Chatty Café Sustainability – 2024 and beyond:

A guide for
local government

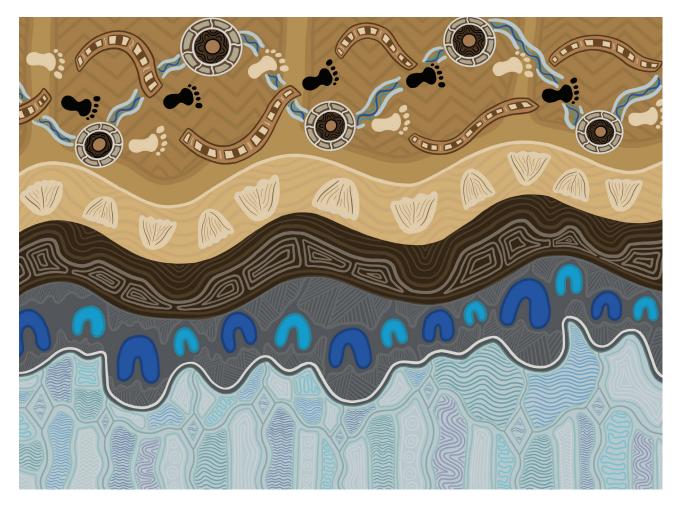**Bayside City Council proudly acknowledges the Bunurong People of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this land, and we pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.**

Background

The Chatty Café Scheme is a global initiative that originated in the United Kingdom in 2017. The Scheme aims to reduce loneliness and social isolation by encouraging and creating opportunities for communities to interact through conversation at 'Have a Chat' tables. In Australia, The Chatty Café Scheme Australia Ltd (CCA) was initiated in October 2019. CCA is an Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) approved health promotion and harm reduction charity (HPC) with Tier 1 deductible gift recipient status.

In 2020, Bayside City Council (local government authority in Victoria) funded CCA to establish the Bayside Chatty Café project – a strategic, whole-of-municipality rollout of Chatty Café. The aim of the Bayside Chatty Café Project was to generate positive social and economic impact though increasing community connection. Building on this, Bayside City Council (BCC) and CCA successfully applied for a grant under the Victorian Government's Metropolitan Partnerships Development Fund (MPDF), 2021-22 to enhance and expand the Project to incorporate local businesses in a COVID-19 recovery environment, conduct a detailed evaluation and prepare a Toolkit to assist other local governments to implement the Scheme.

Additional funding was made available from the MPDF in 2022-23 to expand the Scheme across the local government areas of Boroondara, Glen Eira and Stonnington, develop a Volunteer Recruitment and Retention plan and a Sustainability Plan to support the continued success of the Scheme beyond the funding period. As a companion to the Toolkit, this guide outlines strategies for local governments to ensure the sustainability of Chatty Cafés beyond 2024.

Sustainability strategies

Embed Chatty Café into Council's business as usual.

Embedding Chatty Café promotion and support into existing Council processes, programs and promotions is a simple, low-cost way to ensure that the program continues to expand and thrive within any municipality. Examples of how this can be achieved include:

- Incorporating Chatty Café into community directories – both online and in hard copy. This could include the name and location of local café venues.
- Ensure promotions are included on existing relevant webpages such as Boroondara's 'Add life to your years'.
- Include funding support of annual membership costs for community hosts such as libraries in annual budgets.
- Review community development / social inclusion position descriptions and ensure promotion of Chatty Café is included.
- Support community venues to include in their business as usual based on models that work for them e.g. neighbourhood houses, community centres and libraries
- Include promotional/update opportunities on the agendas of community group meetings

It is suggested that Councils gradually work on incorporating these measures into their business as usual over time.

Volunteers

Table volunteers are a very valuable resource supporting the success of Chatty Tables, particularly when a new venue is starting up. With the global downturn in volunteerism since the COVID-19 pandemic, it's essential that recruitment of volunteers is supported and encouraged. Councils can support Chatty Café in recruiting volunteers by:

- Including Chatty Café program promotion in online volunteer management systems
- Offering capacity building for volunteer managers
- Linking volunteer opportunities through organisations such as CisVic
- Inviting Chatty Café representatives to volunteer forums and open days

Promotion

The success of Chatty Café is strongly linked to community awareness of the opportunity. This is both in relation to host venues learning about the potential to raise their profile and community members becoming aware that there is a 'safe' place for them to connect with others. Promotion can be supported by:

- Inviting Chatty Café to hold promotional pop-up cafes at community events such as Senior's month, Mental Health Week, end of year celebrations etc.
- Ensuring listings in directories such as Ending Loneliness Together
- Continuing to promote via social media including 'success' stories of happy participants and promotion of committed venues.

Funding

Since inception, Chatty Café Australia has relied on short term government funding and donations to support operations. A more secure form of income is required to ensure ongoing success of the program. The board of Chatty Café Australia have resolved to seek corporate partnerships and offer different levels of membership to boost income and participation.

Councils can support Chatty Café Australia by directing them towards appropriate grant opportunities and by writing letters of support upon request.