

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY



2025 FEDERAL ELECTION PRIORITIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LA TROBE WAS FOUNDED TO SERVE THE GROWING COMMUNITY IN MELBOURNE'S NORTH AND LATER ACROSS REGIONAL VICTORIA, ESTABLISHING ITSELF AS THE STATE'S ONLY TRULY STATE-WIDE UNIVERSITY.

Our campus network plays a vital role in the future of local communities, increasing access to higher education and research and facilitating strong partnerships with schools, TAFEs, local government and industry.

The University has prepared a list of 2025 Federal Election Priorities. These priorities would enable La Trobe to address critical national challenges such as key workforce skills shortages while strengthening Australia's economic growth.

OUR PRIORITIES ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING KEY THEMES:

- the needs of regional communities
- the needs of growing communities in the northern suburbs of Melbourne
- cost of living pressures faced by students
- growing demand from domestic students in population growth areas
- workforce needs across healthcare and education
- improving education outcomes in our schools by establishing the Australian Centre for Education Impact and Excellence
- productivity and health challenges experienced in the care, agriculture, and food sectors
- the growing challenges of chronic disease in our communities

La Trobe University is pleased to submit these policy priorities, and we look forward to working collaboratively with the next Commonwealth Government.



Student teacher at Charles La Trobe College

INVESTING IN REGIONAL AND OUTER METROPOLITAN EDUCATION

RESOLVING INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY SETTINGS

The next Commonwealth Government must resolve the uncertainty surrounding international students.

This is crucial for the future of our education system. We are currently investing in infrastructure that will enable us to graduate 5,000 health professionals per annum by 2030 – helping to meet national workforce needs while educating the next generation of Australians. Our \$170 million investment in new, state-of-the-art clinical and health facilities across our Melbourne and regional campuses is predicated on a stable and reliable source of revenue from international students.

Ongoing capital and growth investments across Melbourne’s North along with investments in Albury-Wodonga, Bendigo, Mildura and Shepparton will be severely restricted without either a reasonable level of international student enrolments or significantly increased Commonwealth Government funding.

Ask of Commonwealth: La Trobe calls for the immediate removal of Ministerial Direction 107 and its replacement by a transparent and fair policy lever to manage international education settings that provides certainty to the sector while upholding integrity in the system.



Domestic and international students collaborating at an occupational therapy class

BUILDING THE FUTURE HEALTH AND EDUCATION WORKFORCE

ADDITIONAL COMMONWEALTH SUPPORTED PLACES (CSPs): AUSTRALIA FACES SIGNIFICANT WORKFORCE SHORTAGES ACROSS METROPOLITAN, PERI-URBAN, AND RURAL AND REGIONAL LOCATIONS.

These shortages have become more acute in the post-COVID period, with demand increasing for more healthcare and education professionals.

As noted in our request for certainty in international education policy settings, La Trobe is investing more than \$170 million in an ambitious Health Innovation Strategy, to enable us to graduate 5,000 health professionals per annum by 2030. Our investment will make La Trobe the largest educator of health professionals in Australia.

This includes a significant investment over the coming years to build new facilities and upgrade existing teaching centres, expanding our training capacity to deliver skilled clinicians to the communities where they are most needed.

New Nursing and Midwifery clinical simulation facilities at our four regional campuses will facilitate significant enrolment growth, with estimates indicating an increase of 39% in rural nursing, 57% in occupational therapy, and 45% in physiotherapy. This means that, by 2030, we will graduate an additional ~235 Nurses and Midwives, ~21 Occupational Therapists, and ~16 Physiotherapists annually across our regional campuses.

Furthering our commitment to health education in regional areas, we are investing in a state-of-the-art Dentistry and Oral Health Centre at our Bendigo campus. This new pre-clinical simulation centre will support increased enrolments, with commencing students rising from 80 to 150, dental chairs increasing from eight to 16, and the addition of 80 simulation manikins. This will see a 23% increase in enrolments by 2030, we expect to graduate more than 50 dentistry and oral health students annually, positioning us as the leading rural dental education provider in Australia.

However, in order to fulfil these plans, we need additional CSPs from 2026 onwards. This funding would support an additional 3,000 domestic students across La Trobe University campuses by 2028.

And we know from work undertaken in developing the Australian Universities Accord that the additional CSPs will be required by many institutions across the country.

La Trobe urges the next Commonwealth Government to commit to a shared CSPs pool that can benefit all institutions.

Ask of Commonwealth: La Trobe requests an additional 3,000 Commonwealth Supported Places by 2028. These additional CSPs would be part of a larger, national pool that would be available for institutions like La Trobe with plans to address Australia's workforce shortages.



New Nursing facilities at the Albury Wodonga campus

GROWING THE REGIONAL HEALTH WORKFORCE

FUNDING TO SUPPORT HEALTH STUDENTS

La Trobe is home to Australia's largest Rural Health School, located across four regional campuses (Albury-Wodonga, Bendigo, Shepparton and Mildura). Our students undertake placements at health facilities across the state, with a focus across the north and north-west of Victoria.

La Trobe has introduced measures that actively support students of rural/regional origin, allowing entry with lower ATARs to promote higher enrolment among these students and increase their participation in higher education. The success of our programs is evident, with La Trobe's Rural Health School reporting that **76%** of Allied Health, **96%** of Nursing, and **79%** of Dentistry students are of rural or regional origin. Further, our data shows that around two-thirds of our students choose to remain in rural and regional locations to work after graduating, helping to meet the need for a local health workforce.

It is for this reason that we seek further support from the Commonwealth to ensure that we can grow by **35%** the number of students in our regional health programs by 2030. These students will be able to access high-quality training and learning experiences on our regional campuses, equipping them to make a lasting impact in healthcare across rural and regional communities.

One of the significant barriers to students graduating and entering the workforce is managing cost of living challenges. La Trobe encourages the government to increase support for rural, regional and remote student placements.

Ask of Commonwealth: La Trobe seeks an additional \$10 million in funding through the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training (RHMT) program to support our students during their studies and to remain in regional communities as clinicians following graduation. This funding will specifically help students undertaking placements in rural, regional and remote settings.

La Trobe welcomes the commitment earlier in the year from the Commonwealth to provide financial support (Commonwealth Prac Payment) for students undertaking placements in nursing, education, midwifery and social work. We believe these reforms should go further.

Ask of Commonwealth: We know that a key to completing studies is financial security. La Trobe calls on the next Commonwealth Government to expand the Commonwealth Prac Payment to students studying Allied Health programs who also need to undertake mandatory practicum placements.



Students in the new Mildura Nursing Simulation Labs



EMPLOYMENT-BASED TRAINING PATHWAY FOR NURSING

We propose to partner with rural health services and hospitals across our regional campus network to offer sponsored positions to 20% of the local cohort of nursing and allied health students (approximately 166 full-time equivalent [FTE] students per year). The model will be based on our highly successful 'Nexus' program, an employment pathway into teaching, which is currently supported by the Commonwealth Department of Education. This program has seen students graduate and work in the schools the students have trained in, which are often schools in regional and hard-to-staff locations.

Our aim is to recruit rural students, support them to complete their studies locally, and, upon graduation, offer them employment in their local area. Students who secure a place in the program will receive: a \$15,000 stipend; part-time employment with their host organisation from Year 2 onwards; clinical placement priority within the same organisation; a range of university and industry supports to foster their learning and capabilities; and guaranteed employment with the host organisation post-graduation. Priority will be given to Indigenous students, first-in-family to study at university, and students with a low socio-economic status.

Ask of Commonwealth: La Trobe seeks \$10 million to train 166 FTE students per year for three years.

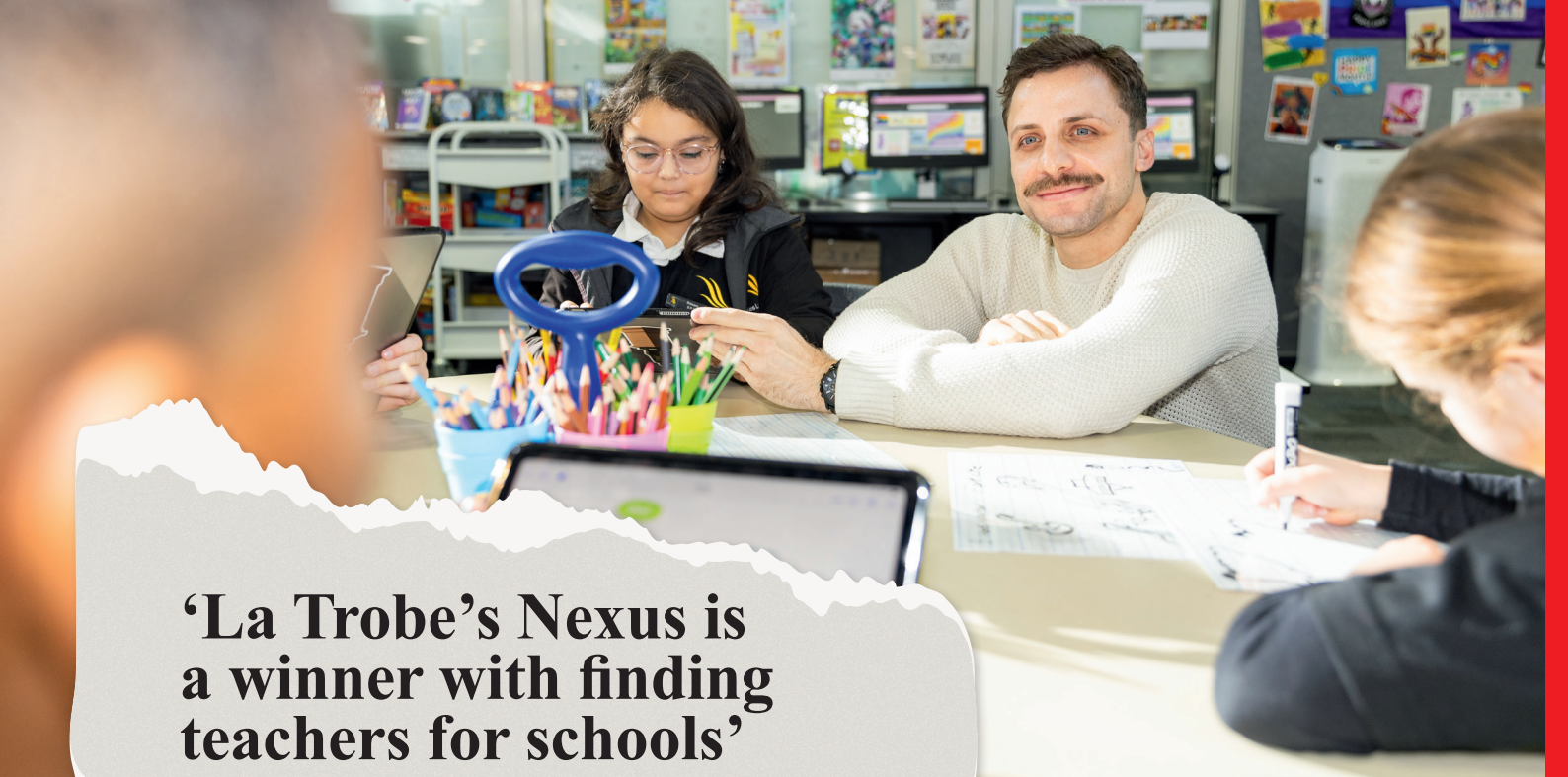
ADDITIONAL RURAL PATHWAYS FOR LOCALLY-TRAINED DOCTORS

We know that doctors trained in rural and regional areas are more likely to stay in the community to practice after graduation. Given the ongoing demand for medical practitioners in the regions we serve, La Trobe is seeking to expand our Rural Medical Pathway in Northern Victoria.

Since its launch in 2019, La Trobe's Rural Medical Pathway has seen a consistent increase in applications from regional students, achieving a 100% retention and success rate. In collaboration with the University of Melbourne, we aim to expand this program further, with more students and more clinical training sites.

Recent data highlights a 523% increase in medical vacancies in the Wimmera and Western areas from 2017 to 2022, underscoring the urgent need for locally-trained doctors to support regional communities. The persistent shortages of healthcare professionals in these areas reinforce the necessity of expanding medical training programs to meet both current and future needs.

Ask of Commonwealth: La Trobe seeks support to establish a rural medical pathway program in Mildura, Echuca, and potentially other sites across Northern Victoria. This commitment would allow us to train more rural doctors in regional Australia and to address the high demand for medical practitioners in northern Victorian communities. We seek \$23 million in capital and recurrent funding, as well as up to 30 additional medical CSPs.



‘La Trobe’s Nexus is a winner with finding teachers for schools’

Australian Financial Review, 4 November, 2022

TRANSFORMING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR EDUCATIONAL IMPACT AND EXCELLENCE

La Trobe University is proposing to establish the Australian Centre for Education Impact and Excellence, which aims to be a transformative hub for educational innovation in Australia. The Centre will merge practical classroom experience with research-driven evidence to address low literacy and numeracy rates. La Trobe has already made significant contributions to teacher education through programs like the Science of Language and Reading (SOLAR) Lab, 12,000 participants have completed a SOLAR Lab course since 2020. The university has fully implemented the recommendations from the recent Teacher Expert Advisory Panel Report, establishing itself as a leader in initial teacher education with programs like the award-winning Nexus employment pathway, which prepares teachers with evidence informed approaches for impactful learning.

The Centre’s mission is to promote excellence in teaching and support schools in integrating evidence-based approaches. A multidisciplinary team of academics, master teachers, and industry leaders will develop educational tools, professional development programs, and conduct longitudinal research on their effectiveness. The infrastructure will include a flagship facility at La Trobe’s Bundoora campus, satellite facilities across Australian states, and innovation labs with the latest educational technology. The digital infrastructure will support AI-powered learning analytics, virtual collaboration, and a resource-sharing platform, expanding the Centre’s reach to rural and remote schools.

The Centre will offer resources, professional development, and data-driven improvement strategies at universal, enhanced, and specialised support levels to address diverse needs. This integrated approach aims to improve literacy and numeracy, close achievement gaps, enhance teacher retention, and foster a globally competitive workforce. The collaborative model will involve schools, industry partners, and policymakers, driving long-term improvements in Australia’s educational system and attracting sustained interest and funding from government and corporate stakeholders.

The Centre will implement a research-backed, multi-tiered system for accessing and implementing evidence-informed practices. All Australian schools will have access to a digital platform with teaching resources, professional learning modules, and basic data analytics tools. Partner schools will receive enhanced support through intensive intervention programs, regular on-site professional development, advanced data analytics, and access to multidisciplinary expertise. Schools with the highest needs will receive specialised support through embedded multidisciplinary teams, intensive data-driven interventions, daily coaching, and integrated mental health and wellbeing support. This model leverages expertise across education, psychology, allied health, and cognitive science to drive sustainable improvement in teaching and learning outcomes.

Ask of Commonwealth: We seek \$60 million to establish the Australian Centre for Education Impact and Excellence.

IMPROVING OUR CARE ECONOMY SECTOR

Over the coming years, the demands on our Care Economy will increase due to:

- strong growth of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS);
- an ageing population; and
- government investments in early childhood education.

The Care Economy is the fastest growing industry, and largest single employer, in Australia, with over 1.8 million people, mostly women, currently working in health care and social assistance jobs.

However, the Australian care sector is in crisis with recurring issues such as:

- chronic workforce shortages;
- low consumer confidence;
- poor uptake of digital technologies; and
- major inefficiencies in the administration of delivering care.

It is vital that the sector improve in terms of productivity and quality of care. La Trobe researchers and our industry partners aim to drive improvements through the use of technology, data, training, and workforce innovation, and by expanding research and training.



CARE ECONOMY CRC

La Trobe University seeks support for our bid to establish a Care Economy Cooperative Research Centre (CRC), recognising the care economy as vital for national economic development. We have already secured a matching commitment of around \$35 million from over 50 partners, including industry and research collaborators, underscoring a strong commitment to this initiative.

Ask of Commonwealth: We are seeking \$35 million funding from the Commonwealth to support the growth of this sector, and to ensure maximum productivity and efficiency with tangible improvements to care.

CAREHUB FOR THE CARE ECONOMY

We plan to establish a CareHub at La Trobe's Albury-Wodonga campus that would become a prominent centre for applied research, education, and training in the care sector, bringing an innovative and intergenerational approach to health and social assistance. This advanced facility will integrate resources from industry, academia, and the community to foster real-time research and hands-on learning, addressing key challenges in the Care Economy such as an ageing population, sector fragmentation, carer social isolation, and workforce shortages, particularly in rural areas. The CareHub would have a focus on strengthening regional workforces and support the growth of Australia's health and social assistance industry.

In tackling the unique challenges faced by rural and regional communities, including severe worker shortages and increasing demand for home-based support, the CareHub would offer a blueprint that could be implemented across regional Australia.

It would feature advanced learning spaces, including home environment simulations, aged care areas, and clinics equipped with digital integrations, enhancing both care quality and educational impact. The facility would also promote social inclusion with accessible indoor and outdoor community spaces, fostering a sense of belonging across age groups and linking with the Early Childhood Education Centre of Excellence at Wodonga TAFE. By connecting various care stakeholders, the CareHub would not only advance care practices but also enrich the community's overall experience of care and support.

Ask of Commonwealth: We seek \$20 million to develop a CareHub at our Albury-Wodonga campus to lead the development of the care sector across rural and regional Australia.

HIGHER EDUCATION FOR MELBOURNE'S OUTER NORTH

SERVING MELBOURNE'S GROWTH CORRIDOR

It is estimated that the Northern Growth Corridor (NGC) will accommodate an additional 102,000 homes by 2060, or around 318,850 people. The peak growth period for the corridor is projected to be from 2035 to 2040 with an additional 15,297 dwellings and a population of 209,362 by 2040. The NGC is expected to have a population larger than Geelong.

Key projects already underway in the area include the Beveridge Intermodal Freight Terminal, the Northern Private Hospital and the Amazon Fulfilment Centre.

This growing community will require educational access to ensure the region is a place where people can live, work and study in close proximity.

La Trobe is seeking \$2 million to undertake an analysis of the corridor's post-secondary education needs and how best to respond to such needs. The study would be undertaken in collaboration with industry, local government, health services, and TAFE partners.

This will include the development of a business case for a further campus presence in the Northern Growth Corridor, which could then be considered for funding.

Ask of Commonwealth: La Trobe seeks \$2 million to develop a business case on the best way to meet the post-secondary education needs for the growing outer north area of Melbourne. This work would include business cases for new campus opportunities.



Other programs that La Trobe will be seeking support from the next Commonwealth Government include:

LIFEGUARD – A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PROGRAM FOR CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION AND HEALTHSPAN ENHANCEMENT

La Trobe University proposes LifeGuard, a \$50 million community-driven initiative to combat Australia's rising chronic disease burden through proactive, preventative healthcare.

By addressing the root social, economic, environmental, and biological factors that influence health, LifeGuard aims to reduce chronic disease rates, improve Australians' quality of life, and alleviate strains on the healthcare system.

LifeGuard would establish advanced health infrastructure, including biobanking facilities, mobile health units and telehealth capabilities to support remote diagnostics and early interventions. LifeGuard's innovations include affordable biosensors for early chronic disease detection, community outreach centres to improve health literacy, and AI-driven tools to identify high-risk individuals.

The program would begin in Victoria and expand nationwide in phases, tailoring its interventions to meet the unique needs of each community and creating a strong support network across regional, rural, and Indigenous communities.

LifeGuard will deliver substantial benefits to governments and the Australian public through:

- reduced healthcare costs by focusing on preventive care and alleviating the need for costly hospital treatments;
- improved health equity; and
- enhanced economic productivity.

La Trobe is well placed to drive an ambitious and bold program like LifeGuard through our expertise and experience in biomolecular science, partnerships with Indigenous communities, and research in rural and regional health and underserved communities. LifeGuard will leverage La Trobe's expertise in biosensors and point-of-need testing. Supported by the Australian Centre for Artificial Intelligence in Medical Innovation (ACAMI), LifeGuard will develop advanced diagnostic tools that enable rapid, accessible testing within communities. This approach reduces the need for patients to travel and supports timely interventions in regional and remote areas, aligning with government goals to strengthen rural healthcare infrastructure and create scalable, sustainable health outcomes.

The \$50 million investment would also support the newly created Gabra Biik, Wurruwila Wutja Research Centre's efforts in Indigenous engagement, providing economic opportunities, employment pathways, and cultural preservation initiatives for Indigenous communities nationwide. This expansion of LifeGuard aligns with La Trobe's commitment to Indigenous advancement and community empowerment, fostering sustainable development and supporting Indigenous communities through economic, social, and cultural initiatives.

La Trobe's LifeGuard initiative complements its efforts to enhance community resilience, particularly during crises. The Victorian Virtual Emergency Department (VVED), developed in partnership with Northern Health, is now Australia's largest Emergency Department and importantly offers critical emergency healthcare access for rural and remote areas via telehealth. LifeGuard's expansion would work in parallel with services like VVED by focusing on preventive health to reduce the demand on emergency services through early intervention. Scaling preventative healthcare nationwide would not only reduce hospital admissions but also strengthen the resilience of rural health systems, ensuring that communities are better supported in both everyday health management and times of crisis.

Importantly, LifeGuard is aligned with Australia's long-term health strategy underpinned by innovative, data-driven healthcare. With Commonwealth support, La Trobe University can bring LifeGuard to life, leading Australia in preventive health innovation and ensuring a healthier, more resilient population.

Ask of Commonwealth: La Trobe seeks \$50 million to bring our LifeGuard proposal to reality.

GOVIC PRECINCT – SHEPPARTON

The Goulburn Valley initiative aims to revamp the region’s food production and processing chain to address contemporary environmental, economic, and social challenges.

Through the creation of the GOVIC Precinct, a centralised hub, the precinct would offer food businesses, farmers, government and industry groups shared facilities, equipment, and education to foster innovation while reducing individual investment risks.

Its collaborative environment would enable food producers to diversify and develop new markets and equip a new workforce with adaptive skills in technology, data, and resource management. The hub’s shared resources would also help farm and business leaders make informed decisions about optimising production, enhancing skills, and accessing support networks, thus driving regional growth and resilience.

This transformation is urgently needed to modernise the Goulburn Valley’s agricultural sector, built in an era with vastly different demands and skills. The region faces an array of pressures – from climate change and water scarcity to labour shortages and evolving consumer preferences – requiring a significant upgrade in infrastructure and expertise. Central to the initiative is a full-scale industry hub providing facilities for food processing, data analysis, and remote monitoring, with a particular focus on sustainable water management ahead of anticipated allocation shifts by 2027.

The GOVIC Precinct aims to ease technology adoption by pairing technologists, educators, and advocates in a supportive environment, fostering community-wide adoption of modern practices essential for economic viability and community well-being.

A successful precinct plan would see a larger bid for additional funding into the capital and operations of the Precinct Plan.

Ask of Commonwealth: La Trobe seeks \$900,000 to create a finalised precinct plan for the Shepparton region, including specifications for buildings, facilities, and programs that embed the needs of stakeholders across the community.



La Trobe’s Shepparton campus

DIGITAL INNOVATION HUB – BENDIGO

La Trobe is working with Cisco, the City of Greater Bendigo, and over 20 other partners who are supportive of the vision for a Digital Innovation Hub in Bendigo.

The Hub would provide a low-risk environment for industry, startups, researchers, and students to collaborate and innovate, while boosting local talent and revitalising Bendigo's CBD. The facility would support local businesses to digitise and support their workforces to attain new skills.

The Bendigo and Loddon Mallee region aims to become a premier Digital Innovation District by enhancing local competitiveness and promoting digital inclusion. Over the past five years, a Digital Innovation Hub (DIH) has been supported to foster collaboration among industries, startups, researchers, and students in a low-risk environment, thereby nurturing local talent and revitalising Bendigo's CBD. The Emporium Creative Hub will serve as the primary precinct site, with plans to expand across the Loddon Mallee region. A consortium, including La Trobe University, Cisco, local tech companies, and various innovation ecosystem entities, will develop a prototype facility to refine the DIH model. This initiative will boost local productivity, attract new businesses, and create sustainable job opportunities, establishing Bendigo as a thriving centre of digital innovation.

This centre will build on last year's announcement by Deloitte to establish a Digital Delivery Centre on La Trobe's Bendigo campus.

Ask of Commonwealth: La Trobe seeks \$2 million to support planning for the establishment of a Digital Innovation Hub in Bendigo and identify secondary locations across the region. A further request to fully operationalise the proposal would follow the completion of this work.



International students on
La Trobe's Bendigo campus

ESTABLISHMENT OF AN AGRICULTURE FUTURES FUND

The \$20 billion Agri-food Research Future Fund (AFRFF) will be a strategic, long-term investment supporting Australian primary producers, food manufacturers, and health practitioners across the agri-food and nutrition value chain. By bridging current gaps in agriculture, food, and nutrition research, the AFRFF will help transform the production of high-quality food for consumers and strengthen local and export markets in response to 21st-century challenges.

Australia's food production and supply chains need greater resilience to withstand a turbulent global food system. The AFRFF will enhance expertise spanning energy, water, logistics, complementary crops, genomics and future foods. This expertise will lead to enhanced health outcomes that will improve lives as well as contribute to food supply resilience and sustainability. This will not only bolster Australia's food sovereignty and supply chain resilience but will also create value-added products for global markets, positioning Australia to help address food shortages in neighbouring regions over the coming decades.

Working closely with the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF), the AFRFF will enhance the 'paddock to gut' continuum, integrating national health and agri-food priorities. This combined effort will help reduce the burden of diet-related non-communicable diseases and reduce demand on the health system. The AFRFF will thus play a crucial role in advancing Australia's food security, long-term health outcomes, and economic strength growth.

ESTABLISHMENT OF AGRIFOOD INNOVATION & NUTRITION AUSTRALIA

AgriFood Innovation & Nutrition Australia (AFINA) is a national initiative that integrates the Agriculture, Food Innovation, and Nutrition & Health sectors to drive interdisciplinary collaboration. Its purpose is to develop sustainable food solutions for improved health outcomes. Guided by industry, government, and society, AFINA leverages broad expertise to create commercially viable and novel solutions, ensuring that the food produced enhances health outcomes. Addressing 21st-century challenges requires a holistic approach and diverse expertise across the agrifood value chain, from farming production to advanced manufacturing and health outcomes. With commercial challenges becoming increasingly multi-dimensional, Australia needs a range of skills and perspectives to tackle them effectively.

There is an urgent need to support Australia's food production and supply chain to ensure resilience in a turbulent and changing global food system. Innovation across the sector is critical to drive the change required to provide the quantity and quality of food needed for Australia's food security and to expand export markets with new value-added products. As countries become more interconnected and global food trade increases, Australia has a responsibility to secure its own food supply and help mitigate supply shortfalls in neighbouring regions. Developing a sustainable production system across critical areas such as energy, water, logistics, complementary crops, genomics, and future foods will generate nutritious food, improve lives, build the economy, and contribute to food supply resilience and sustainability.

AFINA will serve as the front door and initial point of contact for the agrifood sector, aligning research and innovation efforts with industry and government priorities to deliver value to the industry, scale manufacturing and production efforts, and promote long-term health benefits, economic strength, and food security in the region. By integrating expertise across agriculture, food innovation, and health sectors, AFINA aims to develop real solutions for 21st-century challenges, promoting long-term community wellbeing and economic growth, especially in regional Australia. La Trobe University, alongside its foundation partners, is committed to achieving AFINA's objectives through significant investments in infrastructure, strategic recruitment, and research collaborations, seeking additional support to establish an AFINA office and enhance industry collaboration.

Ask of Commonwealth: La Trobe is seeking \$20 million investment in infrastructure and capital works to support stage one works. This will see investment in fit for purpose industry spaces and equipment to support industry to enable the production and manufacture of new foods that are safe, nutritious, and appealing to the consumer while meeting industry standards. La Trobe will invest a combined \$10 million in cash and in-kind to realise AFINA.



Researchers at our Bundoora campus analysing crops in glasshouses



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