

**LA TROBE UNIVERSITY'S ALBURY-WODONGA
CAMPUS SUBMISSION TO THE SELECT
COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND
DECENTRALISATION**

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**A Lifelong Intergenerational
Facility and Education (LIFE)
Hub in Albury-Wodonga**

ENQUIRIES

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INTRODUCTION

La Trobe University's Albury-Wodonga campus welcomes the opportunity to participate in this *Inquiry into Regional Development and Decentralisation*. This submission is supplementary to that of La Trobe University, which outlined how each of the University's regional campuses has the potential to act as a site of collaborative research activity between university researchers, industry, communities and other external organisations and thus drive regional socioeconomic development.

In this submission, La Trobe outlines a **vision for a transformational project** –the **Lifelong Intergenerational Facility and Education Hub** (the LIFE Hub) – to be established at the La Trobe Albury-Wodonga campus in regional Victoria. Building on La Trobe research into rural ageing and aged care over the past decade, La Trobe proposes to establish the Hub as a state-of-the-art indoor and outdoor physical space where people of different generations and from diverse backgrounds can interact and network in a lifelong learning environment. The LIFE Hub is an integrated model of a vibrant community and is based on La Trobe research as well as international best practice research evidence (Appendix 1 contains a summary of Australian and international evidence that demonstrates the success of similar programs, which will be utilised in designing the Albury-Wodonga Hub). The Hub will focus on older people to create a sense of belonging and purpose through interaction with each other and wider communities. It will be led by volunteers with support and active participation from La Trobe, other key stakeholders and wider community members.

The LIFE Hub would turn the Albury-Wodonga campus into a unique centre of lifelong learning with the potential to generate various opportunities for employment, training, education, research, volunteering and industry involvement in the Hume region. This ambitious project has enormous potential to improve outcomes across educational, social cohesion, economic and environmental spheres and will enhance thinking about the ways that rural and regional communities can respond to the growing ageing population. In addition, by embedding the concept of lifelong learning in the community, the project will augment regional community access to higher education and buttress regional educational outcomes and achievement as well as bridging the aged care workforce shortage.

As the proportion of the Australian population aged 65 years and over increases, so will the demand for aged care services. This demand will be even more pronounced in regional and rural Australia. La Trobe submits that instead on focusing solely on how to address the demand for increased services for the ageing rural population, **the Commonwealth Government should invest in the LIFE Hub concept that has the potential of contributing to regional economic development.** The Albury-Wodonga model can work as a proof of concept service model that can be scaled up and replicated in other regional and rural communities across Australia. The University has commenced detailed business planning, which will determine the investment that will be required to establish the LIFE Hub in Albury-Wodonga.

La Trobe's proposed LIFE Hub is aligned with this Inquiry's Terms of Reference and in particular the following clauses:

- a. best practice approaches to regional development, considering Australian and international examples, that support:
 - v. an improved quality of life for regional Australians;
 - vi. vibrant, more cohesive and engaged regional communities;
 - viii. a place-based approach that considers local circumstances, competitive advantages and involves collective governance.

KEY RECOMMENDATION

Support the establishment of the Lifelong Intergenerational Facility and Education (LIFE) Hub at La Trobe's Albury-Wodonga campus

How will the Hub contribute to regional development in Albury-Wodonga and the wider Hume region?

In addition to contributing to a more resilient, empowered and socially cohesive community, La Trobe's proposal will provide significant opportunities for regional economic development in Albury-Wodonga including:

- ⊙ increasing the profile of careers in aged care and thus addressing the significant health and social care workforce shortage particularly in regional and rural Australia. The centre could capitalise on an existing network of volunteers (who currently make up around 20% of the volunteering population – Winterton and Warburton, 2014) and thus contribute to social and economic capital in these communities.
- ⊙ forge a link with existing and future tertiary education programs in Albury-Wodonga offered by La Trobe University and Wodonga TAFE:
 - through existing course offerings such as La Trobe's Bachelor programs in Nursing and Social Work, courses offered by Wodonga TAFE (such as Horticulture, Cooking, Gardening and ICT) and the degree-diploma model offered by La Trobe and Wodonga TAFE (such as Nursing); and
 - contribute to further curriculum design at La Trobe and Wodonga TAFE thus enhancing the community's connection with the education providers in their locality and, more importantly, contribute to building community aspiration for higher education in regional Australia.
- ⊙ helping to tackle youth unemployment through volunteering, internship and other opportunities and generating linkages to education and career options relating to aged care;
- ⊙ through the promotion of active and healthy ageing, reduce the relative economic burden associated with an ageing population (for example, instead of investing money to address

illnesses associated with lack of activity or social isolation, the funds could be invested in activities that *prevent* physical deterioration);

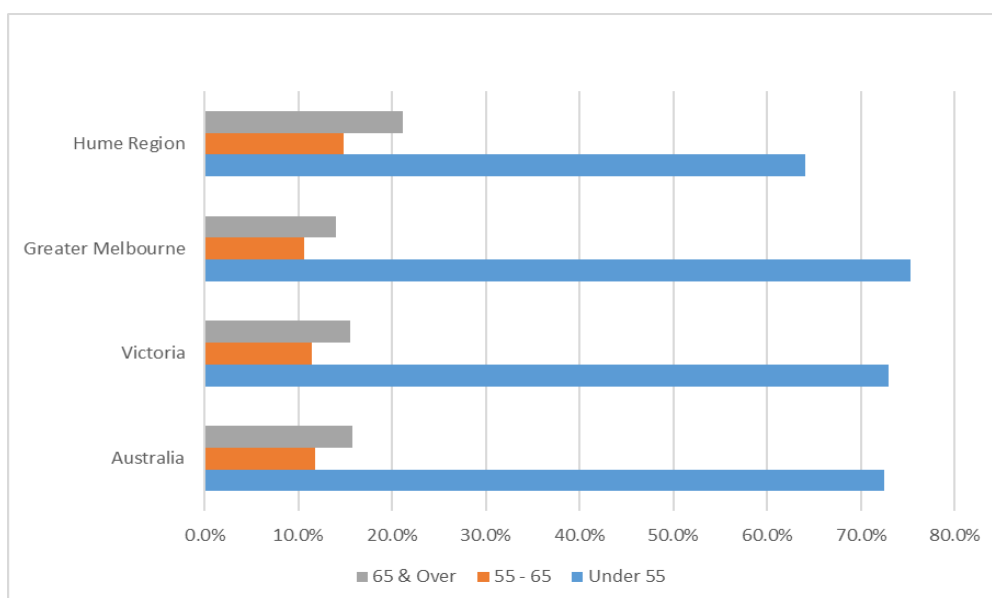
- ⊙ increasing the profile of the town as a learning and tourist destination in regional Australia, in the same way that the Hogeweyk dementia village in Holland has led to a significant economic boom for the town.

THE VISION: A LIFELONG LEARNING INTERGENERATIONAL HUB BASED AT LA TROBE'S ALBURY-WODONGA CAMPUS

As part of its strategy to contribute to the regions in which it is located, La Trobe University proposes the establishment of a Lifelong Learning Intergenerational Hub at its Albury-Wodonga campus. This Hub would enable the application and translation of evidence-based research to the wellbeing of rural, older people in Albury-Wodonga and inform research that makes a difference other regional communities locally, nationally and internationally.

The main tenet behind the Hub is to create a vibrant community for seniors to connect, network, volunteer, learn new skills, make new connections, and share their knowledge and life experience in a safe and interactive environment. The Hub space would provide an opportunity for different generations to interact and network in a lifelong learning environment. This would contribute to community resilience and cohesion while at the same time encouraging younger generations to pursue education and career options in aged care through interactions with seniors. According to the 2016 Census, the proportion of people aged 65 and over in the Hume Region (21%) is significantly higher than that in Greater Melbourne (14%) and in the rest of Australia (15.7%), reinforcing the demand for a Hub of this kind to be based in Albury-Wodonga (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Age distribution in the Hume, Greater Melbourne, Victoria and Australia (2016 Census)



The John Richards Initiative

In addition to the demographic data that indicates the need for aged care programs in the Hume region, the Albury-Wodonga campus is a logical place for the Hub as the campus also serves as the base of the **‘John Richards Initiative’ (JRI)**, the only interdisciplinary ageing and aged care research centre in Australia. The JRI was established in 2007 through a generous donation by John Richards OAM, a local farmer, with matched funding by the Victorian State Government and La Trobe University. **JRI’s four main areas of research are health services and aged care, ageing in place, workforce, and informal care and technology for older people in rural and regional communities.**

Several La Trobe research projects underpin La Trobe’s Hub proposal including:

- ⊙ **WAVE (Well Ageing Vision and Engagement)¹:** This is a whole of community partnership to explore ageing and liveability in Wangaratta. In a recent paper, La Trobe researchers highlight the importance of access to outdoor and indoor space among older people in the Hume region in staying active and engaged in later life. Connecting with other seniors as well as providing opportunities to connect with people in various age groups is deemed critical to decreasing social isolation. As the proportion of people aged over 65 in Australia continues to increase (see Figure 1), the need for policies to alleviate the economic burden associated with population ageing, such as active and healthy ageing, will become more crucial.
- ⊙ **Ageing Services and Supports in Rural Environments (ASPIRE):** This Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage funded project was conducted in partnership with the University of Queensland and the Victorian State Government and explored wellness in older people in rural settings. It examined initiatives to promote and facilitate similarly healthy environments in other places. Initiatives included developing access to important community infrastructure or transport, social phenomena such as facilitating and improving social networks, and participation and perception of ‘community’. It was shown that such initiatives can help to reduce demand for services as well as have broad flow-on benefits for the whole community.
- ⊙ **Virtual Dementia Friendly Communities (VERILY):** This Commonwealth funded project, conducted in partnership with Saskatchewan University in rural Canada, will establish virtual support for carers of people with dementia in 12 rural communities across Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia. The project will develop an integrated support network including:
 - a physical and online presence through a volunteer-led information hub to assist carers
 - a website and smartphone app that provides health service navigation and networking for carers and service providers
 - videoconferencing and webinars for carers

¹ (Hancock et al, under review)

- 🎯 **Rural Aged Care Workforce:** The Wollongong-based IRT foundation supported this project, which provided insights into the acute workforce shortage of care providers for the growing ageing population. The demand for a skilled and sustainable workforce will continue to grow while worker availability is dwindling, particularly in community aged care. Besides workforce maldistribution, the project found that the aged care workforce is itself significantly ageing compared to workers in other employment types.



Sharing the research into rural ageing and aged care with the wider community

Despite data showing the benefits of social and physical activity in health, there is a lack of resources and infrastructure available in regional and rural areas that further limits opportunities for aged people in regional communities to take part in in physical activity. The JRI carries out indispensable research into ageing and aged care research, however there is currently no means of showcasing and sharing this research with the communities who need it most – namely the ageing population in regional and remote Australia. There is no physical presence or hub to share the benefits of the research with the community. Similarly, there is a lack of infrastructure or physical places where older people can share their learning and experience with others including younger generations. Through the establishment of a Lifelong Intergenerational Hub, La Trobe University will be able to bridge this gap in Albury-Wodonga to the benefit of the entire region.

La Trobe University's Albury-Wodonga Campus

Albury-Wodonga, on the Murray River, is Australia's largest inland regional centre. This thriving region provides a wide range of employment, sporting, leisure, tourism, cultural and entertainment opportunities. The establishment of the Hub would complete the circle for this vibrant campus and provide an opportunity for different community members to interact.

Closely co-located with a number of key providers, La Trobe's Albury-Wodonga campus is well placed to host the LIFE Hub:

- ⊙ Co-location with other education facilities: The campus is located next to Wodonga TAFE, Victory Lutheran College (Prep-Year 12) and a Child Care facility. Every year, the campus hosts over 3000 students through the Schools Partnership Program (SPP), which offers a range of activities that expose students to the possibility of attending university.
- ⊙ Co-location with sports facilities, accommodation on campus, and the site of a proposed residential aged care facility.
- ⊙ Co-location with the Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre (MDFRC) that brings an environmental and sustainable living dimension to the LIFE Hub concept.



Community and industry involvement

La Trobe's proposal will be further developed following a period of community and industry consultation. The aim is for the Hub to be co-designed by community members, who would be an active participant in the sustainable operation of the Hub. With industry involvement, there could also be opportunities for corporate regional decentralisation that stem out of this project.

CONCLUSION

The novelty of our proposed Lifelong Intergenerational Hub lies in its integrated and collective learning nature, which offers opportunities for a shared translation of evidence-based research and best practice to facilitate social cohesion. In addition, the exchange of knowledge from the community through co-design of the Hub enhances the relevance of the research being produced to meet the needs of the participating rural and regional communities. The creation of the Hub has significant potential to generate local employment and volunteering opportunities, contribute to the retention of talent in regional areas, and deliver economic growth and positive social outcomes in regional and rural communities.

La Trobe is able to provide further information, underpinning research and detailed business plans to the Select Committee on Regional Development and Decentralisation on this proposal.

Appendix 1: Local and international models that underpinned the Lifelong Learning Intergenerational Hub concept

There are local and international examples that serve as successful models for the Lifelong Learning Intergenerational Hub concept. A growing trend in social science research is to build living labs for researchers to engage with end-users as part of a co-design approach and to disseminate research. Current examples include:

1. Eco-system Mens Shed (e.g. Kooweerup Mens Shed): Mens Shed programs promote health and wellbeing of men who participate by supporting their engagement in social activities which they find meaningful (Ballinger, Talbot, & Verrinder, 2009).
2. Sensory garden (e.g. Caladenia Nursing Home in Kilmore): Sensory gardens and other types of horticultural activities have been shown to improve overall wellbeing and drive other outcomes such as improved sleep and a reduction in falls (Gonzalez & Kirkevold, 2014).
3. Community and kitchen gardens: Engaging in horticultural activities improves the health and wellbeing of older adults (Gonzalez & Kirkevold, 2014). In addition, community gardens can improve nutritional outcomes (Strout, Jemison, O'Brien, Wihry, & Waterman, 2017). Examples of similar community kitchen gardens in schools include Stephanie Alexander (<http://www.stephaniealexander.com.au/about-me/kitchen-garden-foundation/>) and Jamie Oliver's Ministry of Food. Food also facilitates social participation in the community.
4. Outdoor eatery (e.g. Menindee): An outdoor kitchen beside the community garden to create a recreational hub where people of all ages can meet to enjoy social activities, reducing isolation and encouraging healthy activity. Cooking skills are essential across generations and can facilitate social cohesion.
5. Older persons gym (Belza, 2007): Regular physical activity has a wide range of benefits for people of all age groups. However, older adults often feel intimidated when using fitness facilities and are concerned about slowing others down in group exercise. As such, they would prefer individually tailored physical activity programs (Costello, Kafchinski, Vrazel, & Sullivan, 2011).
6. Arts and crafts programs (e.g. Townsville Community Legal Centre): Community-engaged arts programs have been demonstrated to improve overall perceived health, experience of pain, and sense of community (Phinney, Moody, & Small, 2014).
7. Technology (e.g. Heathcote Health): Computer programs can be used to improve older adults' digital literacy and access to health information.
8. Connection with surrounding neighbourhoods (e.g. Hogeweyk and Tillburg dementia villages in Holland)²: These villages highlight how a community can be engaged to support each other and bridge stigma associated with ageing and old age.

² <https://hogeweyk.dementiavillage.com/en/>
<https://www.dementiavillage.com/projects/building-bridges-old-young/>