

# **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE**

## **Inquiry into Vaping and Tobacco Controls**

Shepparton – Monday 15 April 2024

### **MEMBERS**

Sarah Connolly – Chair

Nicholas McGowan – Deputy Chair

Michael Galea

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Bev McArthur

Danny O’Brien

Aiv Puglielli

Meng Heang Tak



**WITNESS**

Louise Mitchell, Director, Community, Greater Shepparton City Council.

**The CHAIR:** I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee Inquiry into Vaping and Tobacco Controls. I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we are having this meeting today and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging and any that may be joining us today. I would also like to welcome any members of the public in the gallery this afternoon.

All sessions today taken by the committee will be protected by parliamentary privilege. However, comments repeated outside of this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check, and verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website.

I very much welcome you, Louise Mitchell. Thank you for taking the time to come and talk to us today. I will invite you to make an opening statement of no more than 5 minutes after which time committee members will just ask you some questions. If you cannot answer the questions, it is not a problem. We are more than happy if you take them on notice.

If we just quickly go down the line with a quick introduction, maybe just name and electorate.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Aiv Puglielli, North-Eastern Metropolitan.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Lauren Kathage, the Member for Yan Yean.

**Michael GALEA:** Hi there. Michael Galea, Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan.

**The CHAIR:** I am Sarah Connolly, the Chair and the Member for Laverton.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** Mathew Hilakari, the Member for Point Cook.

**Meng Heang TAK:** Meng Heang Tak, the Member for Clarinda.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. I am going to hand over to you, please.

**Louise MITCHELL:** Thank you very much, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. Our formal responsibilities at Greater Shepparton City Council in relation to tobacco and e-cigarettes are twofold: firstly, as I am sure you are aware, with respect to the public health and wellbeing requirements under the relevant legislation, the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act*, and secondly, with respect to our involvement with the regulation of tobacco and e-cigarettes under the *Tobacco Act 1987*. I think I can contribute a few insights relating to some of the broader environmental concerns as well and waste and resource recovery, so I will talk to each of those three aspects in turn briefly.

In terms of the public health impacts and response, our municipal public health and wellbeing plan has identified the harmful impacts of tobacco and e-cigarettes as a focus area for quite some time. This plan provides local impetus for the focus areas of the broader Victorian public health and wellbeing plan, which of course includes that focus as well on reducing the harms of tobacco and e-cigarette use and notes obviously the rise in the prevalence of e-cigarettes in particular. Cross-sectoral work via our public health and wellbeing committee locally aims to improve outcomes in those areas. We work particularly closely with VicHealth, GV Health and the Goulburn Valley public health unit – and I believe some of those organisations may be appearing before you as well.

We understand via the local public health unit that the percentage of adults who smoked daily in 2021 was greater than that in the wider Victorian community and that the percentage of women smoking or vaping during their pregnancies in Greater Shepparton is significantly higher than for the wider Victorian community as well. I have got some specific statistics here if that is helpful from the Victorian public health and wellbeing outcomes and also from the 2021 census results. These stats relate to around 2021. I believe there is more

research planned to be undertaken in the local secondary schooling system shortly, with some findings to come forward in 2025, so there will be more information to come.

In recent years we have taken a few different steps to reduce particularly the impact of vaping locally, having information sessions online for parents to teach them about the harms of vaping and to help identify the signs that someone's child might be vaping and what you might do about it. They are just some examples of the steps that have been taken.

Just another observation on public health matters: we have observed that the Quit programs in particular are really geared towards the over-18s, perhaps recognising that that is the legal age to be purchasing tobacco and e-cigarette products. But we know that the secondary schooling cohort is a really major growing demographic of vaping as well, so we would sort of be keen to see some of those interventions targeting the under-18 cohort more explicitly. Also I want to note that targeting parents will continue to be really important. We are aware, for example, that many children and teenagers who vape – their parents will either be tobacco smokers or e-cigarette users as well. So again, we are really supportive of the actions being taken by the Department of Education and other education providers locally as well.

I will just move on now to our role in regulating tobacco locally. You would be aware of course of our responsibilities under the *Tobacco Act* and regulations to do with the storage of tobacco products: making sure they are not visible to the public, that appropriate signage is displayed, that the price board is displayed – plain packaging and colours of cigarettes and education of staff in tobacco retailers for the sale of cigarettes to under-18s. Some of our other duties also relate to dining venues and making sure that there is compliance with restricted-smoking areas – smoking outdoors in specific areas, that sort of area of activity – investigating complaints, recording and collating data relating to inspections and breaches and reporting illicit tobacco and e-cigarette breaches as well.

Just briefly on illicit tobacco, our role is minimal. Where concerns exist, we make reports to Crime Stoppers and border force, and just note that we do not receive a return call or any follow-up there so sometimes that would be something that would be helpful for the environmental health team to undertake their role and to understand what follow-on has occurred there.

I will go to just a couple of the challenges that exist in this space that you might consider. There is a lack of a licensing or registration system for tobacco retailers. Through our environmental health team, we appoint authorised officers. They tend to need to rely on their local knowledge to identify tobacco retailers and also venues where smoking may be present. This could be potentially an avenue for some reform. Also, the selling of gifts in tobacco stores is something our team has identified as a little bit of a lure perhaps for people to come into the stores who might not otherwise do that, particularly minors. If some of the products in those stores are targeted to young people, it could attract them in and open the door a little bit to the use of these products.

I would say resources generally around meeting our compliance obligations can be a little bit of a challenge, as it is across many public sector organisations' resourcing. To get the best outcomes for the community in line with the regulatory frameworks can be a challenge. Some of the balance, I suppose I would put it, between the ability of retailers to persist through compliance action and our ability to continue to enforce is something that our team was keen to pass on to you. Probably a lack of avenues to escalate some concerns to law enforcement bodies – so perhaps some of the relationships with other parts of law enforcement could be strengthened as well.

Then I am just going to finish up with a few comments on cigarette sales to minors program. The team were very positive about that program, that it has a good intent and it has a really good effect when it can be undertaken. It is a little bit of a tricky program to resource in that we have to recruit minors into the program. They need to be from neighbouring municipalities. That has got some complexities around just the logistics of organising travel, some child safe considerations, but on balance it is a program that is supported and has yielded some really good results. Once an issue is identified through that program, it tends not to recur among the retailers that our team have been involved in.

I will finish up on waste and resource recovery. We know that the introduction of smoke-free zones has been extremely positive. There is really great public support for that initiative, and we are very supportive too from a public health perspective. We do see quite a bit of littering around public spaces that are just outside those

zones. They are certainly pushing smokers out, but the littering issues do persist a little bit and our resource recovery team is investigating some drop-off points in particular for e-cigarettes and vape products. We are aware that the cartridges and the materials that heat the vapour in the cartridges are not great to turn up in plant, like streetsweepers. Ending up in landfill is an issue. I have heard reports that fires can present from those chemicals in landfill as well, and potentially there are some contamination concerns. The waste team are investigating what options might exist for disposal points. We understand some municipalities have taken that path. We are at an early stage in investigating that, and we are certainly seeing these items discarded through the municipality as well, as you can imagine. A little bit like cigarette butts, we are now starting to see the vaping pods and cartridges. They are also really tricky to separate in landfill. They are small items, so cross-contamination in the landfill is an issue as well. Like all the other aspects of vaping, particular issues are emerging and they should be more fully understood in years to come. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** That is great, Louise. Thank you. It was a really interesting last point. I am going to throw over to Aiv for the first question.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you for coming in today and for your presentation. I would like to begin by just clarifying – you referred to statistics that you have regarding prevalence and use and the like in the area. Have those been provided to the committee already?

**Louise MITCHELL:** They have not.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Are you able to do that on notice possibly?

**Louise MITCHELL:** Absolutely, yes.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** That would be really helpful, thank you.

**Louise MITCHELL:** Yes, sure thing.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Purely because you mentioned them. You spoke about monitoring and compliance and the council's role in that jurisdiction. Could you maybe go into a bit more detail about the monitoring visits that do occur within the region?

**Louise MITCHELL:** I can go into a little bit more detail. I probably may need to take some of these on notice.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Yes. What does it look like? What is a standard monitoring visit?

**Louise MITCHELL:** Sure. Essentially, it involves our environmental health officers visiting a premises and ensuring that those key requirements are in place, so the signage is visible that they do not sell tobacco to under-18s, that the items are hidden and the tobacco products are not on view, that any tobacco products have the plain packaging. These are the sorts of things that, if they are not in place, the process like a lot of regulatory processes begins with a bit of an education process and really I guess counselling the tobacco retailer and then follow up to make sure that those issues are addressed and then you move through more stringent enforcement from there.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Yes, sure. Thank you. In terms of the monitoring visits that occur, how are the locations for those visits selected?

**Louise MITCHELL:** At a broad level in terms of the tobacco retailers that the team are aware of. In terms of a specific schedule of visits, it reflects that sort of risk-based approach, so if there are known issues obviously they become a priority for attention. Where there is really good compliance demonstrated, the team would be less likely to follow up really regularly. But if you want more specifics around how that is arranged, that would need to be on notice as well.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** That is okay, thank you. I am hearing that escalation of reports in the community that then prioritises the location to be investigated. Okay, thank you. In terms of these monitoring visits themselves and these checks for compliance, would you characterise that they have been successful as a deterrent in finding bad behaviour?

**Louise MITCHELL:** Look, I think they are useful and necessary. I think I have already touched on some of the limitations perhaps where a retailer is determined not to comply or a dining venue is determined not to comply and I guess the penalties in the system are not strong enough a deterrent to dissuade them.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you. In your view, and you may have gone into this in some detail earlier, the system of monitoring and compliance, particularly the council's role within it, how would you say that system could be improved?

**Louise MITCHELL:** I think the main point here is really around the registration system and maybe strengthening some of the regulatory arrangements. As I mentioned, there is no register or licensing system for those providers at the moment, so that would be one obvious possibility.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Sure. Thank you. For those in the community who are tobacco smokers, with these incoming changes in regulation and legislation, is there a scenario that you could foresee where it may be easier for them to remain smoking cigarettes, for example, rather than approaching a GP who is willing to take on new patients and then give a prescription for a vape?

**Louise MITCHELL:** I do not feel that I am able to answer that question.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** All good. No worries at all.

**Louise MITCHELL:** Thank you.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** That is all right. I just thought I would ask anyway. My last question is just with regard to council. You spoke somewhat about the role that it is currently playing, particularly in compliance and enforcement within the structures that we have. In your view, what would the ideal role be for local government in minimising the harm of vapes and tobacco in the community?

**Louise MITCHELL:** I think for me that key role is around public health and supporting the ecosystem of public health providers and those who have a role to play around public health and wellbeing to really try and address the issues upstream so that we are not seeing such prevalent use in the community. Obviously, we would all love to see a day when we are not having to have enforcement and compliance activity in this space, but I think that is probably unrealistic. I think the key focus for me is on public health.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks. Lauren.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Thank you, Chair. Thanks so much for joining us and for sharing the information that you have. It is quite stark what you are saying about the rates in Shepparton compared to other parts of the state or the state average, particularly for pregnant women; that is really concerning. But it is great to hear that it sounds like you consider yourself a bit of a connector and that you are sort of taking that preventative approach, as we have just heard, and looking at all the different factors that lead into the take-up. I just wanted to ask a little bit around the federal government's non-therapeutic vape prohibition. Is that helping councils at all to reduce harm? How do you see that? If it is a team sport, how do you see that fitting into getting outcomes?

**Louise MITCHELL:** I think any intervention at any level of government that can reduce the incidence of vaping is a positive development.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Okay. There are no specific ways that it plays into how you operate or connect different organisations?

**Louise MITCHELL:** I can take that on notice if you would prefer a more detailed response.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** That is fine. I was just after some reflections. You spoke a bit about how local knowledge is how people learn about where they can purchase illegal products or where they are likely to go. Then at the same time we know that the *Tobacco Act* has rules around illegal advertising. With the Act as it is, what sort of challenges are there for you in enforcing compliance with the Act? And then looking more broadly at that word-of-mouth factor, where do you see a role for council there?

**Louise MITCHELL:** I would like to take that on notice, please.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Okay, sure. Thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Lauren. Michael.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Chair. Thanks for joining us today, Ms Mitchell. You talked a bit about the role that the environmental health officers, or EHOs, play. I was quite interested to hear that. I want to pick apart a few things from that. Firstly, how many EHOs does Greater Shepparton employ? You may have to take that on notice again or just give a rough –

**Louise MITCHELL:** I may need to. Look, it is not a massive number. It is less than 10, but to give you an exact number I would need to come back to you.

**Michael GALEA:** Sure. Thank you. Is there much engagement between your team here and neighbouring councils as well to track issues that might go across council boundaries?

**Louise MITCHELL:** Typically there are some. Again, I will come back to you on the specifics. Thank you.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you. You cited a recurring issue where they will report something to border force but then you do not actually hear back. How does that inhibit continuing to provide that regulatory oversight if you are not hearing back?

**Louise MITCHELL:** Well, it provides a little bit of an information gap in terms of follow-up with the specific provider. If you are trying to move through that spectrum of enforcement of compliance – through education through to enforcement – it just leaves a bit of an information gap about where next to intervene or what the outcomes might have been if criminal activity may have been suspected.

**Michael GALEA:** Which will then help you, if you do know that, to do further regulatory action in other areas or –

**Louise MITCHELL:** That is right.

**Michael GALEA:** You mentioned licensing of tobacco retailers as well, noting of course that just a few weeks ago the Premier announced a Victorian tobacco licensing scheme. I would imagine that would have a big impact on your ability to ensure that compliance. Would that be correct?

**Louise MITCHELL:** Yes. Thank you.

**Michael GALEA:** Great. The detail of that is still being worked through so it is a timely time for us to be talking to you. You mentioned gifts being sold in tobacco shops as an issue. Is that something that you would like to see as part of tobacco regulation of those stores – what they can and cannot sell beyond just tobacco?

**Louise MITCHELL:** I think it would certainly reduce the attraction into the stores for some in our community.

**Michael GALEA:** Yes, interesting. Are there any other things that the state government should be particularly considering right now as it is formulating what those regulations look like for the scheme – any other things that Greater Shepparton would want to have in that process that tobacco retailers would have to comply with in order to operate?

**Louise MITCHELL:** I think that continued focus on compliance with the existing regulations and programs like the cigarette sales to minors program, but I would again like to see that really strong investment in and continued focus on the public health preventative side of the issue as well.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you. I am assuming in the same way that you would like reports back from border force, such a regulator – we do not know what it is going to look like exactly yet, but for tobacco shops from the state level, I am assuming you would like that feedback from them as well back to your EHO team so you can keep track of emerging trends.

**Louise MITCHELL:** Yes, ideally.

**Michael GALEA:** Great. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Michael. Mathew.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** I really appreciate you being here today and the effort that you put into the presentation. I might just start with a few questions. I suspect I am going to have the answer to it already, but we will go to it. I was just going to check if there is a database or knowledge of how many shops in the Greater Shepparton area actually sell cigarettes and vapes currently?

**Louise MITCHELL:** I would have to check that for you and come back. If it is held within council, I would have to check and come back.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** Yes, no worries. We may or may not have a database that exists there, but we talked a little bit about local knowledge. Do you know how often shops that sell cigarettes or e-cigarettes might be visited on, say, an annual or four-year term, or what sort of period they might be checked, or is it just more of an ad hoc program?

**Louise MITCHELL:** I will come back to you on that, I am sorry.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** No, no. That is okay.

**Louise MITCHELL:** But my primary responsibilities relate to public health, and I have been briefed on the environmental health and regulatory side of things, so I am going to have to collect a lot of this information that you are most interested in and come back to you.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** That is totally fine. I am really happy for you to take them on notice. You may take this on notice too, in terms of breaches that have occurred for sales of cigarettes or tobacco products, do you have a rough number of how many breaches are recorded annually?

**Louise MITCHELL:** I will find out for you.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** You will find that out? Great. So we might even get a really exact number?

**Louise MITCHELL:** Yes, that is right.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** It would be great to know over the last few years as well. Maybe if you had data for the last five years just to see whether there has been a bit of an uptick or a down tick and maybe your staffing numbers over that period so that we can just understand if it is related to the staff being increased for more checks or not.

**Louise MITCHELL:** Sure. If we can access that data, we can pull it together for you.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** If it is there – that is really great. What are some of the challenges in terms of the public health side, to bring it a bit more to your expertise, in engaging particularly young people on the dangers of tobacco or tobacco products?

**Louise MITCHELL:** Well, that is a wicked challenge, isn't it?

**Mathew HILAKARI:** That is an open-ended question for you to have a bit of a –

**Louise MITCHELL:** Absolutely. Look, it is a lot of the classic issues around peer pressure. I think the availability of vapes, the fact that they may be seen as not harmful is really important as well and that they have kind of got a novelty factor. They are a little bit like some of the mixed alcoholic drinks. They are marketed differently to other tobacco products and in a way that is really appealing to young people as well.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** Could you expand a little bit on that in particular?

**Louise MITCHELL:** Yes. Obviously there are different flavours that they come in, very much again like the alcopop type of branding – not particularly marketed as an adult product and they are flavours that would appeal to young children and teenagers.



**Mathew HILAKARI:** Are you seeing an uptick in older people, so not the below-30s, taking up vaping as well, or is that not as noticeable?

**Louise MITCHELL:** Yes, it has definitely been identified as an issue locally that secondary school students are a really key cohort of concern, and the local Department of Education has been very active around working to reduce that incidence. It is absolutely a key cohort that needs attention.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** And on vaping availability, do you feel like that is predominantly near high schools and near locations where young people gather, or is it just a generalised increase across the board?

**Louise MITCHELL:** I would have to take that on notice. My sense is that it is generalised, but I could find out for you.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** When you think about Greater Shepparton's role, do you feel that councils should have an enforcement role in terms of tobacco and tobacco licensing itself?

**Louise MITCHELL:** That is a difficult question. I think we do have that very local intelligence and we have regulatory responsibility, so I can see that it has a logic to it. The responsibilities of local government are very broad, and there are a lot of public programs at different levels of government that do lean on the abilities and the proximity of local government to the community. I think it has got to be seen in that light of it is adding to a very expansive existing list of responsibilities. I think we are well placed; at the same time it needs to be properly resourced and recognised that they are not cost-neutral exercises.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** You mentioned the sales to minors program. Can you tell us just a little bit more about that? You need to hire people from outside of the local government area. Walk me through some of the program itself, and maybe take me through the practical steps of going through it.

**Louise MITCHELL:** Yes, absolutely. The environmental health team recruit young people from outside the municipality – so they will not be recognised, obviously – to go into tobacco retailers to attempt to buy products and to see which tobacco retailers are willing to engage in that trade. Then once they are identified the more typical regulatory processes come into play, so action is then taken. I believe, as I mentioned before, that there is really good success with that program. The recidivism around that program is favourable.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** So do you then go back to that store some period of time later and find that there is less of a problem?

**Louise MITCHELL:** Yes, that is right.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** Would you be able to provide us any data that speaks to that? I think that is really an important one to know.

**Louise MITCHELL:** Yes, I can certainly do that.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** You talked through some of the waste implications. I am keen to understand if the waste department at the council has any evidence of fires being produced as a result of this. My final one is on tobacco stores. You mentioned gift selling, and I know Michael ran through that a moment ago. Do you envisage tobacco retailers being much more like a liquor store, where basically the sole purpose of the store is to sell liquor? Is that how you would see it in your mind? Or what would you think is an appropriate way?

**Louise MITCHELL:** I do not have a view about how it would work. Our comments are in the context of just being able to identify the retailers that we need to engage with and if we have a regulatory role to know where they are and have a very clear regulatory framework and authority probably overseeing that role.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** So really a clear definition of what a tobacco store is and you guys really understanding exactly where it is and what it is?

**Louise MITCHELL:** That is right.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** Fantastic. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Mat. Heang.

**Meng Heang TAK:** Thank you, Chair. I am really interested in public health and preventative initiatives. Maybe part of the question has already been answered or alluded to. In terms of council, what public health campaigns or initiatives is council currently participating in to raise awareness, particularly in the growing number of high school students?

**Louise MITCHELL:** At the moment we do not have specific campaigns. We have targeted parents previously with information sessions to educate them about the dangers of vaping, what vaping is and how to recognise the signs and take action for their children. They have been really successful. Currently we do not have that running, but we work in partnership with the public health unit. We are very supportive of the Department of Education's activities in this area in schools, targeting secondary school students. As I mentioned, it is an identified focus area of our public health and wellbeing action plan, so we will continue to see some activity in this area. But I think a broader focus, probably at the state level, that all municipalities could leverage off to really push against the harmful effects of vaping for young people would be great. Like I mentioned earlier, Quit campaigns are not well targeted to young people, as it stands at the moment.

**Meng Heang TAK:** And would you agree that parents also play a big part in this? I am interested, similar to Mat, in terms of the growing multicultural community here in Greater Shepparton. What sort of campaigning to get parents from the multicultural community – I am not saying that it is a growing number, but is there any targeted focus?

**Louise MITCHELL:** Yes. There are a number of agencies in Greater Shepparton that have their sole focus, really, on serving the multicultural community. At council, for example, we have a team that is very focused on intersectionality and also has a particular staff member whose sole focus is on engaging with the multicultural community, and we really leverage those positions inside council to drive any messages regardless of the campaign we might be running or the current area of concern and really run it through those channels. It is at the level of phone calls, doorknocks, informal networks and more formal settings as well. It is quite organic and ingrained in the work we do.

**Meng Heang TAK:** Thank you. No more questions here.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Heang. We have got about 3 minutes left. Do any other committee members have a question they would like to ask?

**Mathew HILAKARI:** I can do some more if you want, Chair.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Yes, thanks. I am just thinking about and building on what Heang was asking and thinking about. In the Shepparton area, the connection between council and Aboriginal-specific organisations like Kaiela and others, in terms of vaping and tobacco – what does that look like?

**Louise MITCHELL:** In terms of public health, the really critical organisation for the Aboriginal community is the Rumbalara co-op. They run their programs. We have close connections with Rumbalara across a range of our activities. In terms of an explicit focus on tobacco and vaping, it is probably not as strong as it could be. But I note that Rumbalara, in the spirit of self-determination, are running a large number of programs continuously on all sorts of public health issues, and they are also very strongly connected in with GV Health and the Department of Health as well as public health units. We would just probably refer to some of those other agencies as well.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** And then thinking, I guess, of a strengths-based approach, there is the new facility up here that is run by Rumbalara. It starts with an M. I cannot –

**Louise MITCHELL:** Munarra Centre for Regional Excellence.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Yes.

**Louise MITCHELL:** That is right.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Is that used for any –

**Louise MITCHELL:** Munarra is in the final stages of the completion of its campus in the northern part of Shepparton, and it will be an educational centre for young people. As I understand it, Munarra will have a very holistic focus on the health and wellbeing of young people, with a very explicit focus on Aboriginal young people and their culture. So I would anticipate that they could well be active in this area as well as many others.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Are there funding streams from council to Rumbalara and other organisations to fund activities around harm reduction?

**Louise MITCHELL:** We do have healthy communities grants. They are open to anyone in the community, so they are not explicitly targeting Rumbalara, for example. I think I will just leave it at that, because there is not a broader field that we are playing in there.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Sure. And then before we finish, we spoke about the rates in Shepparton versus the state. If we are talking about prevention or education programs and the campaigns we have talked about, what needs to be different with how things are run in Shepparton compared to other parts of the state or in, you know, regional Victoria?

**Louise MITCHELL:** I think a really particular focus on women who are expecting is something that would be important. We do have some particularly concerning statistics for women who are expecting babies – those rates are really well above the state average – so I think that should be a priority area. Shepparton has got some not quite unique but particular characteristics. It has got a regional and rural aspect to it and it has got a very obviously diverse community, so I think approaches that take that diversity into account and situate it in the regional context are incredibly important.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Lauren. Mat has just got one quick question.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** I have got two quick ones: one on if you could provide any details on any warrants that the council has sought for tobacco products and any scope and any detail you can provide on that, and also any training that is provided to environmental health officers and how that goes to providing them with the adequate skills to undertake their tasks.

**Louise MITCHELL:** We can provide that.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Louise. That is the end of the session with you today. Thanks again so much for coming and talking to us. This brings this particular hearing to a close. The committee will follow up on additional questions or questions taken on notice in writing, and responses are required within five working days of the committee's request.

The committee is now going to break very quickly for about 4 minutes before recommencing the hearing. I declare this hearing adjourned.

**Witness withdrew.**