents	Protect lives; provide targeted, highly accessible emergency information formatted to the specific needs of at-risk groups.	Ongoing	Lead
Emergency Management	Develop a clear positioning framework regarding the Shire's explicit roles and responsibilities in the event of an emergency, building strategic partnerships with key agencies and groups.	Fragmented emergency responses	Contain public health risks quickly through a highly coordinated, multi-agency emergency response framework.	Ongoing	Lead
Climate Change	Implement mitigation and adaptation strategies to address local environmental vulnerabilities (flooding, sea-level rise, coastal erosion) while reducing the Shire's corporate environmental footprint.	Long-term climate-induced public health risks	Provide health protection for the community and build resilient local public infrastructure.	5 years	Partner

8.0 Evaluation, Monitoring & References

Evaluation and Monitoring: The Shire's Public Health Plan 2026 – 2031 will be formally reviewed on an annual basis. Progress reports will be prepared systematically in alignment with the evaluation framework outlined within this Action Plan and submitted to Council for review, tracking, and continuous strategy alignment.

References

- WA Public Health Act Handbook for Local Government March 2024, Public and Aboriginal Health Division, Department of Health of Western Australia.
- State Public Health Plan 2025–2030 (SPHP) for Western Australia.
- State Public Health Plan for Western Australia, 2019.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2021 Census of Population and Housing.
- Environmental Health Risk Scoping for Indian Ocean Territories, Ryan James, Department of Health WA.

Strategic Implementation Notes

- Regularly update health status profiles within review reports to accommodate any new public health priorities or shifting objectives, incorporating data-related suggestions raised during future public submissions.
- Continue active partnerships with regional mental health bodies to discuss and advocate for the systematic integration of localised mental health indices in upcoming iterations of the State Public Health Plan.
- Partner with relevant law enforcement and health agencies to address and include localised priorities targeting the prevention of illicit drug use and pharmaceutical misuse.
- Ensure that future interim implementation plans incorporate:
 - Measurable statistical targets, where possible.
 - An action plan that delivers actionable, short-term outcomes.
- Absolute clarification regarding the exact scope of programs the local government can operationally implement to support the core objectives.
- Develop and maintain clear, accessible reference materials mapping exactly what health services are available to partner with local government, explicitly outlining the structural roles and operational expectations of the IOT Administration, State Government, and Local Government when it relates to regional public health execution.