



# REGIONAL COOKING MODEL

Healthy Loddon Campaspe (HLC) partnered with Bendigo Foodshare to explore how cooking programs across the Loddon Campaspe region could be strengthened, coordinated and expanded. Rather than creating a new cooking program, the project focused on understanding what already works, identifying common challenges, and developing recommendations for a Regional Cooking Model that builds on existing strengths and resources. Through a comprehensive evidence review, stakeholder engagement and resource assessment, the project established a strong foundation for future investment in cooking programs that improve food literacy, social connection, wellbeing and food security.



## THE CHALLENGES

Cooking programs play an important role in supporting healthy eating, food security and community connection across the region. However, organisations delivering these programs often face barriers including:



Limited kitchen facilities and equipment



Short-term funding arrangements



Workforce and facilitator shortages



Time and capacity constraints within community and school settings



Difficulty engaging priority populations

At the same time, the region already had several well-established cooking resources, including the Cooking Together Manual, Cooking for Change Train-the-Trainer Manual and Grow Cook Share Manual. Stakeholders identified a need to better align and utilise these resources rather than develop another standalone program.

## WHAT WE DID

HLC commissioned Bendigo Foodshare to undertake a regional consultancy that included:



A review of existing HLC cooking program evaluations and resources.



Interviews with 18 organisations across schools, health services, community houses and multicultural organisations.



Structured feedback on existing resources, particularly the Cooking Together Manual.



Development of recommendations for a Regional Cooking Model that could be adapted across a variety of settings.

# KEY FINDINGS

Despite the diversity of programs and participants, several consistent themes emerged. Successful cooking programs are:

Hands on and practical

Social and inclusive

Facilitated by skilled and supported staff

Flexible enough to meet local needs

Purpose-driven, and often centred around shared meals

Stakeholders also highlighted that people often attend cooking programs for much more than cooking skills. Programs create opportunities for social connection, reduce isolation, build confidence and support mental wellbeing. Shared meals were identified as one of the most valuable components of successful programs.

## OUTCOMES

The project resulted in a comprehensive recommendations report outlining the foundations of a Regional Cooking Model that:

- Supports different delivery settings and participant groups.
- Aligns existing regional resources into one coordinated framework.
- Reduces duplication of effort.
- Promotes cultural inclusion and participant choice.
- Enables delivery in locations with limited kitchen infrastructure.
- Provides pathways for organisations with varying levels of experience and capacity.

Rather than creating new manuals, the project recommended strengthening and aligning existing resources, ensuring organisations can access the right tools for their context while maintaining consistent quality across the region.



## REGIONAL IMPACT

The project engaged organisations from across the Loddon Campaspe region and captured insights from cooking programs delivered in schools, community houses, health services and multicultural organisations. It established a shared understanding of best practice and created a roadmap for strengthening cooking initiatives into the future.

Importantly, the work demonstrated that effective cooking programs do not require purpose-built kitchens or expensive infrastructure. With the right resources, facilitation and support, cooking activities can be successfully delivered in a wide range of settings, increasing opportunities for participation across rural and regional communities.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The Regional Cooking Model provides a practical framework for future growth. Recommendations for Stage 2 include developing shared tools and templates, creating a regional "Quick Start" package, piloting the model in diverse settings, and building facilitator capacity through training and support.

By building on existing expertise and resources, the model positions the Loddon Campaspe region to strengthen food literacy, social connection and food security outcomes while ensuring cooking programs remain sustainable, inclusive and adaptable for years to come.