



We need to fix pool and library 'access gaps' in the outer suburbs.



Communities across the outer Melbourne are crying out for new aquatic centres and libraries to support our fast-growing populations.

Over one-third of Melbourne's babies and toddlers live in outer suburban areas, yet these areas don't have as many pools and libraries as inner Melbourne.

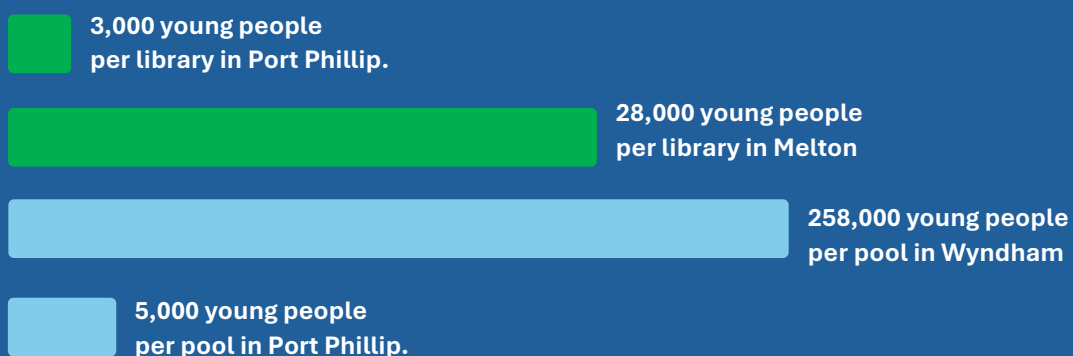
This is creating unfair 'access gaps'.

"This difference is likely to grow as populations increase," warns the Victorian Government's own independent infrastructure advisory body.

Infrastructure Victoria says these shortages are most acute in:

- growth areas to the east of Melton,
- across the northern and south-western growth areas in Wyndham,
- in most of the northern growth corridor (Hume, Mitchell, and Whittlesea), and
- through most of the south-eastern growth corridor (Cardinia and Casey)

What's worse, funding constraints and increased usage mean existing pools and libraries are showing their age. Many in need of urgent repairs.



Why are libraries and aquatic centres so important?

Learning to swim and develop a love of reading are critical for a young person's safety, education and development.

But modern pools and libraries are much more than places to go for a swim or borrow some books.

They are safe, accessible and welcoming public places that build social connectivity, foster inclusion and combat loneliness.

They support people of all ages and abilities, hosting classes, social groups and community events. In the case of libraries, these benefits are largely free.

Pools and libraries are also excellent places to co-locate other forms of critical social infrastructure, like council service hubs, health services, Neighbourhood Houses, community legal centres and others.

“Unlike many other types of social infrastructure, [aquatic recreation centres] and libraries usually operate every day of the week and almost every day of the year, providing many different health, wellbeing, and education services for people of all ages and abilities.”

— *Infrastructure Victoria.*

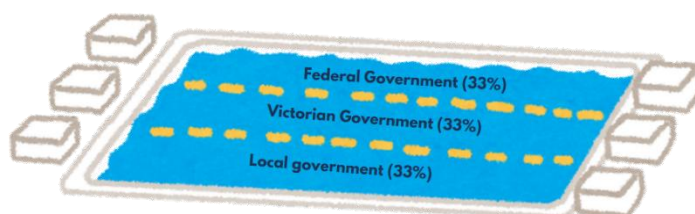
Who should pay?

Historically, the Victorian and Federal governments helped fund the development of new libraries and pools across our suburbs.

But over recent years local councils have been left to go it alone, with only ad hoc funding from the state and Commonwealth. This is unjust and unsustainable.

It's only fair the cost of new pools and libraries is split equally between the Federal Government, the Victorian Government and local councils.

A 'one third each' approach will best ensure we can respond to the needs of outer Melbourne communities and provide residents with the infrastructure they require in a timely way as suburbs continues to expand.



COMMUNITIES IN FOCUS



Tarneit's long wait

Since 2015, residents of Wyndham in Melbourne's outer west have had access to the \$54.5 million AquaPulse aquatic centre in Hoppers Crossing. The centre boasts a diverse range of facilities and activities and attracts around one million visits per year. But just north is the booming growth community of Tarneit. Its 56,000 residents do not have access to a local community swimming pool.

With the local population forecast to grow by 164% (to 131,000) by 2041, the Wyndham City Council is attempting to secure funding from the Victorian and federal governments to progress these dual projects. Without new investments, the residents of Tarneit will continue to miss out.

Total funding sought: \$150 million.



Cardinia needs an upgrade

Cardinia Life is a large aquatic centre servicing the residents of Pakenham and surrounding suburbs. Since the centre was built in 2006, the Cardinia population has more than doubled. The age of the existing facility also means maintenance costs have jumped significantly.

The Cardinia Shire says it's not financially viable to continue operating *Cardinia Life* in its current state over the long-term. A planned redevelopment will improve pools and facilities, and establish new wellness and community spaces, including a creche.

Total funding sought: \$57 million

About the OMC Pools & Libraries campaign

Our call for sustainable funding for public libraries and community pools

Outer Melbourne Councils (OMC) is advocating for a fairer and more sustainable approach to the funding of new public library and community aquatic and recreation centre infrastructure in underserved areas of Melbourne's outer suburbs.

Historically, financial contributions from the Victorian and Federal Governments have been crucial in the development of new libraries and pools in growth areas.

Over the past decade however, such ad hoc contributions have dried up, and the responsibility for funding this important infrastructure has fallen more heavily on local government. Local councils have been left to go it alone.

This has led to a growing deficiency in the availability of libraries and aquatic and recreation centres in our region, and a backlog of projects that need to commence. Outer Melbourne is now home to six of the eight most underserved metro councils for libraries (Melton, Casey, Wyndham, Whittlesea, Cardinia, Hume), and the three most underserved metro councils for aquatic and recreation centres (Wyndham, Casey, Melton).

To address this shortage of social infrastructure, OMC is calling for a commitment from all levels of

government to start a conversation about a sustainable ongoing multi-jurisdictional funding model.

We propose that new public library and community aquatic and recreation centre projects be funded equally by the Federal Government, Victorian Government, and the relevant local council. This approach will best ensure that we can respond to the needs of outer Melbourne communities and provide our residents with the infrastructure they demand in a timely way as suburbs and population continues to expand.

Noting the current backlog in required public library and aquatic and recreation centre projects that need to commence, we call on the Victorian and Federal Government to each provide an immediate \$20 million of investment to assist councils across outer Melbourne to progress planning and early works on the current backlog in required projects.

We have a funding challenge...

The absence of adequate funding to support the development of new aquatic and recreation centres and public libraries in outer Melbourne is not a new one, and the impacts of it on our communities compound each year that it remains unaddressed.

In its report *Social infrastructure in Melbourne's growth areas (2021)*, Infrastructure Victoria (IV) found that a

funding gap exists that is impacting the timely delivery of new ARCs and libraries, and that local government cannot deliver this infrastructure alone.

To address this funding gap IV identified a need for increased funding from sources outside of local government to progress the development of new facilities and made recommendations in support of this.

Over three years on, commencing development on new facilities continue to face significant barriers across all municipalities in outer Melbourne due to a lack of available funding outside of local government, increased cost shifting onto councils, rate capping, increasing construction costs and a tightening fiscal environment.

In addition to the need for new facilities, the quality of existing libraries and aquatic facilities varies across municipalities, including outdated library buildings and older seasonal outdoor pools. This places even further pressure on the capacity of councils to deliver the facilities their communities expect.

By example, in Mitchell Shire, the planned investment in aquatic facilities must address the need for a new facility which responds to new suburban growth in Beveridge and Wallan while at the same time completing necessary upgrades to the Shire's existing older infrastructure located in rural townships in the north.

We need to get started now...

A large number of new community aquatic and recreation centres and library projects in outer Melbourne are yet to

commence despite a substantial community need having been identified.

A better and more sustainable solution must be found to ensure that the provision of important services to local communities does not fall even further behind.

Over the next decade it has been identified that at least nine new community aquatic and recreation centres and seventeen new public libraries will be needed across outer Melbourne. The total funding required to deliver these projects is currently estimated to be more than \$1.2 billion, with some delivery of some larger projects now costed at well over \$100 million.

Pools and libraries are important to local communities

The availability of pools and libraries across outer Melbourne is vital in achieving important outcomes for our communities.

Community pools save lives

As result of population growth and urban expansion, many of our communities now lack adequate access to aquatic facilities. Our ageing aquatic infrastructure is also struggling to keep pace with demand.

Insufficient availability to community pools means that residents of outer Melbourne have more limited access to learning adequate swimming skills and understanding of water safety. With swimming lessons associated with a

significantly reduced risk of drowning, including an 88% reduction in drowning risk for children aged 1–4 who participate, it is vital that our communities achieve equitable access to an aquatic facility nearby where they live.

Swimming lessons equip individuals with critical skills, including water survival techniques, safe behaviours, and lifesaving knowledge. Meeting benchmarks, such as swimming 50 meters or performing rescue techniques, correlates with increased confidence and competence in aquatic environments, which further reduces preventable drowning incidents.

This is also particularly important for large multicultural communities and socioeconomically disadvantaged communities in outer Melbourne who are on average less likely to participate in swimming lessons.

[Public libraries improve community wellbeing and inclusion](#)

Public libraries in outer Melbourne are essential for fostering community wellbeing, social interaction and cohesion, and equitable access to resources. They offer safe, welcoming spaces where people from diverse backgrounds can connect and reduce social isolation. Through wellness programs, access to health information, and social initiatives, public libraries actively contribute to the physical and emotional wellbeing of our communities.

Outer Melbourne’s public libraries reduce barriers to accessing books, digital materials, technology, and Wi-Fi, ensuring community members have the tools they need for education and personal growth. Programs offered cater to a wide range of ages, from literacy workshops and digital skills training to job-seeking support. As community hubs, our libraries host cultural events, educational workshops, and collaborative activities, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual understanding.

With growing visitation and increasing value being provided to local communities, the case for ensuring adequate new investment in libraries across outer Melbourne is strong. It has been estimated that public libraries on average deliver \$4.30 of benefits for every dollar of investment made. This equates to hundreds of millions in benefits being realised across outer Melbourne annually.

In fact, investment in public libraries in outer Melbourne produces almost twice the significant per capita positive user and community welfare benefits compared to inner suburban library investment. This can be attributed to outer Melbourne having six of the eight most underserved metro councils for libraries, with a long-term lack of investment meaning that funding has failed to keep pace with population growth.

Image credits

Girl in purple goggles

Courtesy Unsplash/piratedea

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Girl in library

Courtesy @connectedlibraries/Instagram

City of Casey

Cardinia Life

Courtesy Cardinia Leisure/Instagram

Cardinia Shire Council

Tarneit housing

Courtesy wanderingchina/Wikimedia

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