



An Australian Government Initiative



Regional
Development
Australia

Hume Regional Workforce Strategy 2026-29

Regional Development Australia Hume



OFFICIAL

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Acknowledgement of Country

RDA Hume acknowledges that the region known as Hume is the traditional land of many First Nations peoples. We acknowledge all Traditional Owners and custodians of their Country.

We acknowledge the Yorta Yorta People, the Taungurung People, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People, the Waywurru People, the Dhudhuroa People, the Bpangerang People, the Duduroa people and the Jaithmathang People.

We recognise the continuing connection to land, waters and culture and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

RDA Hume values its partnerships with the Traditional Custodians across the Hume region to build prosperity.

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Chair's Foreword



Every region has its defining strengths. In the Hume Region, those strengths are our people, our industries and the partnerships that have always enabled us to adapt and grow. As we look to the future, it is clear that our workforce will be one of the most important drivers of the region's continued prosperity.

Across our region, employers are creating new opportunities, industries are evolving, and communities are changing. At the same time, workforce shortages, skills gaps and barriers such as housing, transport, childcare and access to training continue to limit participation and place pressure on businesses and essential services. These challenges are significant, but they also present an opportunity to think differently about how we develop, attract and retain the workforce our region needs.

The *Hume Regional Workforce Strategy 2026–29* reflects a shared commitment to meeting that challenge. It is the product of collaboration between industry, education, community organisations, government and First Nations leaders who all recognise that no single organisation can solve these issues alone. Together, we have developed a practical roadmap that focuses on growing local talent, strengthening workforce capability, creating more inclusive pathways to employment and preparing our region for the opportunities presented by technological change and a rapidly evolving economy. What gives me confidence is that this strategy builds on Hume's existing strengths. We are home to

innovative businesses, outstanding education and training providers, committed community organisations and strong regional leadership. By harnessing these strengths and continuing to work together, we can create a workforce that is more skilled, more resilient and better equipped to support sustainable economic growth across the region.

This strategy is not an endpoint—it is the beginning of our next chapter. Its success will depend on the commitment of all of us to continue building partnerships, sharing responsibility and turning ideas into action. Regional Development Australia Hume is proud to play a role in bringing partners together, advocating for our region and supporting the initiatives that will make a lasting difference.

I would like to sincerely thank everyone who has contributed their time, expertise and vision to the development of this strategy. Your collaboration has shaped a document that reflects both the realities we face and the opportunities ahead.

I commend the Hume Regional Workforce Strategy 2026–29 to our partners and stakeholders, and I look forward to working together to build a workforce that will strengthen our industries, support our communities and secure a prosperous future for Hume.

Brett Luxford

Chair RDA

Hume Committee

RDA Hume Regional Workforce Strategy on a page

OUR VISION is a growing, resilient and inclusive region where people, businesses and investments thrive

 **RDA Hume** will act as a regional connector and advocate to drive strategic outcomes



REGIONAL PARTNERS will design, deliver and enable workforce outcomes



Industry and employers



Government (local, state and federal)



Education and training providers



Community and First Nations organisations

STRATEGIC PILLARS AND ACTIONS rely on coordinated action across RDA Hume and our regional partners

1

Priority skills and jobs

- 1.1 Regional alignment on priority skills, jobs, industries and pathways
- 1.2 Storytelling that showcases local career opportunities

2

Future focused workforce

- 2.1 Work integrated pathways connecting learners to priority roles
- 2.2 Digital, AI and advanced technical micro-credentials aligned to cross industry needs
- 2.3 Peer-to-peer mentoring to strengthen leadership and management capability

3

Dynamic and AI enabled workforce models

- 3.1 Flexible work arrangements across priority industries
- 3.2 Multi-employer workforce models to combine seasonal roles into year-round employment
- 3.3 AI and technology enabled workforce models

4

Realised workforce potential

- 4.1 Inclusive and culturally appropriate workforce practices
- 4.2 Job readiness supports for new and emerging workers
- 4.3 Strengthened use of migration pathways such as DAMA

5

First Nations-led economic development

- 5.1 First Nations-led employment models
- 5.2 Investment in First-Nations-led economic and workforce development

ENABLED BY a strong and well-promoted regional liveability offer

E.1 Scaled worker housing solutions

E.2 Coordinated regional promotion of lifestyle and place

E.3 Improved access to transport, childcare and connectivity



Hume has a large, diverse and growing regional economy

Overview of Hume

**180,000 EMPLOYED
BY 2027**

**\$23 BILLION
TOTAL VALUE ADD**

**12 LGAs and ALPINE RESORTS
with 322,000 RESIDENTS**

Industries

Major value-add industries



Agriculture
~\$2.6 billion

A core part of the region's
identity and output



Manufacturing
~\$1.93B

Anchored in food processing
and regional supply chains



Construction
~\$2.5B

Enabling growth through
infrastructure delivery

Major employment industries



**Health care & social
assistance**
~7.4% growth p.a.

Driven by ageing and
sustained care demand



Education
~4.8% growth p.a.

Supporting population
growth and future skills
pipelines



Construction
~3.7% growth p.a.

Scaling with population
and infrastructure
demand



**Tourism and
hospitality**
~3.6% growth p.a.

Sustained by strong
seasonal visitation



First Nations people have long played, and continue to play, a vital role in Hume's social and economic fabric

Deep and enduring economic foundations

- We acknowledge all Traditional Owners of the lands across the Hume region including the Yorta Yorta People, the Taungurung People, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People, the Waywurru People, the Dhudhuroa People, the Bpangerang People, the Duduroa people and the Jaithmathang People
- These Nations, communities and people have sustained thriving economies for over 60,000 years.
- The region has long been a place of exchange and shared resource management, including gatherings such as the Bogong moth migrations in the Alpine region.

Ongoing contribution and unrealised opportunity

- First Nations communities demonstrate ongoing strength and leadership across the region's social, cultural and economic life.
- However, this contribution is not always fully recognised or enabled, with structural barriers limiting the full realisation of economic and workforce potential.
- There is strong opportunity to build on proven models and expand participation and leadership.

Pathway to a stronger, self determined future

- First Nations leadership and knowledge are central to shaping future outcomes, with communities best placed to determine what works for their people and Country.
- Realising this opportunity requires shared responsibility across all stakeholders, including:
 - truth telling and acknowledging the impacts of dispossession
 - addressing systemic barriers and exclusion
 - supporting culturally safe organisations and leadership
- Strengthening First Nations participation and leadership will deliver economic value and enhance the cultural and social fabric of the region.



But workforce supply, skills and supporting systems are not keeping pace with demand



Constrained labour market

Ageing population with 22% aged 65+ (compared to 16.8% in Victoria)

Unemployment is lower than the state average (3.8% vs 4.4%)

Employment growth (2.9% p.a.) is **outpacing population growth** (1.3% p.a.)



Shifting skills and capability needs

Technology and automation are reshaping roles, creating more digital higher-order skills

Growth in higher-skill agriculture and manufacturing roles

Limited leadership depth constrains mentorship, succession and resilience



Low awareness and engagement with pathways

28% of 15- to 24-year-olds are not in the labour force, further weakened by high out-migration

Limited exposure to contemporary careers and low higher education uptake

Persistent stigma that agriculture and manufacturing industries are **low-paying and outdated**

Lower participation among migrants, women, First Nations people, people with a disability, and youth



Persistent shortages in critical roles

Gaps in engineers, trades, planners, automation specialists, electricians, allied health

Declining higher education participation (-2.5% p.a.) and largely external provision, increasing reliance on attracting graduates

VET growing (3.7% p.a.) but concentrated in current rather than emerging skill need



Infrastructure and liveability constraints

Limited availability, affordability and suitability of housing

Barriers in transport, childcare and digital connectivity, especially in dispersed communities



The role of RDA Hume

Within this strategy RDA Hume acts as a regional connector and advocate, to drive strategic workforce outcomes by:

- **Activating stakeholders** to align on priorities, design solutions and share good practice
- **Advocating to government** for the policy, investment and system settings required to address structural workforce constraints

Through this role RDA Hume will help support workforce initiatives that are practical, connected and responsive to the needs of employers, communities and the regional economy.

The role of regional stakeholders

Delivering this strategy requires coordinated action across regional partners. Each plays a distinct and complementary role in designing, delivering and enabling workforce outcomes across the region.



Industry and employers can support this strategy by defining workforce demand, shaping priority roles and skills, and leading the implementation of new workforce models through inclusive practices, job design, mentoring, and adoption of flexible and technology-enabled approaches.



Education and training providers can support this strategy by working collaboratively to deliver aligned and connected pathways that respond to industry demand and support workforce outcomes. Specifically:

- **Schools** can build awareness of local career pathways, strengthen careers education, and support transitions from school into training and employment.
- **Tertiary providers (TAFE, universities and RTOs)** can design and deliver training aligned to priority roles, including work integrated learning, micro-credentials and higher-level pathways.
- **Community education providers (including School to Work providers)** can support flexible, place-based pathways, including delivering foundation skills and job readiness support, and connecting learners to pathways and opportunities to transition into training and employment.



Government can support this strategy by enabling the policy, funding and system settings required to support workforce outcomes across the region. Specifically:

- **Local government** can enable place-based delivery through planning, coordination and local investment, including supporting participation, service access, housing and regional promotion.
- **State government** can fund and deliver the VET system, support training pathways and workforce programs, and align policy and investment to regional workforce needs.
- **Federal government** can set higher education and migration policy, including DAMA, and provide funding for workforce, infrastructure and regional development programs.



Community and First Nations organisations can support this strategy by delivering place-based and culturally appropriate workforce solutions, support participation through job readiness and wraparound services, and lead and scale First Nations-led workforce development models.

1 Priority skills and jobs

Improved visibility, credibility and accessibility of local career pathways can strengthen workforce supply in critical local jobs. Current transitions into local employment remain weak despite strong job opportunities across the region, with more than a quarter (28 per cent) of people aged 15 to 24 not in the labour force. Youth out-migration further weakens the entry-level workforce pipeline, with many leaving the region to study or in search of perceived better opportunities elsewhere despite strong and growing opportunities within the region.

Limited exposure in schools to contemporary jobs and careers and low uptake in higher education drive perceptions that Hume's high-value, traditional industries such as agriculture, manufacturing and construction are low paid, lack future focus and offer limited progression, which reduces uptake of local jobs and reinforces out-migration.

The actions under this pillar aim to align regional stakeholders on priority skills and roles, and deliver coordinated storytelling to showcase clear, credible career pathways, including earning potential and the evolving nature of work, to build aspiration and support stronger transitions into local employment.

1.1 Regional alignment on priority skills, jobs, industries and pathways

Alignment on priority skills, roles, industries and workforce messaging is critical to ensure clear and consistent signals across the region. This is particularly important for priority sectors such as health care, construction, agriculture and manufacturing, where demand is strong, but awareness and perception gaps persist. A coordinated approach can ensure stakeholders consistently promote both high-skill roles (e.g. engineers, automation specialists, construction managers) and high-volume roles (e.g. carers, electricians), strengthening awareness and improving the ability of these roles to attract the workers they need.



RDA Hume will connect industry, education partners and local government to align on priority skills, roles and industries and a consistent set of workforce messages.



Industry and employers can support this by actively shaping and informing priority skills and roles based on workforce demand, with ongoing input as needs evolve, including through employer bodies (e.g. Master Builders Association, Master Plumbers Association) that can provide aggregated insights on workforce needs and skills demand.



Education and training providers can support this by contributing input on current and planned pathways for priority skills and roles, and ensuring messaging reflects clear and credible training and career pathways across schools, tertiary providers and community education settings.



Local government can support this by identifying priority skills and roles as employers and contributing place-based workforce needs and insights to inform regional priorities and messaging.

1.2 Storytelling that showcases local career opportunities

A coordinated regional storytelling approach is needed to promote agreed priority skills, roles, industries and career pathways in a clear and practical way. It should show that real and achievable career pathways exist in Hume, across a range of industries and roles. Storytelling should meet people where they are, using trusted channels to reach young people, job seekers and career changers, and drawing on real-world examples of jobs and pathways in the region. This should lift visibility of high-volume essential roles (e.g. aged and disability

care), priority growth sectors (health and construction), and the evolving, technology-enabled nature of roles in agriculture and manufacturing, while building confidence in local opportunities and supporting more informed career decisions.



RDA Hume will coordinate the development and dissemination of regional storytelling campaigns across partners and channels, ensuring consistent promotion of local jobs and career pathways aligned to agreed workforce messaging.



Industry and employers can support this by contributing real-world job insights, case studies and workforce narratives that reflect current and emerging roles and promoting these through employer networks and recruitment activities, including leveraging existing resources and materials from industry and employer bodies, and promoting these through employer and industry networks.



Education and training providers can support this by reinforcing campaign messaging across the education system, including schools embedding content in careers education, and tertiary providers promoting pathways through outreach and course information.



Local government can support this by producing locally relevant promotional materials and/or distributing campaign content through established community and regional channels to amplify reach and consistency.

2 Future focused workforce

Strong alignment between training and workforce needs can improve workforce supply. Integrated and locally accessible pathways can accelerate entry into priority roles, support progression into higher-skill occupations and improve retention of talent within the region. Current local training pathways are not always aligned to priority skills and occupations, limiting the supply of workers into roles such as engineers, trades, planners, electricians, automation specialists and allied health professionals. Participation trends reflect this misalignment, with VET growing at scale (3.7 per cent per annum) but concentrated in applied fields, and higher education declining (2.5 per cent per annum) and largely external to the region.

This misalignment is driven by limited local provision in key disciplines due to thin markets and a lack of flexible, work-integrated models that connect learners directly to employment.

The actions under this pillar aim to strengthen alignment between industry and training providers, expand work-integrated and flexible learning models, and build the technical and leadership capability needed to support emerging workforce demands.

2.1 Work integrated pathways connecting learners to priority roles

Work-integrated pathways can better connect learners to priority roles and accelerate entry into employment. This is particularly important for priority roles across sectors such as construction, agriculture and manufacturing, where demand is strong but existing pathways are fragmented or external to the region. Embedded VET within higher education and degree apprenticeships that combine study with paid work can strengthen alignment between training and industry need, reducing time to employment and improving retention of talent in the region.



RDA Hume will convene local and metropolitan universities, NVITAFE and industry to support the development and piloting of integrated training models that connect learners to priority roles.



Industry and employers can support this by identifying priority roles and skill requirements, contributing to pathway design, and providing work-integrated opportunities such as placements, traineeships and apprenticeships to support transition into local employment.



Education and training providers can support this by identifying priority roles and skill requirements, contributing to pathway design, and providing work-integrated opportunities such as placements, traineeships and apprenticeships to support transition into local employment.



State government can support this by enabling flexible training delivery, funding pilot programs and scaling work-integrated models through the VET system and partnerships with universities.

Local government can support this by identifying local workforce needs and opportunities for work integrated pathways, connecting employers and training providers, and facilitating place-based delivery models, including enabling training to be delivered locally or on-site.

2.2 Digital, AI and advanced technical micro-credentials aligned to cross industry needs

Demand is rapidly increasing for practical digital capability, including understanding how to work with AI, automation and adjacent technologies across a range of roles. This is particularly relevant in sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture and construction, where technology is reshaping how work is done and the skills required.

Digital and advanced technical micro-credentials can support rapid upskilling by building foundational capability and confidence in understanding, applying and working alongside digital and AI-enabled systems. This can support both higher-skill, technology-embedded roles (e.g. automation specialists, digitally enabled technicians) and population-serving roles (e.g. care, education and service roles), where digital systems are increasingly part of day-to-day work, improving productivity and helping employers meet workforce demand.



RDA Hume will convene local and metropolitan universities, NVITAFE and industry to support the design and delivery of micro credentials focused on practical digital capability, including AI and automation adjacent skills, aligned to industry demand.



Industry and employers can support this by identifying priority digital and technical skills, contributing to course design, and supporting delivery through workplace-based learning and adoption.



Education and training providers, particularly NVITAFE, can support this by designing and delivering micro-credentials focused on practical digital capability, including AI and automation-adjacent skills, aligned to industry demand.



State government can support this by enabling flexible training delivery and funding pilot programs and scaling of micro-credentials through the VET system.

2.3 Peer-to-peer mentoring to strengthen leadership and management capability

Stronger leadership and management capability is important to support workforce development, improve retention and enable organisations to grow local talent. This is particularly relevant across sectors such as construction, manufacturing, health care, and local government, where limited supervision, mentoring and people management capability constrains workforce development and progression. Peer-to-peer mentoring provides a practical, low-cost approach to building practical leadership capability, supporting career progression, improving retention in priority roles, and strengthening the pipeline into leadership positions across key industries, with existing models in the region (e.g. Greater Shepparton Business mentoring Program) providing a foundation that can be scaled more broadly across the workforce.



RDA Hume will convene employers, industry groups and regional partners to inform and support the development of a region-wide peer-to-peer mentoring approach. This could involve for example a “lift and shift” approach of Greater Shepparton’s mentoring program to adapt and apply this model across the region



Industry and employers can support this by participating in mentoring networks, sharing experience and providing peer support to strengthen supervision, workforce development and leadership practices.



Local government can support this by participating in mentoring networks as employers, connecting across councils to share leadership capability and workforce management practices.



CASE STUDY

Opening doors to regional health and the workforce of the future

La Trobe University and Gateway Health brought students into a two-day Innovation Sprint in Wodonga in early 2026, tackling a live regional health challenge while building fresh ideas, workforce pathways and new opportunities for collaboration beyond traditional placements.

More than 20 La Trobe students gathered at Gateway Health's Head Office in Wodonga for the La Trobe x Gateway Health Innovation Sprint, bringing fresh eyes to a complex regional health challenge. Coming from metropolitan Melbourne and the local area, they were asked to help Gateway Health think differently about how people access care – and how that experience could be made simpler, faster and more intuitive.

The Sprint grew out of an existing relationship between Gateway Health and La Trobe University, as well as an earlier summer student project looking at how people first access Gateway Health's services. Over the two days, students and alumni worked in teams on possible digital and service solutions, alongside Gateway Health staff and leaders.

La Trobe has a strong focus on AI and integrates it across all aspects of the student experience. The Innovation Sprint was no exception, with students challenged to explore how AI could be applied to address the problem statement. Through this process, they also gained valuable insight into the opportunities and limitations of using AI in healthcare, including the practical, ethical and regulatory barriers to implementation.

Students were asked to tackle a real-world challenge facing Gateway Health: How might we create one simple digital front door to Gateway Health's programs that reduces confusion and remains accessible for all?

"We were looking at our intake processes – what it looked like coming in through the doors, the systems,

the processes," says Gateway Health CEO Trent Dean. The focus was on reducing duplication, lowering barriers to entry and improving the experience of accessing care.

Gateway Health operates across north-east Victoria and southern New South Wales, delivering services spanning mental health and wellbeing, alcohol and other drugs, primary health care, community wellbeing programs and health promotion. "We see access and equity as a real issue and a real challenge," Trent says.

For Trent, one of the biggest strengths of the Sprint was the mix of thinking students brought with them. "Health is a microcosm, but it needs good minds from outside health," he says. "It's still a business, so how do we bring all that knowledge to look at a wicked problem?"

Trent sees the Innovation Sprint as part of a broader and evolving partnership between Gateway Health and La Trobe. Alongside clinical placements and research, he points to future opportunities in student engagement, workforce development, co-design and new models of care.

"If we want a stronger workforce going forward, we really need to expose these emerging professionals to the challenges and the possibilities within regional health early," he says. "That's our duty as leaders and as health professionals – to help them build a career, not just a placement."

For both Gateway Health and La Trobe, the value of the collaboration extends well beyond the event itself. The Innovation Sprint demonstrated how students can contribute meaningfully to real-world challenges, how regional health organisations can benefit from fresh multidisciplinary perspectives, and how partnerships like this can help shape the future regional workforce while driving innovation in healthcare delivery.

3 Dynamic and AI enabled workforce models

Adopting new workforce models can improve productivity and workforce outcomes across the region. Current workforce models are not well suited to Hume's thin and highly distributed labour markets, limiting employers' ability to attract and retain skilled workers. At the same time, work is becoming more technology enabled, but existing approaches lack the flexibility to respond. These challenges are driven by seasonal and fragmented work, limited collaboration across employers and uneven adoption of technology, alongside constrained workforce supply in key sectors such as tourism, agriculture and manufacturing.

The actions under this pillar aim to support the adoption and scaling of flexible, multi-employer and technology enabled workforce models, improving productivity and enabling more sustainable workforce outcomes across the region.

3.1 Flexible work arrangements across priority industries

Flexible work arrangements are important to improve workforce attraction and retention, particularly in sectors such as construction, agriculture and manufacturing where rigid full-time and fixed work patterns structures limit participation. Adopting flexible models, including four-day work weeks and hybrid arrangements where appropriate, can broaden participation, particularly for those constrained by caring responsibilities or location. Flexible work can also support greater participation of older workers, particularly given Hume's ageing population, by enabling continued workforce engagement through reduced hours, part-time roles and more flexible work patterns, where regulatory settings allow.



RDA Hume will convene employers and industry groups to share insights, showcase effective models and support the uptake of flexible work arrangements across priority industries, and advocate to government for policy and regulatory settings that enable greater workforce participation, including reducing barriers for older workers such as pension-related income and hours thresholds.



Industry and employers can support this by designing, trialling and scaling flexible work models, such as four-day work weeks and hybrid arrangements, tailored to their operating contexts to improve attraction, retention and workforce participation.



Local government can support this by promoting flexible work practices through local business networks and sharing examples across sectors and regions to support broader adoption.

3.2 Multi-employer workforce models to combine seasonal roles into year-round employment

Multi-employer workforce models can address seasonal and fragmented work patterns that limit workforce stability and retention. This is particularly relevant in Hume's tourism, agriculture and hospitality sectors, where demand is increasingly concentrated into shorter, more intense peak periods, reducing the duration of consistent employment for both businesses and workers. Individual employers often cannot offer sustained hours or year-round roles, making it harder to attract and retain workers. Combining roles across employers can create more stable, full-time employment pathways, improving retention and access to local jobs while helping employers better meet workforce demand during peak periods.



RDA Hume will convene industry partners and the Victorian Skills Authority to support the design and piloting of multi-employer workforce models across priority sectors, building on the proposed Seasonal Skills Passport and adapting it for broader application across industries facing seasonal

demand. They will also explore policy and regulatory opportunities to further support this, for example portability of long service, annual or sick leave.



Industry and employers can support this by collaborating to design and implement combined seasonal and cross-industry roles (e.g. across tourism, agriculture, events, hospitality and maintenance), enabling workers to transition between roles and sustain year-round employment.



State government, specifically the Victorian Skills Authority, can support this by aligning training, funding and program settings to enable multi-employer models, including supporting access to relevant training pathways and skills development.

3.3 AI and technology enabled workforce models

Technology-enabled workforce models can improve productivity and support delivery in constrained labour markets, particularly in sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture and construction where workforce shortages are acute. However, adoption of AI and digital technologies remains uneven, limiting employers' ability to improve productivity and respond to fluctuating demand. Building a baseline understanding of AI and digital technologies, including what they are, how they can support work, and where they may be applied, can help employers make informed decisions about whether and how to adopt these approaches. Learning from early adopters and practical examples can help clarify application and provide scalable options for businesses. This is particularly important for small and medium-sized enterprises, which often lack the capability and resources to explore these technologies independently.



RDA Hume will support industry leaders and training partners to design and deliver targeted capability-building initiatives, including regional events that showcase AI and digital technologies and practical examples of adoption, and support the trialling of proposed approaches.



Industry and employers can support this by trialling and adopting technology-enabled workforce models, integrating digital tools into operations to improve productivity and support workforce sustainability.



Education and training providers, particularly NVITAFE and universities, can support this by building employer capability in the applied use of AI and digital technologies, including designing and delivering targeted training aligned to industry needs.



Local government can support this by facilitating access to practical learning opportunities, including delivering or supporting workshops for local SME's that build understanding of AI, showcase real world applications and connect businesses with early adopters and expert support.

State and federal government can support this by providing funding and enabling program settings that support capability-building, pilot projects and the scaling of AI adoption across the region.

CASE STUDY

Expanding opportunity in manufacturing through flexible job design

Opal Fibre Packaging has rethought job design at its Wodonga site, using flexible rostering, including a four-day working week, to improve attraction, retention and workforce diversity.

Manufacturing roles in regional areas have traditionally faced challenges in attracting and retaining a diverse workforce, particularly where roles are perceived as inflexible or lacking long-term career appeal.

At Opal's advanced, high-speed cardboard packaging facility in Wodonga, these challenges are addressed from the outset. When the site was established in 2023, the focus was on creating meaningful, high-quality roles supported by strong leadership, a positive team culture and contemporary ways of working.

A key part of this approach has been the introduction of a four-day working week across day and afternoon shifts. This rostering model provides greater

flexibility, while a consistent three-day weekend has improved overall job satisfaction and work-life balance.

Importantly, this is not just about flexibility, it is about creating an attractive and sustainable employment experience and "job products" that appeal to a broader demographic. By combining modern rostering with a strong focus on leadership and engagement, the Wodonga site now ranks among Opal's highest for team member engagement and female participation.

As a result, Opal has been able to attract and retain a more diverse workforce, including individuals who may not have previously considered a career in manufacturing. This demonstrates how rethinking traditional workforce models can improve employee outcomes, strengthen capability and support long-term business performance.



4 Realised workforce potential

Expanding workforce participation across the region can help meet current and future labour demand by making full use of the available workforce and building a steady pipeline of new workers who are set up for success. Participation is lower across several groups, for example, overseas-born residents make up 19.8 per cent of the population but only 15 per cent of the workforce, people with disability represent 6.8 per cent of the population but just 0.5 per cent of the workforce, women 50.4 per cent but 48.2 per cent, and First Nations people 2.53 per cent but 1.9 per cent. There are also opportunities to better engage older workers, particularly given Hume's ageing population.

These gaps are driven by systemic barriers, including limited access to childcare and transport, job readiness requirements such as licences and checks, recognition of international qualifications, workplace accessibility and inflexible work practices. Employer capability to attract, support and retain workers also varies, including the ability to create culturally safe and inclusive workplaces that enable people to enter, remain and progress in employment.

The actions under this pillar aim to reduce barriers to employment, improve access to job readiness and support services, strengthen the use of migration pathways to support a steady pipeline of new workers, and build employer capability to adopt inclusive workforce practices that support participation for all.

4.1 Inclusive and culturally appropriate workforce practices

Inclusive workforce practices are critical to improving attraction, retention and participation, and ensuring employment opportunities are accessible to people from all backgrounds. This is relevant across all industries, where workforce diversity remains limited and employers may face challenges attracting and retaining workers. Workplaces need to be culturally safe, accessible and inclusive to enable people to enter, remain and progress in employment. Strengthening practices such as culturally responsive approaches, accessible workplace design, reasonable adjustments and effective onboarding can improve access to employment, increase retention and help employers maximise productivity from the available workforce.



RDA Hume will convene employers, industry groups and regional partners to share and promote inclusive workforce practices, including showcasing proven models and facilitating peer learning.



Industry and employers can support this by strengthening workforce practices across inclusive recruitment, accessible job design, onboarding and retention approaches, including culturally responsive practices and reasonable adjustments, and sharing these practices more broadly.



Community and First Nations organisations, including WomenCAN and the Munarra Centre for Regional Excellence, can support this by sharing proven models and supporting employers to adopt approaches that reflect local community needs and improve workforce participation.

4.2 Job readiness supports for new and emerging workers

Coordinated job readiness and access supports are important to reduce practical barriers that prevent people from entering and sustaining employment. This is especially relevant where barriers such as transport, licensing, checks and limited access to foundational job readiness support restrict entry into roles across sectors such as health care, construction and agriculture. Better aligning supports to local jobs and employer demand can improve access to high volume entry-level roles, increasing workforce participation and improving retention outcomes across priority industries.



RDA Hume will convene stakeholders to inform and support the design of a region-wide approach to job readiness and access supports aligned to priority industries and roles, including working with

neighbouring RDAs to share insights and approaches, support cross-border opportunities, and advocate for greater consistency in licensing requirements across border regions.



Education and training providers, particularly community education providers, can support this by delivering job readiness services, including mentoring, and foundational supports such as résumé and application preparation.



Federal government can support this by enabling policy, funding and program settings that improve access to job-readiness supports, including supporting cross-border workforce participation.

Local government can support access by communicating available services and pathways through community networks and local channels, helping individuals connect to the supports they need.



Community and First Nations organisations, including Munarra Centre for Regional Excellence and WomenCAN can support this by delivering job readiness and support services, including mentoring, transport assistance, support to access licences and checks, and foundational supports such as résumé and application preparation.

4.3 Strengthened use of migration pathways such as DAMA

Migration pathways can help address workforce shortages that cannot be met locally, particularly in critical and hard-to-fill roles. In Hume, stakeholders noted that Designated Area Migration Agreements (DAMA) have been effective in addressing operational-level workforce needs where local supply is limited. However, their application is more constrained for technical and professional roles due to requirements such as skills matching, qualification recognition and registration processes. Connector and welcome programs are also important to support successful settlement, integration and long-term workforce participation. Strengthening awareness, access and coordination of migration pathways, alongside investment in settlement support and more responsive system settings, can help employers better utilise these pathways to support workforce supply and sustained service delivery.



RDA Hume will convene employers, industry groups and government partners to improve awareness, access and utilisation of migration pathways, including DAMA, and advocate for settings that better reflect regional workforce needs.



Industry and employers can support this by identifying roles where local supply is persistently insufficient, including roles suited to DAMA, and utilising visa migration programs and pathways to attract and retain workers where appropriate.



Education and training providers, particularly community education providers, can support this by delivering job readiness services, including mentoring, and foundational supports such as résumé and application preparation.



Federal government can support this by setting migration policy and program settings, including DAMA arrangements, and improving the accessibility, processing, qualification recognition and responsiveness of migration pathways to better meet regional workforce needs.

Local government can support this by coordinating administrative support for employers, connecting businesses to migration services, facilitating local partnerships and creating connector programs for new migrants (such as the Committee for Greater Shepparton C4GS's Community Connector Program).

5 First Nations-led economic development

Expanding First Nations-led workforce models can improve participation, strengthen retention and deliver more sustainable workforce outcomes across industries and communities. First Nations-led employment models are delivering strong results but are not yet consistently scaled across the region, limiting their overall impact. This is driven by fragmented system support, short term funding and barriers to participation that limit the ability of organisations to sustain and expand proven approaches.

The actions under this pillar aim to support the scaling of proven First Nations-led employment models, strengthen partnerships between First Nations organisations, industry and government, and advocate for sustained investment to enable long term workforce and economic development outcomes.

5.1 First Nations-led employment models

First Nations-led employment models can improve workforce participation, retention and culturally appropriate pathways into work. This is particularly relevant for supporting stronger transitions into employment across industries such as construction, land and water management and community services, where demand exists but pathways and support are not consistently effective. Scaling proven models, particularly those that integrate training, employment and cultural support, can strengthen access to sustainable roles and improve retention outcomes by providing ongoing support through the transition into and early stages of employment.



RDA Hume will work with First Nations organisations and regional partners to identify and document proven employment models, connect stakeholders to share and learn from these approaches, and support their trialling across different employers and contexts across the region.



Industry and employers can support this by partnering with First Nations organisations to adopt and integrate these models within their workforce, supporting culturally safe workplaces and sustained employment pathways.



First Nations organisations, including TVN On-Country and On-Country Pathways, can support this by leading, demonstrating and adapting culturally grounded employment models, and working with employers to apply these approaches more broadly across industries. This includes sharing proven models and practices that integrate training, employment and cultural support to strengthen transitions and retention outcomes.



Local government can support this by aligning planning and economic development activities with the local priorities of First Nations organisations, and supporting place-based initiatives that strengthen pathways into employment and reflect community aspirations.

5.2 Investment in First Nations-led economic and workforce development

Sustained and coordinated government investment is important to enable First Nations-led workforce and economic development initiatives to deliver long term impact. This is particularly relevant for organisations delivering integrated employment models and community led pathways, where short term and fragmented funding limits their ability to build capability and scale proven approaches. Longer term investment can strengthen organisational capacity and support the expansion of these models across key industries, improving participation, retention and access to sustainable employment. This can enable more consistent workforce outcomes and maximise the impact of First Nations-led approaches across the region.



RDA Hume will advocate for sustained and coordinated government investment in First Nations-led economic and workforce development initiatives, including longer-term funding models that support delivery and scaling.



State and federal government can support this by providing coordinated, longer-term funding and policy settings aligned to regional priorities, enabling First Nations organisations to build capability, scale models and deliver sustained workforce and economic development outcomes.



First Nations organisations, including TVN On-Country, On-Country Pathways, the Munarra Centre for Regional Excellence and the Kaiela Institute, can support this by designing and delivering programs that integrate training, employment and cultural support, leveraging funding to expand reach and impact.



CASE STUDY

Unlocking economic opportunity through First Nations leadership and place-based development

The Munarra Centre for Regional Excellence in Shepparton brings together education, employment and community-led development, while creating meaningful training and job opportunities through its construction and ongoing programs.

The Munarra Centre for Regional Excellence, located on Yorta Yorta Country, is a First Nations-led education and community hub developed through a partnership between the Kaiela Institute, Rumbalara Football Netball Club and the University of Melbourne. Designed and governed through a self-determined model, the Centre brings together education, leadership and cultural knowledge within a purpose-built facility grounded in community priorities.

The Centre provides pathways-based education with Yorta Yorta knowledge embedded in its curriculum, supporting stronger transitions into further study and employment. Programs span vocational and higher education, including qualifications in health, community services and early childhood education, alongside culturally responsive learning experiences delivered on Country.

Construction of the Centre demonstrates how employment and training outcomes can be embedded into delivery. Built by First Nations-owned

company TVN On-Country, the project exceeded all social procurement targets, with Victorian Aboriginal staff making up over 30 per cent of the project team and contributing about 20 per cent of total labour hours, well above initial targets. The project also created new jobs and delivered structured training opportunities, including cadetships and work experience for First Nations students, alongside strong participation from First Nations businesses across the supply chain.

The Centre itself is designed to drive long-term outcomes beyond construction. As an Indigenous-led pathways-based education facility for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students - the first of its kind in Australia - it provides a platform for culturally grounded education, employment and wellbeing initiatives. It is expected to deliver a significant uplift in education and employment pathways in the region, with programs set to grow over time.

Together, the development and delivery of the Munarra Centre demonstrate how First Nations leadership, investment and partnerships can create immediate employment opportunities while establishing long-term pathways into education, work and economic participation, contributing to broader regional prosperity.

Enabled by a strong and well-promoted regional liveability offer

Enhancing liveability across the Hume region is a key driver of workforce attraction, retention and participation. Hume's ability to attract and retain workers is constrained by gaps in enabling infrastructure and services, including housing availability and affordability and access to transport, childcare and digital connectivity, particularly in smaller and more dispersed communities. These constraints are driven by uneven population growth, localised pressure on housing and services, gaps in digital infrastructure and access and fragmented approaches to regional promotion and service provision.

The actions under this enabler aim to improve access to housing and essential services, strengthen coordinated regional promotion of lifestyle and place, and improve access to transport, childcare and digital connectivity to support workforce participation and mobility.

E.1 Scaled worker housing solutions

Housing is important to support workforce attraction and retention, particularly in growth areas such as Mitchell, Wodonga and Greater Shepparton where demand for workers is increasing and outpacing infrastructure to support housing growth. Limited availability, affordability and suitability of housing constrains access to employment across sectors such as health care, construction and tourism (including alpine regions where seasonal workforce demand is high) reducing the region's ability to attract and retain workers. Expanding and scaling housing solutions can improve access to jobs in priority industries, support retention of essential workers (e.g. health care workers, trades and tourism workforce), and enable more sustainable workforce growth across the region.



RDA Hume will advocate for the scaling of worker and key-worker housing solutions, and facilitate coordination between government, employers and housing providers to support place-based initiatives.



Industry and employers can support this by identifying workforce housing needs and priority locations and partnering with government and housing providers to support place-based solutions.



Local government can support this by enabling planning and land-use settings, facilitating place-based housing initiatives and working with employers and housing providers to identify and deliver local solutions aligned to workforce needs. This includes supporting the activation of underutilised or unrealised land, coordinating local infrastructure and service provision, and aligning housing delivery with asset renewal.

State and federal government can support this by enabling housing supply and infrastructure delivery through funding, policy and program settings, including releasing and servicing land, supporting affordable and key-worker housing initiatives, and investing in enabling community infrastructure to meet population and workforce growth.

E.2 Coordinated regional promotion of lifestyle and place

A coordinated approach to promoting Hume's lifestyle and strengths can support workforce attraction and retention. While the region offers strong quality of life advantages, awareness remains fragmented and inconsistent, limiting its ability to attract workers to both larger centres and smaller communities.

Coordinated promotion can improve visibility of the region's lifestyle, community and natural assets, including events, arts and key destinations such as the Murray River and Alpine resorts while also highlighting its

connectivity across the Victoria–NSW border and proximity to Melbourne. This strengthens the region’s appeal as a place to live and work, supporting attraction and retention across industries.



RDA Hume will convene and coordinate regional stakeholders, including the tourism industry, to support a shared approach to promoting Hume’s lifestyle and strengths, drawing on sector expertise to articulate a compelling regional narrative.



Industry and employers particularly in tourism bodies, can support this by contributing insights on regional strengths, visitor experiences and local assets, and promoting these through industry networks and channels.



Local government can support this by delivering and amplifying place-based promotion through coordinated marketing, events and community engagement, ensuring consistent messaging and broad reach across the region.

State and federal government can support this by providing funding and program settings that enable regional tourism and place promotion, including investment in events, destination marketing and enabling infrastructure to support visitation and workforce attraction.

E.3 Improved access to transport, childcare and digital connectivity

Improved access to transport, childcare and digital connectivity can support workforce participation and mobility across the region. This is particularly relevant in smaller and more dispersed communities, where limited access to these services constrains participation in employment and training. Addressing these barriers can improve access to both entry-level and skilled roles, increase workforce participation across priority cohorts and support more consistent workforce availability, particularly in areas experiencing workforce shortages.



RDA Hume will coordinate regional evidence and priorities to inform government decision-making, and advocate for targeted investment in transport, childcare and digital connectivity to address local workforce and participation barriers.



Local government can support this by investing in and facilitating local service delivery and infrastructure, including transport solutions, childcare provision and digital access, and working with partners to co-invest in place-based initiatives aligned to workforce and population growth.

Implementation plan

Timeline

Actions are staged across the strategy period to progressively build, scale and embed a sustainable regional workforce system.

- Short term actions (FY27) aim to establish the foundations for change, including aligning stakeholders on priority roles, improving visibility of local opportunities, removing immediate barriers to participation and piloting new workforce and training models.
- Medium term actions (FY28) aim to scale effective approaches, including strengthening education to employment pathways, expanding workforce supply, scaling new workforce models and delivering early improvements in liveability and regional coordination.
- Long term actions (FY29) aim to embed a mature and sustainable workforce system, including integrating workforce pathways into standard practice, sustaining participation and migration outcomes, scaling First Nations-led models and delivering structural improvements to housing, infrastructure and workforce capability.

The table below outlines the indicative timing for each action across these phases.

Pillar / Enabler	Action	Short (FY27)	Medium (FY28)	Long (FY29)
1. Priority skills and jobs	1.1 Regional alignment on priority skills, jobs, industries and pathways	✓		
	1.2 Storytelling campaigns that showcase career opportunities	✓	✓	
2. Future focused workforce	2.1 Work integrated pathways connecting learners to priority roles		✓	✓
	2.2 Digital, AI and advanced technical micro-credentials aligned to cross industry needs	✓	✓	
	2.3 Peer-to-peer mentoring to strengthen leadership and management capability	✓		
3. Dynamic and AI enabled workforce models	3.1 Flexible work arrangements across priority industries	✓	✓	
	3.2 Multi-employer workforce models to combine seasonal roles into year-round employment		✓	✓
	3.3 AI and technology enabled workforce models	✓	✓	✓
4. Realised workforce potential	4.1 Inclusive and culturally appropriate workforce practices	✓	✓	
	4.2 Job readiness supports for future workers	✓		✓
	4.3 Strengthened use of migration pathways such as DAMA		✓	✓
	5.1 First Nations-led employment models		✓	✓

Pillar / Enabler	Action	Short (FY27)	Medium (FY28)	Long (FY29)
5. First Nations-led economic development	5.2 Investment in First Nations-led economic and workforce development			✓
Enabled by a strong and well-promoted regional liveability offer	E.1 Scaled worker and key-worker housing solutions		✓	✓
	E.2 Coordinated regional promotion of lifestyle and place	✓	✓	
	E.3 Improved access to transport, childcare and connectivity	✓	✓	✓

Advocacy

RDA Hume will advocate to state and federal government for the policy, funding and system settings required to address structural workforce challenges across the region.

Key advocacy priorities include:

- Alignment of licensing and regulatory requirements across the NSW–Victoria border (action 4.2)
- Investment in transport, childcare, housing and digital connectivity (enabler E.3)
- Settings to support workforce attraction and retention, including migration pathways (4.3)

Monitoring and governance

RDA Hume will work with regional stakeholders to monitor progress against the actions in this strategy and support coordinated delivery across the region. This will focus on tracking progress at a system level, recognising that outcomes will be delivered collectively rather than through any single organisation.

Progress will be monitored through a structured but flexible governance approach, bringing together key stakeholders from industry, education and training providers, government, and community organisations. RDA Hume will:

- Convene bi-annual regional coordination forums to review progress, share updates and identify emerging priorities
- Engage directly with delivery partners to gather insights on implementation, challenges and opportunities across actions
- Track progress against actions and outcomes, drawing on available data, stakeholder input and practical examples of implementation

Reporting outcomes

RDA Hume will communicate progress through regular, transparent reporting, including:

- An annual progress report, providing a structured overview of activity, key outcomes, challenges and priorities for the coming year
- Bi-annual status updates at regional coordination forums to highlight key developments, emerging insights and any adjustments to priorities