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The local community, in particular residents of Morwell, will be asked to play a critical role in the long-term health impacts study of the Hazelwood mine fire recently awarded to Monash University.

This week Monash announced it would call for participation in a Community Advisory Committee early in the new year and release details of an extensive baseline survey in which the researchers hope all adults in Morwell will participate.

The initial 10 year study, awarded via tender by the Victorian Department of Health, is being led by Professor Michael Abramson from the Monash School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine (SPHPM) and Professor Judi Walker, Head, School of Rural Health (SRH), in collaboration with Federation University, University of Tasmania, CSIRO and University of Adelaide.

Professor Walker said SRH, with its strong presence across the Latrobe Valley, understood the importance of ensuring the local community was provided with multiple opportunities to have input into the study's operations and distribution of its findings.

She said the study, which will include streams looking at impacts of the smoke event on a range of health indicators including cardiovascular, respiratory, psychological and cancer-related outcomes, had been funded in response to concerns of the local community, "so we see it as essential that the community feels this is a collaborative effort every step of the way."

The long term study will build on smaller scale studies already underway with the University of Tasmania and Monash looking at initial health impacts for infants and Federation University also working with Monash colleagues to look at early community impacts.

"These studies will feed into the larger long-term study, providing an opportunity for early consideration of the impacts," Professor Walker said.

Numerous measures will be introduced to facilitate two-way communication between the research team and the community for the study's duration.

Professor Walker said a call for expressions of interest would be released shortly for the Community Advisory Committee, inviting representatives from key community and stakeholder organisations and general community members to put their hands up to be involved.

"A Clinical Reference Group will also be established bringing together key local health service personnel involved in responding to the smoke event and in supporting the ongoing health and wellbeing of the local community," she said.

The community will also be kept up to date via newsletters, a dedicated study website and community briefings.

The baseline questionnaire, collecting details such as pre-existing health conditions, lifestyle factors including smoking and an individual's level of exposure during the smoke event, as well as any associated distress, will form the basis for much of the study's ongoing research.

Professor Walker urged local residents to support the questionnaire when it is distributed. “People will be able to complete the baseline survey over the phone, online or in printed forms,” she said.

The local study project headquarters will be at the School of Rural Health’s Latrobe Valley academic site at Latrobe Regional Hospital and Professor Walker said local personnel would be recruited as part of the research, administrative and fieldwork teams, helping to strengthen local connections and build capacity in the region.