

Better Together 2040: 2021-2026 progress and impact report

Delivering social sustainability outcomes for the Northern Beaches community

Northern Beaches Council



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

Introduction

Better Together 2040 sets our long-term direction for social sustainability across the Northern Beaches. It gives us a shared way to strengthen safety, inclusion, diversity and connection, guiding the work we deliver through targeted action plans and partnerships.

This report outlines our progress from 2021 to 2026. Over this period, we have completed or progressed all but one of the actions in the Better Together Implementation Plan, listed on pages 51-55 of the current Better Together Strategy. We have developed targeted action plans to support more focused outcomes in areas such as disability inclusion, multicultural engagement and youth participation.

Completing our 5-year implementation plan is an important milestone. It shows we have delivered the commitments we made when we launched Better Together 2040 and embedded them into how we work. Social sustainability is ongoing and many actions continue through multi-year plans beyond 2026 to respond to emerging community priorities.

In this report, you will find:

- a summary of delivery under the 2021 to 2026 implementation plan
- an overview of progress across current targeted action plans
- a look ahead to priorities for the next 5 years.

Together, this gives you a clear view of what we have achieved and what is next.

The Progress and Impact Report uses the best available data to assess change over the life of the Strategy. In some cases, the original outcome measures could not be reported exactly as written because the required data was not available, had not been collected consistently or was not directly comparable over time. Where this occurred, we selected the closest available indicator that aligned with the intent of the outcome and could provide a credible picture of community wellbeing.

This work has directly shaped the updated monitoring framework for the refreshed Strategy, which is designed to track change more consistently from this point forward.

Strategic Direction: A Safe Community

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

Strategic Alignment

Our commitment to measuring, reporting and collaboratively improving community safety is informed by and aligned with the following frameworks:

UN Sustainable Development Goals



Community Strategic Plan

Outcome: Community and Belonging
Aspiration: Our community aspires to be resilient, ensuring people feel safe, supported, included, and have diverse opportunities for a rich cultural and social life.

Community Wellbeing Framework domains



Healthy **Participatory**

Sustainable communities' principles



Active, inclusive and safe **Well served** **Well run**

Outcome trends – A Safe Community

Measure	Indicator	Baseline	2026 result	5 year trend	Interpretation
Residents feel safe at home and in the community	Experience of feeling safe	8/10 (2022)	7.9/10	Maintaining 	Residents continue to report high levels of safety at home and in the community
Our community feel safe in public, at home and online	% of respondents who say they are able to participate in community life without experiencing exclusion or discrimination	75% (2026)	Baseline	n/a	Three quarters of respondents report being able to participate, though a proportion remain neutral or report barriers
Our community has access to people, organisations and information that can help when they need assistance	% of respondents who say they know where to get 'help' when they need it.	53% (2022)	57%	Improving 	Awareness of how to access information has increased but a proportion of residents remain uncertain, showing ongoing gaps

Unless indicated, all indicators are sourced from the Community Views Survey or ABS statistics.

Safety in action – Delivery progress

	Total actions	Delivered	In progress	Not commenced
Better Together implementation plan (2021 to 2026)	17	17	0	0

Targeted Action Plans supporting the Safe strategic direction in Better Together

	Total actions	Delivered	In progress	Not commenced
Community Safety Plan (2021 to 2026)	29	23	4	2
Disability Inclusion Action Plan (2022 to 2026)	11	6	5	0
Multicultural Inclusion Plan (2024 to 2029)	21	3	8	10
Youth Voice Action Plan (2023 to 2028)	17	3	12	2

Actions marked 'In progress' are aligned to multi-year delivery schedules and remain on track

Progress highlights from the last 5 years (2021 to 2026)

Better Together implementation plan (2021 to 2026)	• Developed and adopted the Northern Beaches Community Safety Plan in 2021 • Identified community wellbeing domains for the Northern Beaches and established baseline indicators • Finalised a community wellbeing outcomes framework focused on strengthening individual and collective wellbeing
Community Safety Plan (2021 to 2026)	• Delivered health promotion campaigns including Drink Less, Live More and gatekeeper training • Partnered with key networks such as the Domestic Violence Network, headspace Consortium and local interagencies • Led awareness initiatives including 16 Days of Activism and Mental Health Month • Administered community grants to build local capacity and resilience • Coordinated the Community Safety Advisory Committee and operational meetings with NSW Police • Promoted respectful online communication through our social media channels to help reduce bullying
Disability Inclusion Action Plan (2022 to 2026)	• Implemented the Dementia Friendly Organisation and Alliance Action Plans, shared inclusive communication guides, and provided staff training on culturally safe and accessible engagement • Engaged with a number of schools with students with disability to improve evacuation processes during an emergency
Multicultural Inclusion Plan (2024 to 2029)	• Promoted uptake of the MyAus App, a free Department of Home Affairs–supported digital resource for culturally diverse communities
Youth Voice Action Plan (2023 to 2028)	• Strengthened links between Student Support Officers and local services to improve youth access, including mapping contacts and facilitating priority-setting meetings • Delivered Have Your Say Day events and reports to gather insights into youth priorities and inform local advocacy • Successfully received a Youth Voice Grant valued at $9,892 to deliver mental health workshops for young people • Developed a working group to explore safety issues relating to LGBTQ+ community, with a focus on younger people

Supporting safety - the next 5 years

Delivering all 17 actions in the implementation plan marks the end of Better Together's first 5-year cycle. The next phase will focus on building on what we have achieved, keeping momentum through future action plans and refining our approach based on evaluation and community feedback.

Our outcome measures show safety results have stayed steady overall. Residents continue to report high levels of safety at home and in the community, and more people say they know where to find help when they need it.

We also know some people do not feel safe all the time. This is a barrier to a socially sustainable community. We will keep working to strengthen safety at home and in community life by improving awareness of support services, increasing inclusion, and addressing everyday racism.

Impact spotlight:
Northern Beaches Sexual Assault Working Group

What's shifted

The Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Working Group was established to identify actions to impact responses to sexual assault across the Northern Beaches and to improve support to victims. The Working Group has lifted the capacity of local services to respond to disclosures of sexual assault and has provided resources to support victims and survivors.

What the group delivered

Partnering with the Northern Sydney Sexual Assault Service and Northern Beaches Police Area Command, the group built three resources:

- a professional development sexual assault webinar for local service providers
- a dedicated online information hub
- printed resources for victims and survivors and the people supporting them.

The webinar combined lived experience with expertise from local police and service providers. It reached 87 attendees live and another 27 through the recording. Pre and post-surveys highlighted a significant lift in confidence responding to sexual assault disclosures. Ninety percent of survey respondents said they left better able to refer clients to specialist services. The online hub has since drawn more than 700 users.

Why it mattered for our community

Sexual assault reports to NSW Police were increasing across the Northern Beaches. Twenty percent of local services surveyed reported a growing demand to be first responders to disclosures of contemporary and historic assaults. The local services estimated 55 percent of people disclosing sexual assault relied on local services for support. Accessible, trusted and local responses and clear pathways to specialist support services are essential, as is the ability for victims and survivors to make well-informed choices about the type of support they would like.

What we learnt

Feedback identified showed gaps in knowledge across the response system, particularly around police processes, medical services and referral pathways. One participant reflected, "Knowledge about police processes and medical interventions was limited. Really appreciated the knowledge sharing." Another said, "Great panel discussion and wonderful to hear from a victim's point of view how they wished to be supported."

Who was involved

The Working Group, comprising elected Councillors, Northern Beaches Domestic Violence Network, Northern Beaches Youth Interagency, community representatives and Council staff worked in collaboration with Northern Sydney Sexual Assault Service, Northern Beaches Police Area Command, local service providers, Mounties Group and Survivor Hub.

Where to next

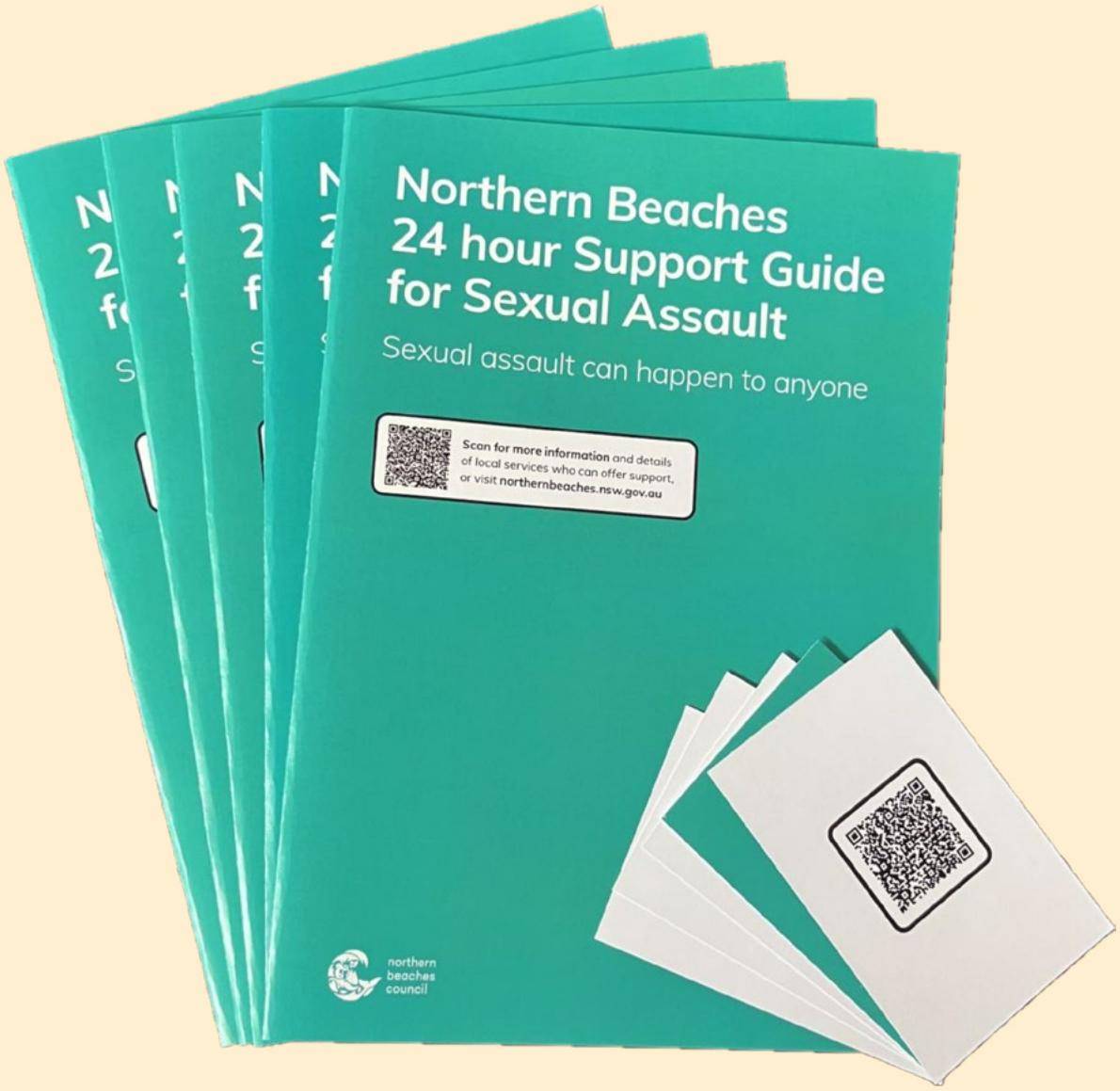
We will continue to provide an information hub to support victims and survivors of sexual assault and the local services responding to their disclosures.

Sexual assault can happen to anyone.

If you or someone you know has experienced sexual assault, it's important to seek support. What that support looks like is your choice.

> **For more information click here to access the Northern Beaches Safety Wellbeing Sexual Assault page.**

Figure 1
Support resources developed by the Working Group



Impact spotlight:
Measuring wellbeing on the Northern Beaches

What's shifted

The Community Wellbeing Framework gives us a local, repeatable way to track liveability, wellbeing and financial circumstances over time. Established in 2022 as a key action under Better Together 2040, it has now delivered 3 data cycles, a public report and a baseline that other Council strategies are building on.

What we delivered

The Framework sets out 4 domains, 16 outcomes and 33 indicators covering the objective and subjective elements of wellbeing. Objective data comes from existing reporting across Council and external sources. Subjective data comes from the Community Views survey, an independently administered survey of a representative sample of 1,200 residents.

- baseline survey in March 2022
- second survey in early 2024
- third survey completed in 2026, with reporting underway
- State of Wellbeing Report published in 2024 as the first progress update
- indicators embedded in the Community Strategic Plan, Better Together 2040 and other plans

Why it mattered

No off-the-shelf framework fits every community, and we didn't have a consistent local measure of how people experienced life on the Northern Beaches. The objective data was already there, sitting across different teams. The gap was in the subjective. A shared framework was needed to identify where disadvantage sits, track change over time and anchor decisions in evidence rather than assumption.

What the 2024 State of Wellbeing Report showed

The Overall Liveability Index reached 69.4, up from 67.8 in 2022 and ahead of the Australian, NSW and Greater Sydney benchmarks.

The Health and Wellbeing Index rose from 7.3 to 7.7, above the national average of 6.4. Residents rated access to the natural environment 9.0 out of 10 and feeling safe 8.1, both up on 2022.

The Report also showed where pressure is building. Public transport scored 6.2, access to services 5.9 and affordable housing 3.9 the lowest rating in the survey. Personal financial circumstances dropped from 6.7 to 6.3, and 23 percent of residents expected their situation to worsen over the next year, up from 18 percent. Residents aged 18 to 34 reported a lower liveability score, poorer mental health and weaker financial wellbeing than older age groups.

Who was involved

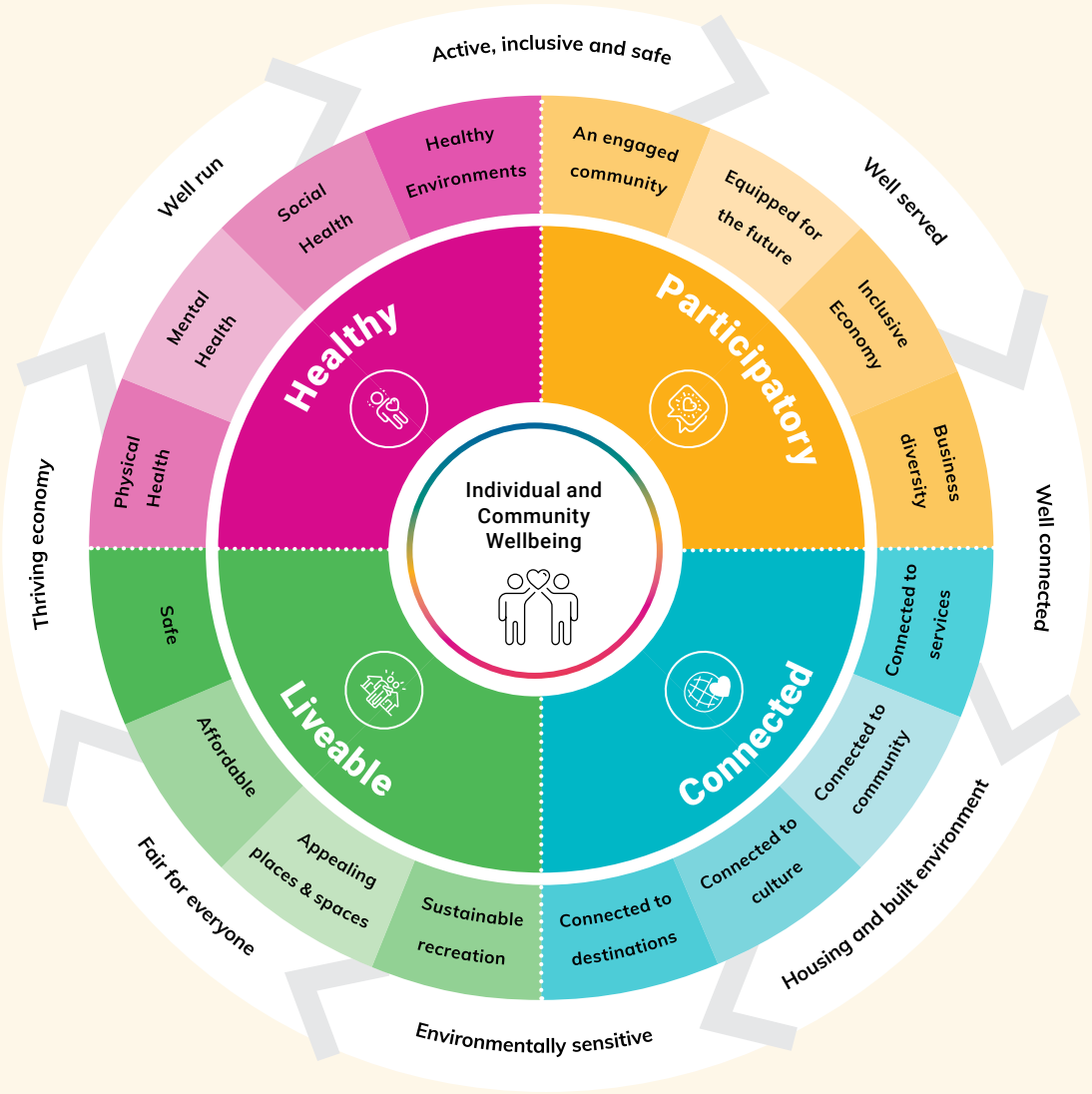
The work was shaped across Council drawing in Corporate Strategy, Community Development, Arts and Culture, Community Centres, Libraries, Children's Services, Transport Network, Strategic Planning, Economic Development, Customer Service, Events, and Resilience and Climate Change. .id Consulting administers the Community Views survey.

Where to next

The 2026 survey is complete and reporting is underway. The biennial cycle is now established, so each round builds on the last and sharpens what we know about how wellbeing is shifting on the Northern Beaches.

Click here for more information

Figure 2
The Northern Beaches Community Wellbeing Framework



Strategic Direction: An Inclusive Community

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

Strategic Alignment

Our commitment to measuring, reporting and collaboratively improving community safety is informed by and aligned with the following frameworks:

UN Sustainable Development Goals



Community Strategic Plan

Outcome: Community and Belonging
Aspiration: Our community aspires to be resilient, ensuring people feel safe, supported, included, and have diverse opportunities for a rich cultural and social life.

Community Wellbeing Framework domains

Liveable

Participatory

Sustainable communities' principles

Well served

Well run

Fair for everyone

Thriving local economy

Outcome trends – An inclusive community

Measure	Indicator	Baseline	2026 result	5 year trend	Interpretation
Residents say they feel included in community life	Experience of opportunity of all	6.2/10 (2022)	6.5/10	Improving 	Perceptions of access to inclusive growth and opportunities have improved indicating a positive shift in how residents experience opportunity across the community
Our First Nations peoples and Indigenous heritage are included in all decision making	% representation of priority populations in engagement* *Data source: Have Your Say project data	3/5 (2025)	No update available	n/a	Engagement activities reflected 3 out of 5 priority populations were proportionally represented, with gaps remaining
Value of all people is recognised, respected and embraced	% of people who say they feel valued as part of the Northern Beaches community	36% (2022)	52%	Improving 	There has been a significant improvement in residents feeling valued as part of the community, indicating a meaningful positive shift in perceptions of inclusion and belonging
The whole community has access to inclusive growth and opportunities	% of community grant funded programs supporting the identified priority populations* *Data source: Community Grants program data	100% (2022)	100%	Maintaining 	All community grant funded programs continue to support identified priority populations, maintaining full alignment with strategic priorities over time
We have an active, resilient and engaged social services sector* *Data source: Better Together Forum annual sector survey	% of social services reporting that they agree they can see a long-term future for their organisation on the Northern Beaches	91% (2022)	90% (2025)	Maintaining 	Levels of confidence in long term organisational sustainability remain high, indicating continued strength and resilience across the sector
	% of social services reporting they believe they are meeting the needs of the Northern Beaches community	76% (2022)	80% (2025)	Improving 	More social services report they are meeting community needs, indicating a positive shift in sector confidence and perceived effectiveness

Unless indicated, all indicators are sourced from the Community Views Survey or ABS statistics.

Inclusion in action – Delivery progress

	Total actions	Delivered	In progress	Not commenced
Better Together implementation plan (2021 to 2026)	34	12	21	1

Targeted Action Plans supporting the Inclusion strategic direction in Better Together

	Total actions	Delivered	In progress	Not commenced
Disability Inclusion Action Plan (2022 to 2026)	11	5	6	0
Multicultural Inclusion Plan (2024 to 2029)	26	6	18	2
Youth Voice Action Plan (2023 to 2028)	38	4	25	9

Actions marked 'In progress' are aligned to multi-year delivery schedules and remain on track

Progress highlights from the last 5 years (2021 to 2026)

Better Together implementation plan (2021 to 2026)	• Developed and implemented a Multicultural Inclusion Plan designed specifically for the Northern Beaches. • Held an annual Better Together Forum to bring services together to discuss emerging challenges and share good practice, with growing attendance each year. • Delivered a youth Insight paper researching the needs and diversity of young people in the Northern Beaches.
Disability Inclusion Action Plan (2022 to 2026)	• We are working towards JobSupport certification for inclusive recruitment practices and have successfully achieved veteran friendly organisation status. • Developed and implemented a Disability and Inclusion Action Plan built specifically for the Northern Beaches community. • Developed Easy Read documents for key projects, including the North Narrabeen and Seaforth Oval Plans of Management, and partnered with platform providers to enhance accessibility of our digital spaces. • Libraries played a leading role in improving digital literacy by offering free Technology Help sessions, one-on-one support and information workshops on topics such as scam awareness and cyber safety. • Improved access to facilities and services through completed accessibility reviews and audits of community centres and the introduction of a Disability Inclusion Award.
Multicultural Inclusion Plan (2024 to 2029)	• Six grants awarded to directly support multicultural communities. • Our Community Grants Program continued to fund projects that improved access and inclusion for priority populations, with priorities reviewed annually to respond to changing community needs. • Supported a range of cultural programs and exhibitions, including MAG&M Art Wall: Dennis Golding and Jumaadi: At the End (My Love) Nature Wins.
Youth Voice Action Plan (2023 to 2028)	• Developed a set of meaningful engagement indicators for young people and embedded them in decision making processes. • Refreshed the Youth Advisory Group to include up to five members nominated through the Northern Beaches Youth Interagency, strengthening representation and connection across local youth networks. • Co-created a Youth Voice Action Plan through engagement with young people living in the Northern Beaches to direct youth development for the next 5 years.

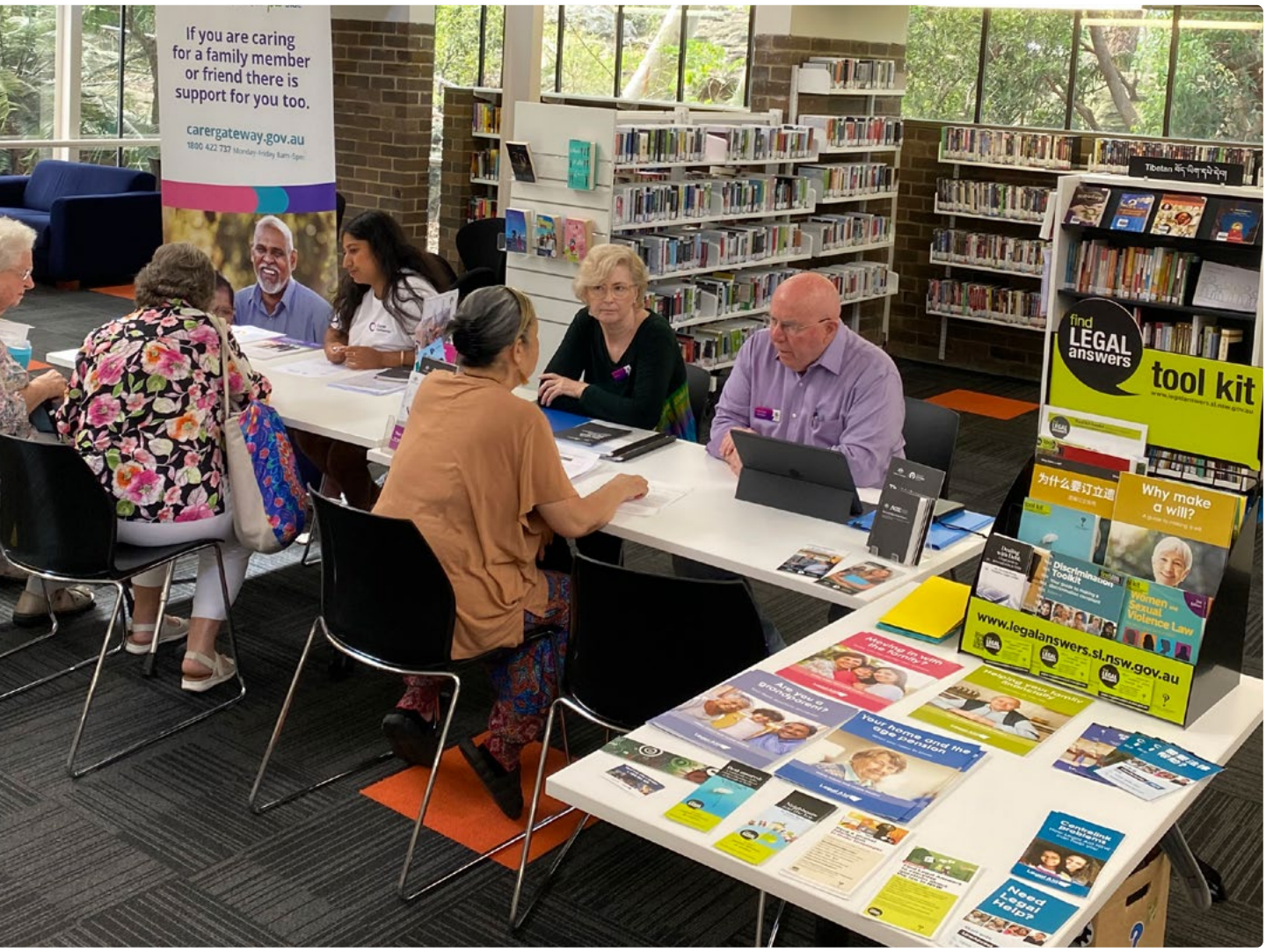
Supporting inclusion - the next 5 years

The delivery of all 34 implementation plan actions marks the close of the first 5-year cycle of Better Together.

Our outcome measures show inclusion is improving. More residents say they feel valued and connected to their community. Confidence among social services about their long-term future on the Northern Beaches has stayed steady, and our community grants continue to support priority populations.

Some people do not yet feel valued or fully included and our engagement does not yet reflect all priority populations equally. Gaps remain, particularly in engagement with people from multicultural communities and LGBTQ+ communities. This is a barrier to building a socially sustainable community.

Library Drop-in Tech Help session



Impact spotlight:
Tech Help in our libraries

What's shifted

In 2023, informal tech help in our libraries moved from occasional pop-up events to a regular drop-in program across all 6 branches. Two years on, it's become a trusted place for people with low digital literacy to get friendly, one-on-one help with everyday tech.

What we delivered

Drop-in Tech Help tables now run at all 6 branches at various times through the week. People who want more privacy can book a one-on-one session. Volunteers, most with IT or tech backgrounds, rotate through branches on a fortnightly or weekly basis.

Support covers the things people need help with: setting up new devices, general troubleshooting, email management, smartphone setup and everyday digital tasks. When the same questions keep coming up, the library turns them into targeted information sessions on priority topics.

In 2025 across the 6 branches, there were 548 recorded drop-in visits and 458 booked sessions, with 777 attendees in total. Mona Vale had the highest attendance at 208. Dee Why recorded the highest number of pre-booked one-on-one sessions.

Why it mattered

The development of Better Together 2040 showed that as more services moved online, more people were being left behind. Digital exclusion was widening, with older residents and adults with low digital literacy facing the steepest barriers.

The first Tech Help pop-ups, at Seniors Festival and Privacy Awareness Week, confirmed what the evidence suggested. Demand was strong and people valued the face-to-face and informal nature of the support. COVID disrupted the early rollout, but when pop-ups returned in 2022 they quickly regained momentum. That sustained demand was the basis for moving to an ongoing drop-in model in 2023.

What we learnt

The program achieved an average customer satisfaction score of 4.96 out of 5 in 2025. Feedback reinforced the value of the service, with participants describing it as essential to staying connected and returning regularly to highlight the patience and kindness of volunteers. Participant feedback included:

- "Very special, couldn't manage without it." (Manly)
- "Very lovely and knowledgeable, a highly valuable service to the community." (Dee Why)

Who was involved

Twenty-four active volunteers deliver Tech Help across the 6 library branches, most on a fortnightly or weekly basis. Library staff play a central role supporting logistics and getting the word out. In 2025, 777 community members took part, most of them older people.

Click here to access the Tech Help program information, booking times and library branch availability.

Impact spotlight:
Have Your Say Day

What's shifted

In 2022, a small group of young people set up a forum to speak directly to elected Councillors and local Members of Parliament. Have Your Say Day is an annual fixture that feeds into Council committees, local service agendas and policy decisions.

What we delivered

The forum is planned and run by young people through Council's Youth Advisory Group (YAG) and the Beaches Leadership Team (BLT), a network of local high school captains. A standardised survey is used to engage young people across the Northern Beaches and inform student presentations. Community Development staff sit in every planning meeting but make space for young people to drive decisions. Peak bodies like Youth Action NSW and the Office for Youth deliver workshops like Appreciative Inquiry, equipping young people with strengths-based, solutions-focused tools to raise the issues that matter to them.

Between 2022 and 2026, participation has surged across the board: school involvement grew from 8 to 10 schools (up 25 percent), attendance at the Presentation Night jumped from 35 to 120 young people (up 243 percent), and survey responses climbed from 350 to 2,368 (up 577 percent).

The reach extends well beyond the room. Eleven young people now hold leadership roles across Council committees, including the Better Together Leadership Group, YAG and planning committees. One is a Member of the NSW Youth Parliament. Two have taken up employment with Council in community development and transport.

Why it mattered

Young people told us that decisions shaping their lives were being made without them. Have Your Say Day created a direct line between young people and decision makers at all levels of government, on topics chosen by young people themselves.

The effect has been concrete. Student perspectives on teacher shortages and transport reached MPs who raised them in parliament in 2022 and 2025. In 2023, young people's concerns about sexual assault and consent led us to establish a Sexual Assault Working Group, run a webinar for service providers on responding to disclosures, and build a new youth webpage. The Northern Beaches Youth Interagency uses the forum's priorities to set its General Meeting agenda, and the local Headspace Consortium draws on the data to shape its work.

One participant reflected: "It has shown that I have a voice in my community and that I am able to make change."

What we learnt

The Appreciative Inquiry workshop was one of the most valuable elements but running it on the same day as the forum was too tight. It now runs a month before the event, giving young people time to analyse survey results and apply what they have learnt before they speak. Smooth handover between outgoing and incoming student leaders is equally important. We now provide project briefs, key dates and earlier follow-up meetings to support the transition year on year to make the program sustainable.

Who was involved

The YAG and BLT lead the event. Peak bodies deliver the training. Local secondary schools provide the venue, with Councillors and state and federal Members of Parliament and community leaders central to its reach. Local youth services have built new connections with young people through the event.

Where to next

Have Your Say Day continues to grow. The ambition is for all 28 secondary schools on the Northern Beaches to take part and to rotate hosting across schools so ownership spreads further. We presented the model at the 2023 Youth Action NSW Conference and we continue to build on the program every year. Other Councils from Northern Sydney region have expressed interest in the program and sent staff and young people to attend with a view to plan a similar event in their local government area.

Click here for more information

Credit: Connor Neil Gagen. 2025
Have Your Say Day participants



Strategic Direction: 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.

Strategic Alignment

Our commitment to measuring, reporting and collaboratively improving community safety is informed by and aligned with the following frameworks:

UN Sustainable Development Goals







Community Strategic Plan

Outcome: Community and Belonging
Aspiration: Our community aspires to be resilient, ensuring people feel safe, supported, included, and have diverse opportunities for a rich cultural and social life.

Community Wellbeing Framework domains



Connected

Sustainable communities' principles



Active, inclusive and safe



Well served

Outcome trends – A Connected Community

Measure	Indicator	Baseline	2026 result	5 year trend	Interpretation
Residents feel connected with community life	Experience of strong sense of community	7.1/10 (2022)	7.2/10	Maintaining 	Sense of community remains high showing strong community connectedness
Everyone who participates in community life feels like they belong	Proportion of residents who feel a sense of belonging in their neighbourhood	66% (2024)	73%	Improving 	Sense of belonging in neighbourhoods has strengthened, indicating a positive shift in how residents experience local connection and inclusion
Our community has access to the services, programs and facilities they need	% of residents who say they can access information about how they can participate in community activities	67% (2022)	64%	Declining 	Confidence in knowing where to access information has declined with fewer residents strongly confident and more reporting uncertainty
Community networks reflect the diverse interests of people living on the Northern Beaches	Social wellbeing rating	7.7/10 (2022)	7.6/10	Maintaining 	Perceptions remain steady, suggesting community networks are generally seen as inclusive, with no significant change over time
We have a thriving volunteer culture	Levels of volunteering	16.9% (2021)	n/a	n/a	This indicator is based on Census data and has not been updated during the reporting period

Unless indicated, all indicators are sourced from the Community Views Survey or ABS statistics.

Connection in action – Delivery progress

	Total actions	Delivered	In progress	Not commenced
Better Together implementation plan (2021 to 2026)	18	18	0	0

Targeted Action Plans supporting the Connection strategic direction in Better Together

	Total actions	Delivered	In progress	Not commenced
Disability Inclusion Action Plan (2022 to 2026)	40	6	34	0
Multicultural Inclusion Plan (2024 to 2029)	25	3	16	6
Youth Voice Action Plan (2023 to 2028)	15	1	13	1

Actions marked 'In progress' are aligned to multi-year delivery schedules and remain on track

Progress highlights from the last 5 years (2021 to 2026)

Better Together implementation plan (2021 to 2026)	• Continued quarterly Volunteer Network meetings • Delivered annual recognition programs including Australia Day Awards and Volunteer Week, with more than 100 volunteers attending the 2025 National Volunteer Week event • Increased to 223 Council volunteers under 25 in 2025 • Reviewed volunteer roles to improve accessibility • Expanded It Takes a Village program, engaging 400 residents in the community quiz and 234 in the Neighbourhood Challenge • Delivered the We Belong intercultural project to strengthen social cohesion • Delivered community capacity workshops and funded grants focused on local connection • Activated neighbourhoods and town centres through cultural events and initiatives
Disability Inclusion Action Plan (2022 to 2026)	• Delivered new and upgraded accessible facilities, including Changing Places accreditation at Lionel Watts play space • Installed approximately 60 new kerb ramps annually and improved footpath accessibility standards • Completed accessible pathways and upgraded accessible parking bays and bus stops • Home Library Services have increased provision of envoy devices to support members with visual disabilities
Multicultural Inclusion Plan (2024 to 2029)	• Delivered multicultural events and progressed a Multicultural Inclusion Plan. • Grant project supported to establish new Nepalese, Spanish and Brazilian playgroups
Youth Voice Action Plan (2023 to 2028)	• Continued Youth Advisory Group engagement • Helped Council identify and curate an internal image library of local young people to increase visibility of young people in council documents

Supporting connection - the next 5 years

The completion of all 18 implementation actions marks an important milestone in the first 5-year cycle of Better Together. As we move into the next phase, the focus will shift from implementation to strengthening impact, informed by what we have learned through community feedback and outcome monitoring.

While residents report increased feelings of belonging and connection, declining confidence in accessing information highlights a key area of focus. Over the next 5 years, we will find new ways of making it easier for people to find, access and participate in community life, focusing on inclusive and accessible communication.

We will continue to build on strong community networks by supporting local partnerships, enabling place-based initiatives, and ensuring opportunities for connection reflect the diverse needs and interests of our community.

Impact spotlight:
Assisted Adult Volunteer Stream

What's shifted

Seven adults with disability are volunteering in our library service, supported one-on-one to work at a pace that suits them. This enables connection through volunteering for people with disability in Library Services.

What we delivered

The Assisted Adult Volunteer Stream runs within Northern Beaches Council Library Services, with 7 participants currently engaged.

Each participant works one-on-one with library staff to shape a volunteering role that fits their interests, capabilities and goals. Staff provide ongoing guidance and supervision. Tasks are adapted where needed so the role is genuinely accessible, and participants build independence over time as their confidence grows.

Why it mattered

People with disability have historically had limited access to volunteering pathways that build employment skills, expand social connection and offer meaningful community contribution. We set up the stream to close that gap in our library service.

It also puts an existing Council commitment into practice. Focus Area 2 of our Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2022 to 2026 includes Action 26: identify and promote volunteering opportunities for people living with disability. The Assisted Adult Volunteer Stream is a concrete delivery mechanism for that action.

What we learnt

Structure and flexibility work well together. Participants told us they valued the chance to contribute, build social connections and do work that matters. Library staff saw participants grow in confidence and become part of the extended library team.

The program also created a real pathway to employment. One participant moved into paid work outside Council after building job skills and experience in a library setting.

The consistent insight: when people are supported to volunteer at their own pace, with the right guidance and flexibility, confidence, connection and employment pathways all follow.

Click here to express interest and for more information or email LibraryVolunteers@northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au



Impact spotlight:
We Belong: Community Led Intercultural Project

What's shifted

Through the We Belong Project, 14 community members from diverse cultural backgrounds stepped into leadership roles, shaping and delivering 4 intercultural initiatives across the Northern Beaches. The project established a lasting bank of oral histories, stories and resources that keep intercultural connection visible in everyday community life.

What we delivered

Four community-led initiatives, each shaped by a different project group:

- Trail Tales: an interactive storytelling scavenger hunt across sites of cultural significance. Oral histories are now accessible through a dedicated We Belong collection and QR codes across the Beaches. As of June 2025, the recordings had been played around 1,449 times.
- The Story of Us Intercultural Fair: a 4-hour celebration of multicultural identity, with 6 community groups and performances and about 150 people attending. Story Trees and community stalls created welcoming spaces for cultural exchange.
- Cultural Chronicles: Year 8 students explored their heritage with family and elders and developed their own stories, after project team members shared their cultural journeys.
- Humans of the Northern Beaches: a living library and podcast series where residents shared personal stories of belonging.

Why it mattered

Demographic change on the Northern Beaches is shifting. Newer migrant communities are growing and a Council review found residents were often unaware of the area's changing cultural makeup. The same review pointed to unconscious bias and racial discrimination in parts of the community, and to connection forming within cultures rather than across them.

The We Belong Project was funded through the Premier's Department Social Cohesion Grant for Local Government to strengthen connection and belonging within and between local communities, using a community-led approach to build intercultural capacity from the ground up.

What we learnt

Storytelling and lived experience created safe entry points for intercultural dialogue. Community-led formats lifted participation and gave participants a strong sense of ownership over the work.

The project also improved internal collaboration with teams working toward shared cultural awareness goals, and participants reported personal growth in intercultural understanding

alongside the community outcomes.

Who was involved

14 intercultural community members led the 4 project groups. Participants included residents across all age groups, Year 8 students, multicultural community leaders and local performers. The project was delivered by Council in partnership with community.

Where to next

The resources, recordings and relationships built through We Belong continue to be available to the community. The project also pointed to a clear next step: supporting community leaders to carry their initiatives forward, building a pipeline of intercultural leadership and extending the value of Council's investment in cross-cultural capacity.

Click here to learn more about the We Belong Project and check out other initiatives we are running for the Northern Beaches Multicultural Community.

FILCOS North Shore. A glimpse of Filipino Cultural Dancers at the Story of Us – Intercultural Fair





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