



Better Together 2040
Social Sustainability Strategy: 5-year review

A close-up photograph of a rock surface, likely a cave wall, showing ancient handprints. The rock is a warm, earthy brown color. Several handprints are visible, some in a lighter, more distinct color and others more faded. The surface is covered with numerous small, white, mineral-like deposits, possibly calcification or lichen, which are scattered across the rock face. The lighting is soft, highlighting the textures of the rock and the mineral deposits.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of these lands
and show respect to Elders, past, present and emerging.

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First year of plan - 2026/27

Draft presented: July 2026 - Workamjig 26SPS0560

Adopted: 15/09/2026



Message from the Mayor

Five years ago, we launched Better Together 2040, setting a long-term direction for a socially sustainable and inclusive Northern Beaches. Since then, we have worked alongside community organisations, partners and residents to achieve that goal.

The refreshed strategy builds on that work. It draws on feedback, evidence and what we have learned about our community.

The pressures shaping community life continue. Housing is harder to afford for people. The cost of living is stretching budgets. The care and support workforce is under sustained strain. Loneliness and social isolation remain a real concern and digital exclusion is leaving behind some of our older residents and people on lower incomes. These pressures are not felt evenly. People already experiencing vulnerability often carry the heaviest load.

The refreshed Better Together 2040 sharpens our focus. It provides a clear roadmap into the future to support a safe, diverse, inclusive and connected Northern Beaches.

We recognise the many strengths of our community. The Northern Beaches has one of the highest rates of volunteering in Greater Sydney. People feel connected to where they live. Our natural environment, sport and cultural life offer everyday opportunities for people to connect. Local organisations bring deep community knowledge and relationships that are not easily replicated. Our work acknowledges and builds on these strengths.

Better Together 2040 delivers our Community Strategic Plan 2040 aspirations. It is a shared commitment between Council, our partners,

the social services sector and the community. Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this work. Your time, evidence and lived experience have shaped every part of it.

We are still better together.

Sue Heins
Mayor, Northern Beaches Council

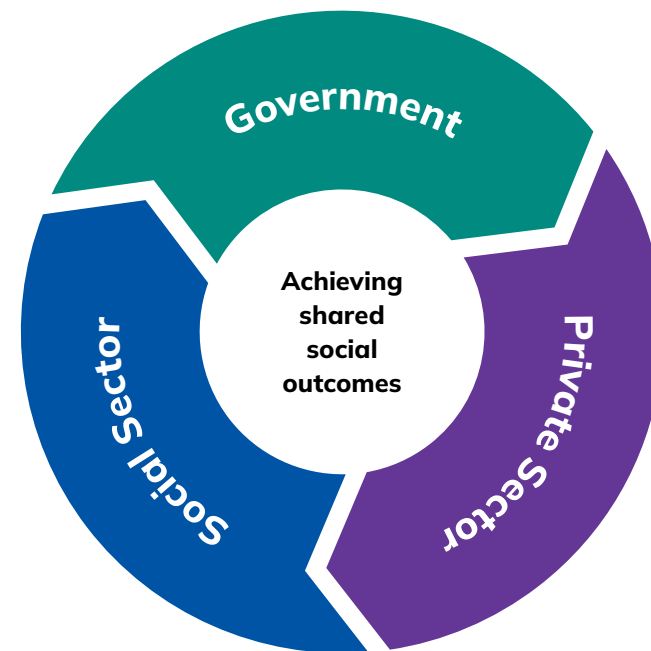
Why a socially sustainable and inclusive community is important

Social sustainability is critical for a community's wellbeing and longevity. It is about creating inclusive and resilient communities that have the required skills, services, people and infrastructure to respond to and recover from social, political, environmental and economic change.

With collaborative planning and commitment from the community we can create places where people want to live and work in the long term.

We believe that the key to creating a socially-sustainable and inclusive community is to ensure governments, the private sector and other stakeholders work together to create a safe and inclusive society, empower citizens and foster a resilient and peaceful community.

Figure 1: Achieving shared social outcomes





The vision for Better Together 2040 is to create:

**A socially sustainable and
inclusive community for all**



Looking towards 2040

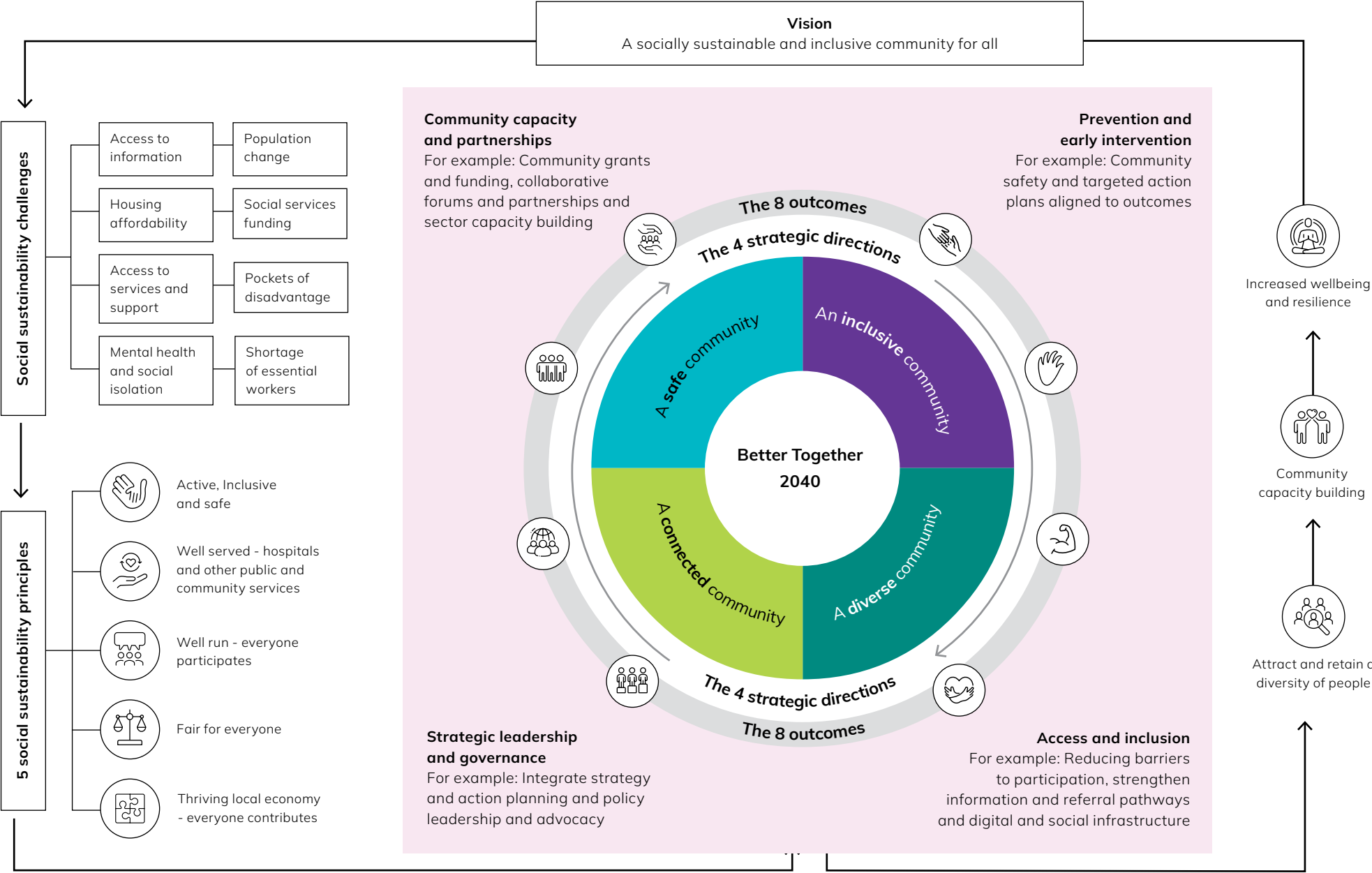
Successful, sustainable communities don't just happen, they require planning and work to create places where people want to live and work in the long term.

Better Together 2040 follows a simple logic: understand what is happening in the community, focus our effort through 4 strategic directions and work towards the conditions that support a socially sustainable and inclusive community for everyone between now and 2040. In 2020, Better Together was developed around 3 strategic directions - safe, inclusive, and connected. As part of this review, a fourth strategic direction - diverse, has been added to reflect the change to Community Strategic Plan 2040 vision for a safe, diverse, inclusive and connected Northern Beaches.

It is a collaboration to ensure our community is stronger, more resilient, equitable and socially sustainable today and tomorrow.

It uses a whole of community, strengths-based approach that establishes a cycle of social sustainability and inclusiveness. The Northern Beaches' key challenges are identified and addressed in an integrated way, ensuring we are better together.

Figure 2 - Impact logic



Better Together strategic framework

A community centred approach

Principles

We have identified 5 principles of socially-sustainable communities for the Northern Beaches community to aspire to. These 5 principles allow us to harness the power and strengths of the community, integrate the key principles of social sustainability within a broader planning approach and break down social and physical barriers.

Figure 3: 5 social sustainability principles



Active, inclusive and safe



Well served - hospitals and other public and community services



Well run - everyone participates



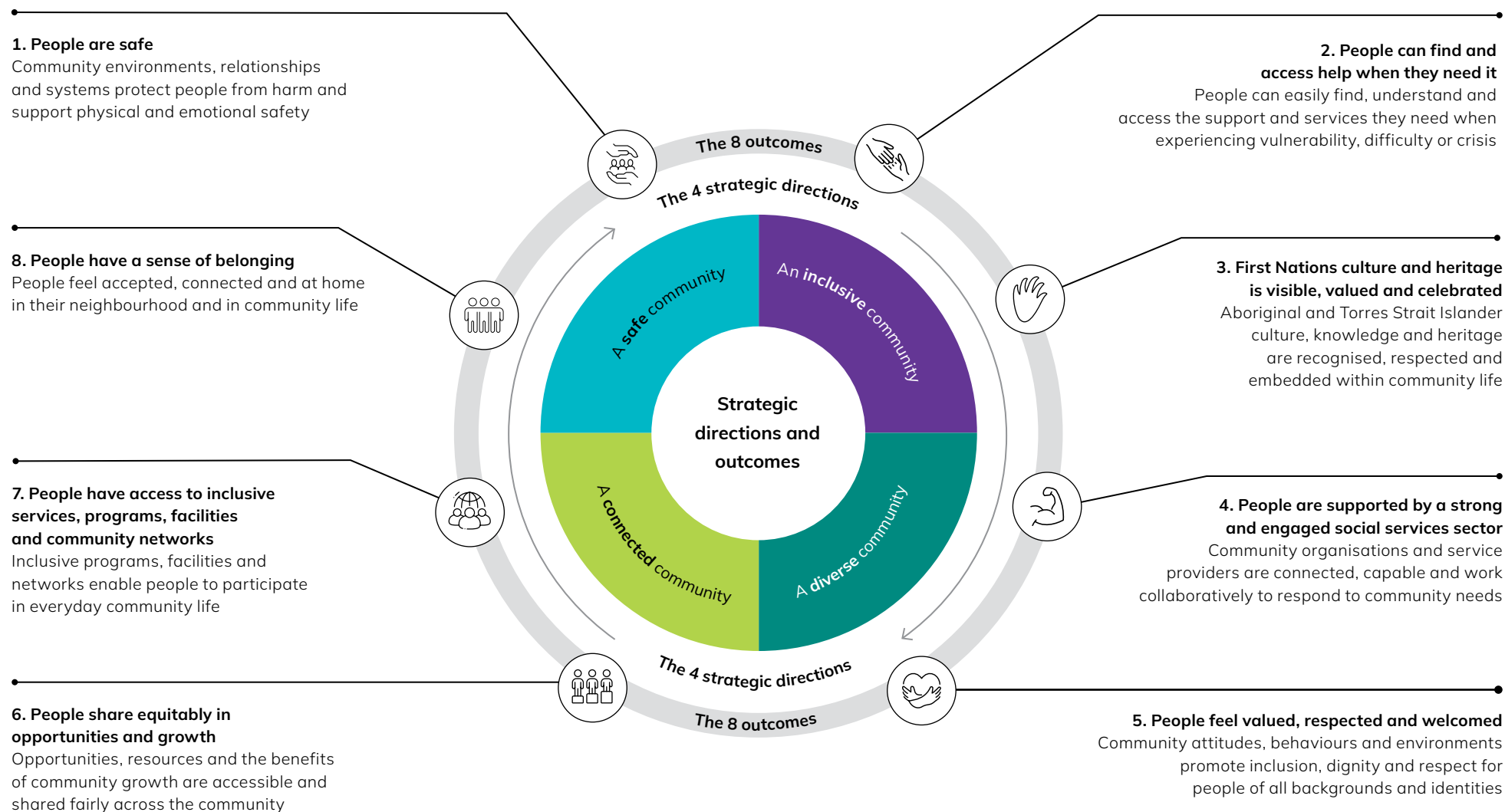
Fair for everyone



Thriving local economy - everyone contributes

Figure 4: Strategic directions and outcomes

Better Together 2040 has 4 strategic directions and 8 outcomes to work towards a socially-sustainable and inclusive Northern Beaches.



Our strategic line of sight

The principles of socially-sustainable communities are supported by global, national, state and regional level strategies and goals. Better Together 2040 aims to provide the local directions needed to achieve the following strategies and goals:

Global	UN Sustainable Development Goals	
		
National	Smart Cities Plan National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032 Working for Women - A Strategy for Gender Equality National Agreement on Closing the Gap Multicultural Access and Equity Policy	Measuring What Matters Framework Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031 - Building a more inclusive Australia National Suicide Prevention Strategy National Housing and Homelessness Plan
State	Premier's Priorities NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework Update NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan 2022-2027 NSW Strategic Framework for Mental Health Greater Sydney Region Plan, A Metropolis of Three Cities - Connecting Communities, March 2018 NSW Homelessness Strategy Housing 2041 (NSW Housing Strategy)	NSW Performance and Wellbeing Framework NSW Women's Strategy 2023-2026 NSW Volunteering Strategy 2020-2030 NSW Carers Strategy: Caring in NSW 2020-2030 NSW LGBTIQ+ Health Strategy 2022-2027 NSW Disability Inclusion Plan 2026-2029 NSW Sexual Violence Plan 2022-2027 NSW Strategic Framework for Suicide Prevention 2022-2027

Region	'Towards' Our Greater Sydney 2056 - North District Plan - Connecting Communities A Liveability Framework for Sydney Resilient Sydney
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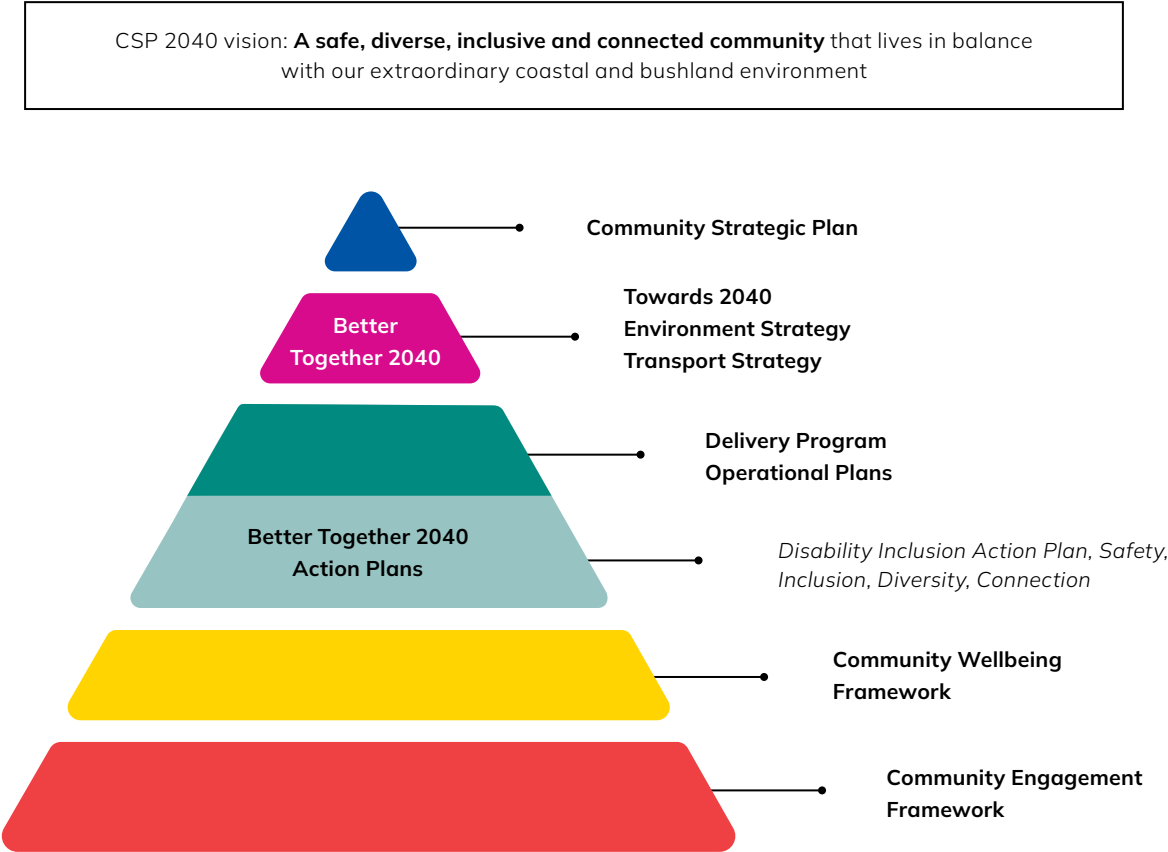
Local Area	Northern Beaches Council Community Strategic Plan 2040 Northern Beaches Local Strategic Planning Statement (Towards 2040)	Withstand, Adapt, Thrive - Northern Beaches Resilience Strategy
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Integrating with existing Council Strategies and Plans

Better Together 2040 is a leading strategy, working closely with Council's existing programs and strategies to maximise outcomes for the community. At its core, Better Together 2040 will guide us as we deliver the community's vision of a safe, diverse, inclusive and connected community.

This document refers to other strategies and plans helping achieve the overall goal of a safe, diverse, inclusive and connected community. As documents are reviewed in coming years, Better Together 2040 will provide the ongoing strategic direction for the community's social sustainability and provide a framework for prioritisation.

Figure 5: Relationship to existing Council strategic directions



Rising to the challenge: Adapting to social change

Social change has been extensive and rapid both globally and within Australia, driven in part by changing demographics as people live longer¹, fewer babies are born and young people move away from metropolitan areas², particularly in Sydney.

Although the Northern Beaches is a naturally beautiful and socioeconomically advantaged area, we must still prepare for the impact these broader societal trends will have on our way of life.

By understanding the local factors that create unique challenges for the Northern Beaches, we can also provide a nuanced and localised response to ensure that we maintain a vibrant, diverse and socially-cohesive lifestyle.

When the first Better Together 2040 was adopted it identified 8 key social sustainability challenges facing the Northern Beaches over the next 20 years. Five years on, each of the challenges remains relevant. These pressures do not exist in isolation. They compound and reinforce each other.

Figure 6 provides an example of the persistence of each of the social sustainability challenges.

¹P. McDonald, "Ageing in Australia: Population changes and responses," in Population ageing and Australia's future, H. Kendig, P. McDonald and J. Piggott, Eds., Canberra, ANU Press, 2016, pp. 65-83.

²K. Bourne, K. Houghton, G. How, H. Achurch and R. Beaton, "The Big Movers: Understanding Population Mobility in Regional Australia," Regional Australia Institute, Canberra, 2020.

Figure 6: Key Social Sustainability Challenges



Where pressure is building

The challenges facing our community have become more tightly interconnected over time. The broader challenges identified in 2020 have evolved into 6 key social trends placing pressure on how people participate in community life.

Escalating housing insecurity and homelessness

Housing affordability was identified as a key challenge in 2020. Since then, rental stress has spread to a much broader cross-section of households. Rising costs and limited supply mean housing instability is no longer confined to traditionally low income groups.

Widening financial vulnerability and cost of living pressure

Pockets of disadvantage were a concern in 2020 and rising living costs have widened financial vulnerability beyond those areas. While household incomes here are comparatively high, they sit alongside increasing living costs that leave some households with limited flexibility.

Ongoing impact of domestic and family violence

Evidence shows that domestic and family violence continues to have significant and lasting impacts in the community. Beyond immediate risk, it contributes to housing instability, financial insecurity and increased demand for crisis and support services. These impacts often extend over time, affecting people's ability to maintain stable housing, employment and social connections, and have ongoing effects on children and young people.

Care and support workforce sustainability

The 2020 strategy flagged the challenges of both social services funding and the shortage of essential workers. These have converged. Demand for health (including mental health), disability and aged care services is growing, while workforce shortages and housing costs make it harder for care workers to live and work locally. Active NDIS participants and demand for aged care services have both grown since 2021, while there remains a national shortage of key care roles.

An increasingly technology-dependent community

Access to information was identified in 2020 as a growing challenge. The shift to digital has accelerated beyond what was anticipated. Nationally, 1 in 5 Australians experience digital exclusion. On the Northern Beaches, older residents, people on lower incomes and people with limited English are most likely to face barriers to digital participation.

Persistent social isolation and loneliness

Mental health and social isolation were flagged in 2020 and the evidence shows these pressures have persisted. More people are living alone, the population is ageing and patterns of work and community life are shifting in ways that reduce everyday opportunities for connection.

The full 2026 Community Profile is available as a companion document for those who want to explore the evidence in detail.

Community strengths and protective factors

The Northern Beaches is not defined by its challenges alone. The community has strengths that provide a foundation for the work ahead.



Safe ways to participate

Residents consistently report feeling they can participate in the community and are connected to where they live and the people around them, reflecting a strong sense of local identity



High levels of community safety

Community safety survey results have remained high over time. Residents report feeling safe at home and in their neighbourhoods



High rates of volunteering

The Northern Beaches has one of the highest rates of volunteering in Greater Sydney, with civic participation embedded in local culture



Thriving social, recreation and sporting opportunities

Sport, recreation and cultural facilities provide rich opportunities for connection



Self-sufficient economy

More than half of employed residents work within the area, supporting economic resilience and reducing pressure on households



Strong not for profit presence

While under pressure, local organisations bring deep community knowledge and long-standing relationships that are not easily replicated



Socio-economically advantaged area

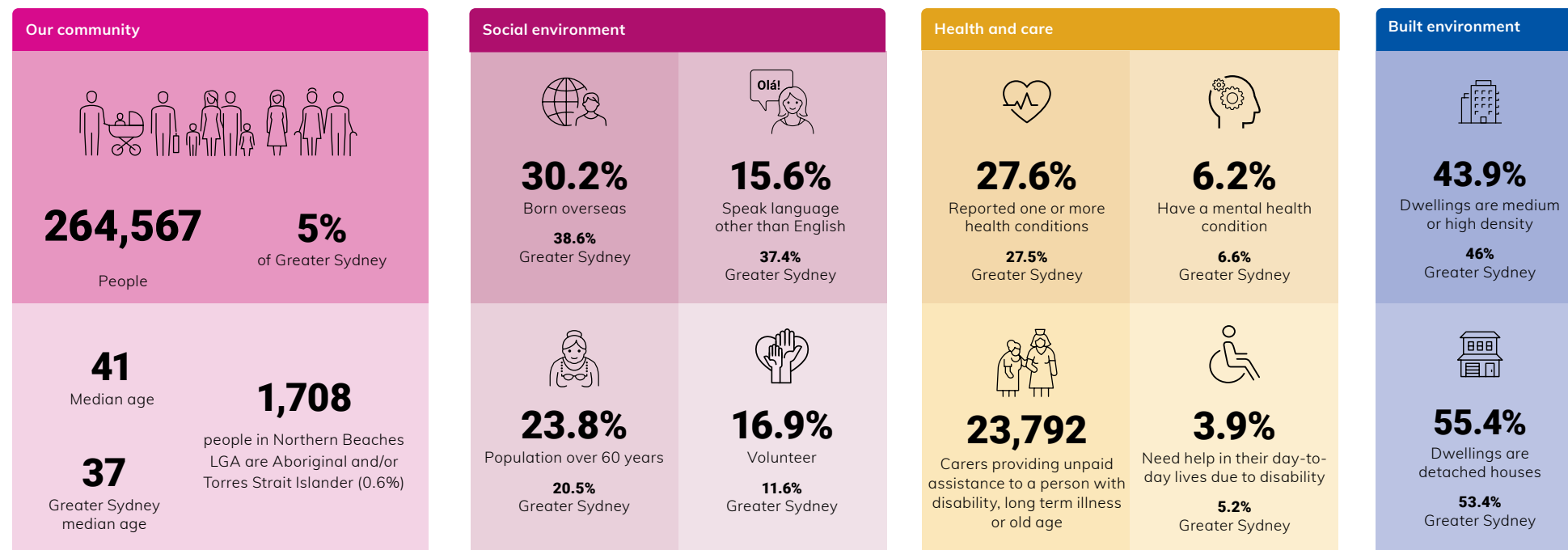
The Northern Beaches is among the most socio-economically advantaged areas in Sydney and more broadly Australia



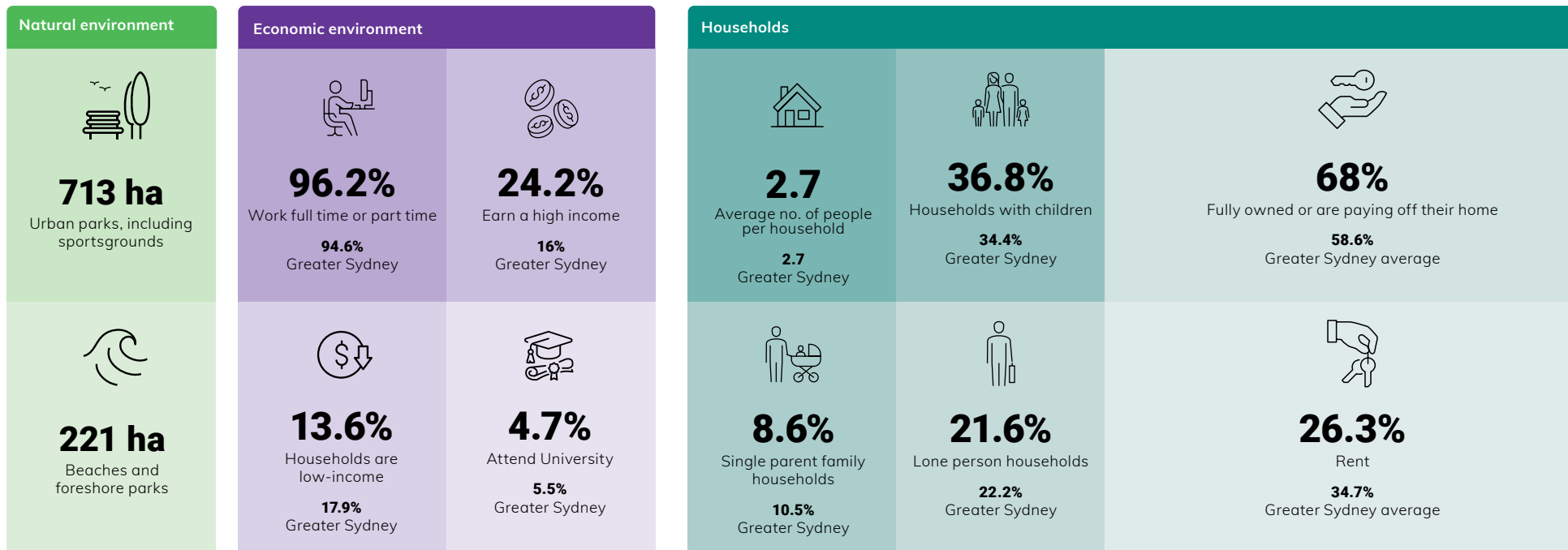
Access to open space

Residents have access to high levels of open space enabling connection with nature, family, and friends

Who we are



Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2021. Compiled and presented in profile.id by .id (informed decisions).



Priority populations

A person becomes a focus for this strategy at the intersection of who they are and what they are experiencing.

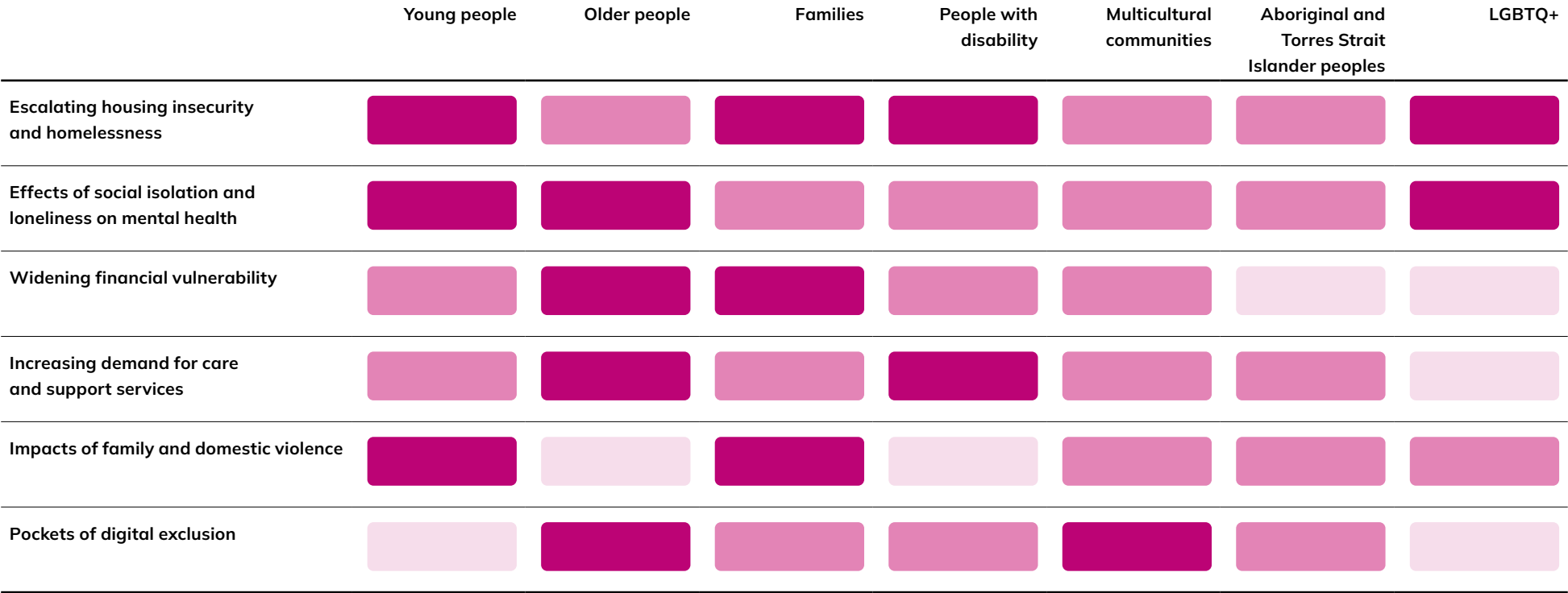
Better Together 2040 identifies 7 priority population groups on the Northern Beaches who may face greater barriers to participation, wellbeing and access to support. But not everyone within these groups experiences the same challenges. The circumstances people face determines whether someone needs additional focus.

Housing insecurity, social isolation, financial vulnerability, demand for care and support services, family and domestic violence and digital exclusion are the circumstances that cut across all 7 groups. This strategy is most concerned with reaching and supporting people from priority populations who experience one or more of those circumstances.

Figure 8 shows how this works. The priority populations are at the top. The circumstances that create greatest vulnerability run beneath, cutting across all groups. The intersection of the two is where Better Together 2040 focuses its effort.



Figure 7: Where community pressures and priority populations intersect



 Strong  Moderate  Less direct

Shading indicates how strongly each pressure affects the population group, based on community profile evidence.

How the Strategy was developed and refreshed

Figure 8: Process to develop Strategy: Inform-Collaborate undertaken in 2020 and 5-year review completed in 2026

	Inform	Consult	
Objective	Educate people in an easy to understand way and engage them to participate	Ensure a broad cross-section of the community, including people with lived experience, provide feedback	
Activities	 Video  Harvesting interest  Discussion paper  Presentations	 Creative Challenge  Workshop in a Box  Survey  Partner and stakeholder workshops	
Results	• 210 registered community members • 1,044 visits to Your Say page • 150,000 eNewsletter reach • 300 bookmarks delivered through our Home Delivery Library Service • 14 internal and external briefings • Strategic Reference Groups briefings	• 90,000 social media reach • 12 Workshop in a Box sessions • 807 survey responses • 29 Creativity Challenge responses • 4 community forums briefed • 6 Strategic Reference Group Workshops • 2 partner and stakeholder workshops	
Outcome from engagement	 3 Strategic Directions Education + Awareness Building	 10 Outcomes Knowledge Mining	

Involve		Collaborate	5-year review
Develop a shared understanding of our community's future strengths and challenges		Build partnerships with key stakeholders and create a collaborative strategy	Review and update the strategy to remain current and accurate
    Discussion Paper Community conversations Partner and stakeholder workshops Vox-pops		 Co-design day to create a collaborative decision-making framework for shared delivery of Better Together strategic directions	    Better Together forum 2025 Review of actions and outputs from first 5 years Literature review Desktop analysis of strategy and policy
• 7 discussion paper responses • 30 community members participated in 2 Community Conversations • 2 partner and stakeholder workshops • 10+ vox pop participants • 40+ members for combined Strategic Reference Group workshop		• 69 participants including 16 people with lived experience and 18 community organisations represented • Refined 380+ ideas and priorities from engagement	• Updated social sustainability challenges • Refined priority populations • Introduced additional strategic direction • Embedded the monitoring and evaluation framework
		 Key Actions and Aspirational Targets	 Refreshed draft of Better Together 2040
Prioritisation		Co-Design	

What our community told us

In 2020, we asked what makes a community safe, inclusive and connected. You told us they are intrinsically linked and equally critical to social sustainability. The conversation didn't stop there.

Over the past 5 years, we have continued listening, particularly through the development of targeted action plans with young people, multicultural communities and people with disability. Each of those processes brought new voices into the conversation and sharpened our understanding of what matters most. The themes that emerged in 2020 have been consistently reinforced and the depth of what we now know has grown.

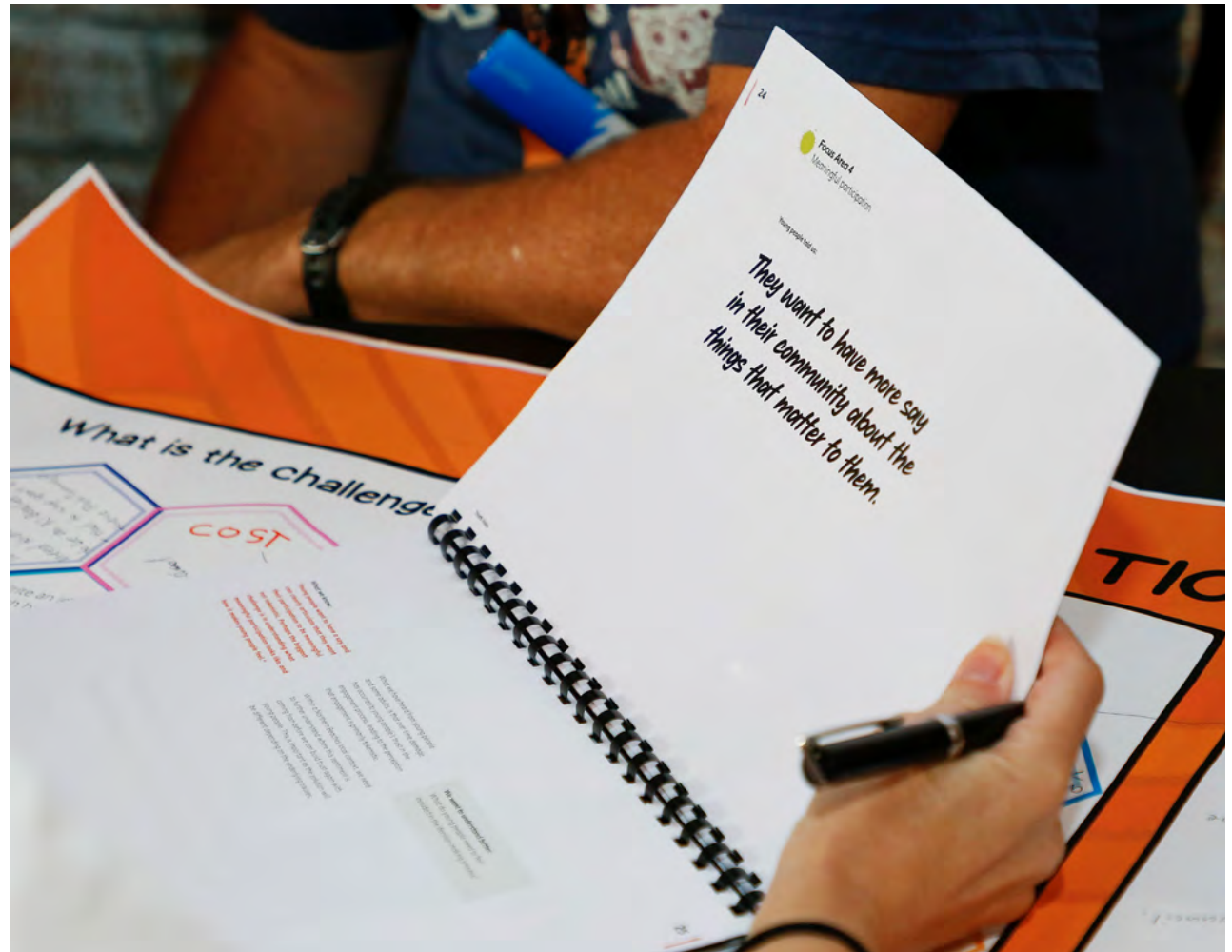
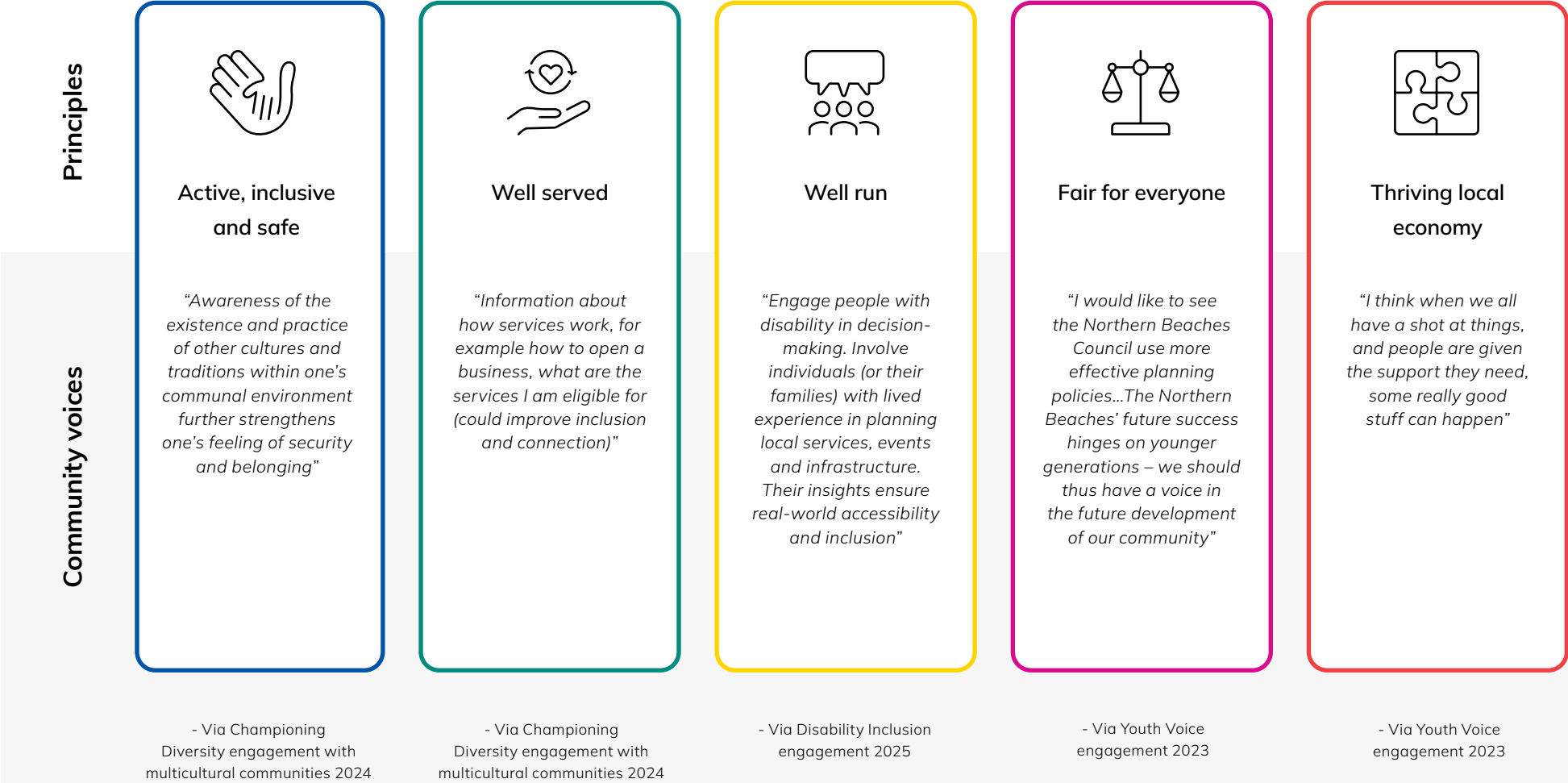


Figure 9: Quotes from the community about what matters most



Council's role in building a safe, diverse, inclusive and connected community

Council recognises the importance of investing in the social sustainability of our community³

Leadership and Advocacy	Through social planning, Council investigates and documents community challenges and outcomes in consultation with the social service sector and local residents and provides research and planning information to assist the effective planning of social services and programs. Council advocates for the community to state and federal governments on issues that are under their remit, such as housing, transport and health.
Promoting safe, inclusive and connected communities	Council supports the implementation of the Social Sustainability Strategy and encourages, supports and facilitates a range of community and cultural events and recreational activities that support people to feel safe, included and connected with community life. Council supports volunteering within Council and acts as an advocate for volunteering in the broader community.
Community capacity building	Council builds the capacity of the community and helps the community to determine and achieve its own outcomes, through partnerships and support with community, not-for-profit and charitable organisations. Council supports the building of connections, encourages collaboration and facilitates knowledge sharing across the social sector and other levels of government to enable program and service delivery that achieves collective outcomes. Community grants are provided to organisations delivering programs that build capacity in the community to address current issues.
Referral and information services	Council provides referrals and information that will help to connect people to the information they need to access services and participate in community life. This is provided through Council's website, libraries, community centres and customer service centres, e-newsletters, a range of media, poster, banners, brochures and by word of mouth.
Delivering Infrastructure	Council delivers critical infrastructure that enable people to be safe, connected and included in community life. This includes roads, parks, recreation facilities, town centres, sporting fields and social infrastructure such as community buildings, libraries, arts and culture facilities. Social infrastructure is available, affordable and accessible to the whole community, with subsidised accommodation provided to community groups and organisations. To maximise the use of community buildings and the sustainability of the social services sector, Council facilitates the co-location of services and the provision of community service hubs.
Delivering programs and services	Council partners with community organisations to deliver support services that respond to the changing needs of our community. Consideration will be given to the provision of community services that are responsive to community outcomes where there is a gap, and work to access a provider to deliver this service to the community.

³ Northern Beaches Council Social Sustainability Policy, updated 2025

The role of Better Together 2040

We work across many areas that shape community life on the Northern Beaches, from housing and transport to planning and the social services sector. Better Together 2040 is the framework that brings a social sustainability lens to this work. It helps us understand where pressures are building, who is most affected and where coordinated action will make the biggest difference.

Not everything that shapes wellbeing sits with us, with housing, public transport and health the responsibility of the NSW and Australian governments. Where that's the case, our role is to advocate for what our community needs, plan for what we can deliver locally where possible, and work alongside the organisations that have responsibility to deliver in those areas. Better Together 2040 sets out both: what we deliver, and what we advocate for.

Better Together 2040:

- identifies the community challenges shaping community life
- clarifies which populations face the greatest barriers
- prioritises prevention and early intervention
- strengthens place-based responses where vulnerability is concentrated
- aligns actions across teams to reduce fragmentation
- makes clear where we deliver, where we partner and where we advocate.

We apply this through 4 strategic directions, to shape the efforts of Council and our partners:

1. **Safe** focuses on reducing vulnerability, preventing harm and strengthening early support.
2. **Inclusive** focuses on removing barriers to participation and access, recognising that not everyone starts from the same position.

3. **Diverse** focuses on diversity inclusion, representation and culturally safe systems.
4. **Connected** focuses on strengthening belonging, participation and community networks.

Together, these directions provide a structured way to respond to community wellbeing, rather than addressing issues in isolation.

Better Together 2040 provides clear direction to focus our effort, who we are trying to reach and how we deliver.

Together, these elements provide a decision-making framework. Whether developing an action plan, assessing a community grant application, designing a new program or reviewing where resources are allocated, the strategy sets the direction and the focus areas provide further definition.

A photograph of a family walking through a sunlit park. In the center, a man wearing a brown hoodie, blue shorts, a black baseball cap with sunglasses on top, and holding a fishing rod in his right hand, is walking. To his right, a young child in a light blue sweater is walking. On the far right, a woman in a white hoodie is partially visible, looking down. The background is filled with lush green trees and foliage, with sunlight filtering through the leaves, creating a bokeh effect. The overall mood is peaceful and family-oriented.

Strategic Direction 1: A Safe Community



Strategic Direction 1: A Safe Community

A safe community strengthens individual and community wellbeing and resilience.

The concept of safety within Better Together 2040 is broader than reducing crime and preventing injury. It is about achieving a positive state of wellbeing for all people within their social and physical environments.

The perception of safety matters just as much as the experience of it. When people feel safe, they are more likely to participate, connect and contribute.

Our community's aspirations

Everyone:

- has people within the community they can ask for support and connect with when they feel unsafe
- has access to support for mental illness and social isolation
- has access to resources and programs that improve wellbeing
- is safe in public spaces
- is free from emotional and physical harm at home
- is safe from bullying and scams when they participate online
- feels safe and welcome to participate in life on the Northern Beaches
- has access to high quality sporting, recreation and natural spaces, including parks, beaches and bushland, that are green, accessible, inclusive and safe.

Community challenges most relevant to this direction

Safety on the Northern Beaches is shaped by several intersecting pressures. These do not operate independently.

- Housing instability creates the conditions in which other risks take hold.
- Mental health challenges and family and domestic violence drive and deepen each other. Both place growing demand on crisis and support services at a time when the care workforce is under sustained pressure.
- Social isolation runs through all of these, weakening the informal networks that help people stay safe.

What's already happening to support safe communities



Community Safety Plan



Road Safety Action Plan; Shared path and e-bike safety education and community campaigns



Safe social infrastructure including community centres and libraries



Crime prevention through environmental design is supported by plans and controls through design



Community Safety Advisory Committee



Provision and maintenance of high-quality sporting and recreation spaces



Safe children's services

2040 Aspirational Target: Everybody can access the mental health support they need within 1 week

Current situation:

In 2020 mental health service providers reported wait lists of up to 3 months

In 2026 mental health service providers reported wait times exceeding 4+ weeks

Imagining a safer Northern Beaches

For the purpose of this strategy, safety is defined as being safe from harm and danger, both emotionally and physically.

The Northern Beaches is a safe and resilient place to live, work and visit, where there is an individual and collective feeling of comfort and security.

People in the community may experience and perceive safety differently. Regardless of individual circumstances, Northern Beaches residents live in a safe environment where everyone's right to be free from harm and danger is respected by others.

Instances of harm are greatly minimised. Everyone can access information and safe agencies are available for those who experience physical or emotional harm. The community prioritises keeping children safe and has a strong commitment to best practice child safeguarding.

The community is resilient and has capacity to address difficult and complex personal safety issues including suicide and domestic and family violence. Everyone feels empowered to contribute and shares knowledge and information about available supports and systems.

A diverse network of public spaces enable everyone to be healthy and active and feel safe to participate in community life. There is cohesion and a culture of mutual caring, safe and free from bullying in the community, at home and online.

Safe: Focus areas

- Strengthening community safety and resilience across public spaces, transport, homes and online environments, so people are better equipped to support each other and navigate difficult circumstances
- Supporting mental health and wellbeing, with a focus on early intervention and reducing barriers to accessing support
- Preventing and responding to domestic and family violence
- Keeping children and young people safe through best-practice child safeguarding.

Safe: Who is most affected

Families:

- children and families experiencing domestic and family violence, particularly where housing instability forces relocation or disrupts access to support.

Young people:

- experiencing mental health challenges alongside housing instability, especially those estranged from family support.

Older people:

- living alone who may be at greater risk of elder abuse, fraud or reduced access to help in a crisis
- older women entering homelessness for the first time, where safety and stability intersect.

People from LGBTQ+ communities:

- young people, where the absence of safe housing, affirming support and appropriate support services compounds vulnerability

People with disability:

- reliant on services affected by workforce shortages, where gaps in care can increase risk of harm or neglect.
-



Strategic Direction 2: An Inclusive Community



Strategic Direction 2: An Inclusive Community

An inclusive community is adaptive to change which strengthens individual and community wellbeing and resilience.

Inclusion within Better Together 2040 goes beyond access to services and programs. It is about the conditions that determine whether people can genuinely participate, contribute and grow. This includes economic opportunity, adaptive service systems and a social services sector that can respond as community needs change.

When those conditions are fair, people are better able to build connections and share in the opportunities the Northern Beaches offers. When they are not, the costs fall most heavily on those who already face the greatest barriers.

Our community's aspirations

Everyone:

- is valued for who they are
- can contribute when decisions are made about things that matter to them
- has access to education and employment opportunities and can benefit equitably from economic growth
- recognises the need for priority populations to have programs and opportunities that reduce inequities
- has social services that are accessible and adaptive to changing needs in our community.

Community challenges most relevant to this direction

Inclusion on the Northern Beaches is shaped by a set of overlapping pressures, including rising living costs, digital exclusion, workforce shortages in care and support services and housing insecurity.

- Increasing costs are placing programs, activities and services out of reach for more households, particularly families and carers.
- As services and information move online, people without the skills, devices or reliable internet are being left further behind.
- Shortages in disability, mental health and aged care services limit access to support, with flow-on impacts for carers and families.
- Housing instability compounds these pressures, disrupting access to services and the stability people need to participate in community life.

What's already happening to support inclusive communities



Disability Inclusion Action Plan



Community grants program supporting priority populations



Library programs that promote inclusion and access



Web and digital accessibility across Council services



All-abilities playgrounds and accessible infrastructure



Promoting diversity and inclusion through programs, activities and services



Community organisations supporting inclusive practice for priority populations



Accessible community spaces and co-located services



Sponsorship for an Inclusion Award recognising accessible local businesses



Community development programs building capacity of priority populations

2040 Aspirational Target:

We have a community hub in each strategic centre that enables co-location of key services

Current situation:

In 2021 there were 2 community hubs

In 2026 there are 3 community hubs

Imagining a more inclusive Northern Beaches

For the purpose of this strategy, inclusion is defined as everybody having equal opportunity to enjoy the same experiences and be part of groups that are meaningful to them.

The Northern Beaches celebrates diversity and values all people equally. Everyone deserves to participate, have fun, be visible and celebrated regardless of age, gender, sexuality, cultural background, socioeconomic status, religion or beliefs, ability, or life circumstance.

Everyone is respected for their contributions and actively encouraged to participate in the shared experience of living on the Northern Beaches. Decision-making reflects the diverse voices of the community and balances the needs of all.

All people experience a sense of wellbeing and acceptance, and respect of different points of views and approaches to living. Northern Beaches residents represent a multigenerational community where the participation of all generations is equally valued.

Access to support and information is equitable and available to empower everyone to participate. Access to social infrastructure and services is provided in support of improving identified social sustainability challenges of priority populations.

Inclusive: Focus areas

-
- Supporting people with disability to access services and participate in community life, and working to address the systemic barriers that limit participation
 - Ensuring equitable access to services, programs and information for all priority populations, with a particular focus on removing barriers related to cost, language, digital exclusion and cultural safety
 - Building a resilient, adaptive social services sector with the capacity to respond to changing community needs, including through cross-sector collaboration, capacity building and place-based service co-ordination
 - Reducing financial and structural barriers to participation, recognising that inclusion requires addressing the material conditions that shape whether people can engage on equal terms.

Inclusive: Who is most affected

People with disability:

- with non-visible disabilities such as psychosocial, cognitive and chronic health conditions, who face systemic barriers to services, information and community participation
- requiring support and care services when NDIS workforce pressures reduce support options and increase wait times
- with higher costs associated with health care, transport and assistive needs compounding economic barriers to participation, alongside limited access to full-time employment.

Older people:

- experiencing digital exclusion
- relying on home care and aged care services affected by workforce shortages, or declining mobility
- acquiring disability after 65 who fall outside the NDIS and often lack clear pathways to appropriate support.

Young people:

- including those experiencing housing instability, family breakdown or insecure early-career employment, who face barriers to education, employment and participation.

Families and carers:

- single parent families managing caring, working and household responsibilities alongside cost-of-living pressures
- young carers balancing caring responsibilities alongside study or work face particular risks of falling behind
- unpaid carers and grandparent carers absorbing the impact of stretched formal services with limited recognition, respite or support
- working families facing barriers in accessing affordable childcare and early learning

People from multicultural communities:

- recently arrived residents navigating unfamiliar systems and needing culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate services
- language gaps and a lack of recognition for overseas qualifications can limit access to stable employment
- carers from multicultural communities face additional language barriers when navigating care systems.

People from LGBTQ+ communities:

- particularly young people and those who are more isolated, who face barriers to affirming services, social connection and safe participation.
-

A photograph showing the backs of three people walking away from the camera on a dirt path in a forest. The person in the middle is wearing a black t-shirt with a white graphic and a black baseball cap. The person to their left is wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat and a black t-shirt with a white graphic. The person to the right is wearing a black long-sleeved shirt. The background is filled with trees and foliage, with sunlight filtering through the leaves.

Strategic Direction 3: A Diverse Community



Strategic Direction 3: A Diverse Community

A diverse community recognises the full range of human difference as a source of strength and works to ensure that every person, regardless of background, identity or circumstance, can participate visibly and fully in community life.

Diversity within Better Together 2040 goes beyond demographic representation. It is about whether the systems, services and spaces that shape community life are designed to work for everyone, including people whose identities and experiences have historically been overlooked. The Northern Beaches is home to people of all ages, genders, abilities and a wide range of cultural backgrounds. These communities are not homogenous, and the strategy responds to that complexity rather than treating diversity as a single category.

Our community's aspirations

Everyone:

- embraces diversity of all kinds
- celebrates differences within the community
- works in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to promote, preserve, celebrate and protect heritage and culture

- has resilience which is increased through social services sector collaboration and capacity building
- contributes their lived experience to inform evidence-based decision making in the planning and delivery of social services.

Community challenges most relevant to this direction

Diversity on the Northern Beaches is shaped by overlapping pressures, including demographic change, ongoing barriers to inclusion, digital exclusion and the underrepresentation of some communities in decision-making. The community is becoming more diverse, with people from multicultural backgrounds, people with disability, LGBTQ+ communities and people at all life stages making up an increasingly varied population.

However, the systems, services and spaces that support the community have not always kept pace. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, there remains a gap between recognition and genuine partnership. For newly arrived residents, language barriers and unfamiliar systems can make it difficult to access support and connect to community life. For LGBTQ+ people, particularly young people and those who are more isolated, the lack of safe and inclusive spaces continues to limit participation.

What's already happening to support diverse communities



Engagement and collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities



Harmony Day and other cultural celebration events



Multicultural Inclusion Plan



Library programs supporting people from multicultural communities



Community grants program supporting culturally diverse organisations



Translation and interpreter support for Council services



Community development programs building capacity of culturally diverse groups



LGBTQ+ affirming programs and events

2040 Aspirational Target:
100% of people agree they are able to participate in community life without experiencing exclusion or discrimination.

Current situation:
In 2026, 75% of people agreed.

Imagining a more diverse Northern Beaches

For the purpose of this strategy, diversity is defined as the full range of human difference, including cultural background, language, ability, age, gender identity, family structure and life experience.

The Northern Beaches is a community where people of all backgrounds, identities and circumstances are visible, valued and free to be themselves. Difference is recognised as a source of community strength.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people from multicultural communities see their languages, cultures and contributions reflected in local life. Cultural heritage is celebrated not only through dedicated events but embedded in the everyday character of the community.

People with disability, individuals at every stage of life and people from diverse family structures experience a community designed with them in mind. Services, spaces and programs are accessible, adaptable and genuinely inclusive, reflecting the real breadth of who lives and belongs here.

LGBTQ+ people and people of all gender identities can participate in community life without fear and without having to explain themselves. The community creates space for people to simply be themselves.

Services and programs reflect the communities they serve. Co-design, cultural safety and lived experience shape how support is planned, delivered and evaluated. No single voice speaks for everyone and no one is expected to fit a mould that was not built for them.

Diverse: Focus areas

- Strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural visibility and partnership, ensuring knowledge and heritage are embedded in community life and decision making
- Building culturally safe and responsive services
- Increasing the visibility and representation of diverse communities in community life, in decision-making and in the planning of services, spaces and programs

Diverse: Who is most affected

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples:

- seeking connection to Country, culture and community
- who may be experiencing digital exclusion at significantly higher rates than the general population, creating additional barriers to participation.

People from multicultural communities:

- recently arrived residents navigating unfamiliar systems
- long-settled communities whose cultural contributions are not always visible in everyday community life.

People from LGBTQ+ communities:

- particularly young people and those who lack access to affirming services, social networks and safe community spaces
- trans and gender diverse people face specific barriers to appropriate health care, legal recognition and community participation
- navigating intersecting identities, including those who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, from multicultural communities, or have a disability and can face compounding barriers to safe and affirming support.

People with disability

- whose identities extend beyond their disability and who are not always involved in how services are designed and delivered.
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Strategic Direction 4: A Connected Community



Bushcare
Volunteer



Bushcare
Volunteer



Strategic Direction 4: A Connected Community

A connected community is a healthier, more resilient community, where people have the relationships, networks and opportunities they need to participate and belong.

Connection is a fundamental human need. When people have strong ties with family, friends and their wider community, they are happier, more secure and have a greater sense of purpose. Communities with strong social networks are also more resilient when things go wrong.

Connection on the Northern Beaches is different for everyone. For some it is formal and built through clubs, volunteering and organised activities. For others it is informal, via neighbours who check in, shared spaces that invite conversation or a sense of familiarity in a place. Both matter. This direction focuses on the conditions that make connection possible and on reducing the barriers that get in the way.

Our community's aspirations

Our community:

- has a unique identity that represents our shared values
- can move around the Northern Beaches to connect and participate

- has access to housing that matches their needs
- can access places and spaces from community buildings to parks, beaches and natural areas that are welcoming, inclusive, adaptable and activated where possible and appropriate to enable connection
- has access to the accurate and timely information needed to fully participate in community life.

Community challenges most relevant to this direction

Connection on the Northern Beaches is shaped by several intersecting pressures: persistent social isolation and loneliness, housing insecurity, digital exclusion and the growing demands of work and caring responsibilities.

- Loneliness has remained stubbornly elevated since the pandemic, particularly among older residents living alone and young people navigating new environments.
- Housing instability disrupts the neighbourhood ties and sense of belonging that take time to build.
- Digital exclusion limits access to community information and online social participation for those who lack the skills or means to keep up.
- Financial pressure and caring responsibilities reduce people's time and capacity to maintain connections and take part in community life.

What's already happening to support connected communities



Capacity building programs for the community



Arts and Creativity Strategy supporting a vibrant local creative culture



Creative Spaces and Manly Art Gallery & Museum



Services and programs including library programs



Range of programs, events and community spaces supporting connection



KALOF youth engagement program



Glen Street Theatre delivering a diverse community program



Connecting volunteers with suitable volunteer organisations



Provision of information and referral



Community grants program supporting connection-focused organisations

2040 Aspirational Target:
All community events,
information and infrastructure
are universally accessible.

Current situation:
In 2021 there were no rationalised
guidelines for minimum inclusion
and accessibility standards.

In 2026 there is an established
Event accessibility guideline & the
2026-2030 Disability Inclusion
Action Plan has been developed.

Imagining a more connected Northern Beaches

For the purpose of this strategy, connection is defined as the relationships in which people are linked with other people or places from which they build meaningful networks and grow personal strength and resilience.

The people of the Northern Beaches are connected across generations, through their relationships with their family, cultural groups, and the broader community.

Individuals are linked to a variety of networks in which they are part of the community and feel a sense of belonging. Barriers for those seeking to strengthen their networks are recognised and overcome.

Everyone is informed and has equal access and opportunities to education, housing, health, support services, employment and information that is accurate, reliable and timely.

Vibrant and diverse opportunities are available that enhance individual and community wellbeing. These opportunities bring people together and foster and contribute to people feeling that they have a place in the community.

Everyone has access to safe communal spaces that encourage shared connection to the natural and built environment.

Connected: Focus areas

- Strengthening social infrastructure, including community spaces, facilities, parks, open space, events and programs that create everyday opportunities for people to connect across generations, backgrounds and interests
- Building and sustaining the Northern Beaches volunteering culture, recognising that volunteering is both a form of connection and a contribution to the sector capacity that supports others
- Reducing barriers to information, programs and community participation, with a focus on ensuring that cost, digital exclusion and physical access do not prevent people from connecting
- Preventing and responding to social isolation, particularly for older people, new residents, young people and others at risk of losing connection with the community around them.

Connected: Who is most affected

Older people:

- living alone, particularly after bereavement, retirement or significant health changes, who face the greatest risk of social isolation and loneliness.

Young people:

- new to the area for work or study and those leaving out-of-home care, who may lack established local networks and find community infrastructure geared toward other life stages.

People from multicultural communities:

- newly arrived residents navigating unfamiliar community structures and language barriers
- children and young people from multicultural backgrounds may need additional support to build connection and belonging as they navigate between different cultural contexts.

People with disability:

- experiencing physical and structural barriers to community spaces, events and programs, and whose social networks can narrow as a result.

Families and carers:

- single parent families and low-income households, whose capacity for community participation is limited by caring responsibilities and financial pressure
 - families experiencing housing instability, where frequent moves undermine the neighbourhood familiarity and local relationships that take time to form.
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Measuring impact and progress

The next five years

Targeted action plans for each of the 4 strategic directions translate the strategy framework into specific and time-bound work.

The action plans will be developed and reviewed in partnership with the community and the social services sector. They will be organised around the 4 output categories (strategic leadership, community capacity, access and inclusion and prevention and early intervention) to keep the plans action-oriented.

Each action within a plan indicates which outcomes it contributes to. This enables traceability for reporting while preserving the principle that outcomes are shared across all directions.

The 4 output categories:

- Strategic leadership and governance
 - developing and maintaining policy, strategies and advocacy
- Community capacity and partnerships
 - strengthening collaboration and partnerships and building capacity of individuals and organisations
- Access and inclusion - reducing barriers and enabling participation
- Prevention and early intervention - identifying and responding to issues before they reach crisis or become entrenched.

How this gets delivered

The strategy sets the direction and the action plans developed carry the work. Each action in the plans provides a timeframe and measurement showing how we'll know it worked.

We'll develop the action plans with the community and the social services sector in the next 5 years.

We will report every year on progress through Council's service highlights reporting, evaluation reports at the conclusion of action plan implementation, and every 5 years through the Better Together progress and impact report.

The 8 outcomes

The 8 outcomes describe the community experiences we are working towards. Because they cut across all 4 strategic directions, they are measured at the community level rather than attributed to any single area of work. No single direction or team is responsible for any one outcome. Progress reflects the combined effect of all directions, all outputs and the broader social system.

Reporting and review cycle

The framework operates on a 5-year cycle aligned to the planning period. Within each cycle, annual reporting on delivery and reach allows for course correction without waiting for outcome data. The full outcome picture is assessed every 5 years through the Better Together progress and impact report.

Better Together 2040 measures progress across 3 outcome levels. Each level asks a different question and uses different data to track success.

The strategy succeeds when all 3 levels are moving in the right direction. The most important signal comes when the first 2 levels are positive but the third is not: actions are being delivered and reaching the right people, but experiences are not improving. That is the signal to change the actions, not lower the ambition.

Figure 10 - Outcome Levels



Community experience measures

This table identifies the level 3 community experience indicators that will be used to track progress against each of the 8 outcomes. Community experience measures track whether life is changing across the broader community.

Outcome	Indicator	What it measures	Baseline	2026 result	Target	Data Source	Frequency
 Outcome 1 People are safe	Percentage of residents who say they can participate in community life without feeling unsafe	Measures whether residents feel safe enough to take part in everyday community activities	83% (2026)	83%	Increasing	Community views survey	2- yearly
	Rate of major crime categories per 100,000	Measures the level of recorded serious crime in the area relative to population size	2168 (2017)	1515 (2025)	Decreasing	BOCSAR	Yearly
 Outcome 2 People can find and access help when they need it	Percentage of residents who say they know where to get help when they need it	Measures awareness of available support services and confidence in navigating the service system	67% (2022)	64%	Increasing	Community views Survey	2- yearly
 Outcome 3 First Nations culture and heritage is visible, valued and celebrated	Percentage of residents who have engaged with First Nations histories, cultures, arts or cultural events in the past 12 months	Measures community engagement with and understanding of First Nations histories, cultures and heritage through participation in cultural events, arts and learning opportunities	Scheduled for 2028 Community Views survey	n/a	Increasing	Community views survey	2- yearly

Outcome	Indicator	What it measures	Baseline	2026 result	Target	Data Source	Frequency
 Outcome 4 People are supported by a strong and engaged social services sector	Experience of high-quality health services	Measures whether residents believe local health services are effective, appropriate and meet their needs	7.2/10 (2022)	6.8/10	Improving	Community views survey	2- yearly
	Experience of social cohesion	Measures residents' overall perception of cohesion within the Northern Beaches community	6.5/10 (2022)	6.6/10	Improving	Community Views Survey	2- yearly
 Outcome 5 People feel valued, respected and welcomed	Feeling valued as part of the Northern Beaches community	Measures the extent to which residents feel recognised, respected and included as members of the community	36% (2022)	52%	Improving	Community Views Survey	2- yearly
	Ability to participate without exclusion or discrimination	Measures whether residents feel able to take part in community life without experiencing exclusion, unfair treatment or discrimination	75% (2026)	75%	Improving	Community Views Survey	2- yearly

Outcome	Indicator	What it measures	Baseline	2026 result	Target	Data Source	Frequency
 Outcome 6 People share equitably in opportunities and growth	Experience of education opportunities	Measures residents' perceptions of access to education and learning opportunities that support personal development, skills and long-term participation in community and economic life	6.7/10 (2022)	6.8/10	Improving	Community Views Survey	2- yearly
	Experience of opportunity for all	Measures residents' perceptions of whether opportunities in the Northern Beaches are available fairly and equitably across the community	6.2/10 (2022)	6.5/10	Improving	Community Views Survey	2- yearly
	Experience of job prospects	Measures how residents rate local employment opportunities and their confidence in accessing meaningful work	5.5/10 (2022)	5.3/10	Improving	Community Views Survey	2- yearly
 Outcome 7 People have access to inclusive services, programs, facilities and community networks	Percentage of residents who say they can access information about how they can participate in community activities	Measures how easy residents find it to access information that enables social participation and connection	53% (2022)	57%	Increasing	Community Views Survey	2- yearly
	Ability to participate without access barriers	Measures whether residents feel able to take part in community life without experiencing access barriers	64% (2026)	64%	Improving	Community Views Survey	2- yearly
	Volunteering	Measures participation in volunteering activities, including whether volunteering is reaching priority populations	21.9% (2016)	16.9% (2021)	Increasing	ABS	5- yearly

Outcome	Indicator	What it measures	Baseline	2026 result	Target	Data Source	Frequency
 Outcome 8 People have a sense of belonging	Proportion of residents who feel a sense of belonging in their neighbourhood	Measures residents' perceived sense of belonging and connection to their local community, reflecting how strongly people feel accepted, included and part of neighbourhood life	66% (2024)	73%	Increasing	Community Views Survey	2- yearly
	Experience of strong sense of community	Measures how strongly residents perceive their local area as having a strong sense of community, including trust, connection and shared identity	7.1/10 (2022)	7.2/10	Improving	Community Views	2- yearly
	Frequency of loneliness	Measures how often residents report feeling lonely, reflecting the prevalence of loneliness across the community.	29% (2024)	No data available	Decreasing	Community Views Survey	2- yearly



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