

Better Together – Social Sustainability Strategy 2041

Draft Social Sustainability Discussion Paper 2020



northern
beaches
council



We acknowledge the traditional owners of this land and elders past and present. We recognise Aboriginal people as the original custodians of the Northern Beaches. Aboriginal culture is integral to our understanding of belonging, community and care of the land.



Crafting an inclusive, connected and safe Northern Beaches - now and into the future.

Northern Beaches Council is leading the development of *Better Together Social Sustainability Strategy 2041*. *Better Together* will provide a significant and meaningful step forward for Council to continue to support the Northern Beaches in becoming an inclusive, connected and safe place to live, work and visit now and into future.

To ensure *Better Together* truly reflects community aspirations and needs, Council is seeking to capture and elevate the voices of all those who live and work in our community.

While the Northern Beaches is lucky to experience a high quality of life in general, we know that there are pockets of relative disadvantage and a range of current and emerging social challenges to be addressed over the next two decades.

Better Together will play an important role in setting the strategic directions to overcome these challenges and help the Northern Beaches become more resilient and adaptive to change.

This discussion paper brings together knowledge and insights gathered from stakeholder consultation over the last 4 years along with a review of demographics and contemporary literature. It examines how that feedback and information relates to supporting the Northern Beaches to become a socially sustainable and resilient community.

We are now asking you, the community, to tell us if we have got it right. We are seeking your support to read this discussion paper and provide feedback on whether we have:

- captured the current strengths in our community,
- understood the complex challenges facing our community, and
- if what we are saying is accurate and comprehensive.

Your input is critical in ensuring that the final *Better Together* reflects the collective knowledge and experience on the Northern Beaches. Tell us how Council can best work with the community to strive for an even more inclusive, safer and more connected Northern Beaches.

What do we think more inclusive could look like?

A place where diversity is valued and celebrated. The community harnesses the power of diverse thoughts, actions and experiences to make sure everyone feels welcomed.

What do we think safer looks like?

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

What could more connected mean?

We are connected across generations, through their relationships with their family, culture, groups, and the broader community.

Purpose

Northern Beaches Council is in the process of leading the development of a Social Sustainability Strategy, *Better Together 2041* that will support the community to achieve its vision for 'A safe, inclusive and connected community that lives in balance with our extraordinary coastal and bushland environment'.

This discussion paper:

- Provides a demographic overview of the Northern Beaches community
- Explains what social sustainability is and why it is important
- Outlines the strengths that exist in the community which help build social sustainability
- Summarises some of the challenges facing the Northern Beaches that if not addressed will affect social sustainability.

The paper provides discussion of key community feedback collected in the last four years through Council's community engagement activities. The key themes identified have then been reviewed alongside the 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data from .id Community Profile and relevant contemporary literature on social sustainability, wellbeing and resilience to provide a localised discussion of broader social change trends.

Participation of the community in developing a social sustainability strategy is critical to effectively uncover the strengths available to meet the current and future challenges and realise opportunities as they arise. The feedback received from engagement around this discussion paper will drive the development of *Better Together 2041* and set the social strategic direction for capacity building, resilience and wellbeing for the next 20 years.

You can contribute to building a safe, inclusive and connected community on the Northern Beaches by reading this discussion paper and providing feedback on the strengths, challenges and opportunities that are facing the Northern Beaches community.



Who we are

Our community

The Northern Beaches Council area had an Estimated Resident Population for 2019 of 273,499. The population is forecast to grow to 308,896 people by 2041, which accounts for approximately 3 percent of population growth in the Greater Sydney area.

The current largest demographic group is parents and homebuilders, 22.8 percent of residents are 35 to 49 years, slightly higher than Greater Sydney 21.1 percent.

The population is ageing with young people leaving the area and people living longer and living in the community, with the level of independence, rather in residential care.

The largest changes in the age structure in this area between 2011 and 2016 were in the age groups: seniors-70 to 84 (+3,421 people), and older workers and pre-retirees 50 to 59 (+3,594 people) who will move into this category over the life of the strategy.

28.8 percent of the population in 2016 was born overseas which is low when compared to 36.7 percent for Greater Sydney. The three highest countries of birthplace are the United Kingdom, New Zealand and China. 15.1 percent of people spoke a language other than English at home in 2016.

In 2016, 9,273 people (3.7 percent of the population) reported needing help in their day-to-day lives due to disability. This was a similar percentage to 2011. In 2016, 800 people who needed assistance were employed, of which 34.1 percent were working full time and 62.5 percent part time.

How we live

The Northern Beaches has strong local ties, with 50 percent of people living at the same address as five years ago. More than half of all dwellings on the Northern Beaches are separate houses and 43.1 percent of the dwellings were medium or high density, compared to 44 percent in Greater Sydney.

The median house price was \$1.51 million at June 2016. Rental costs are nearly double the Sydney average at \$895 per week compared to \$520.7. In 2016, 5.9 percent of the Northern Beaches Council area's households, were experiencing housing stress compared to 11.8 percent in Greater Sydney.

The population is forecast to grow

273,499
residents in 2019

+35,397

308,896
residents in 2041



We are getting older

+3,421



seniors 70-84

+3,594



pre-retirees 50-59

How we talk at home

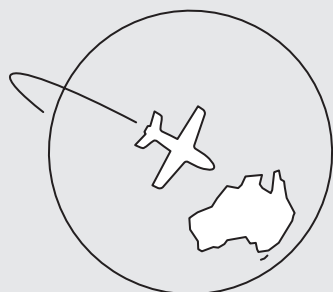
Olá!



15%

spoke a language
other than English
at home

Where we come from



28.8%

Northern Beaches
residents born
overseas

36.7%

Greater Sydney
residents born
overseas



three highest countries of birthplace are:

**United Kingdom,
New Zealand
and China**

How we live

50%

people living at
the same address
as five years ago

**over
50%**

of all dwellings
are separate
houses

43%

dwellings
are medium or
high density

Some of us need a hand



9,273

need help in
their day-to-
day lives due
to disability

We like to study

32.3%

Northern Beaches
have gained a Bachelor or higher degree

28.3%

Greater Sydney
have gained a Bachelor or higher degree

Let's talk money

\$2,173

Northern Beaches
weekly median
income

\$1,745

Greater Sydney
weekly median
income



\$1.51m
median house price

\$895

Northern Beaches
average rental cost

\$520

Greater Sydney
average rental cost

5.9%

Northern Beaches
experiencing
housing stress

11.8%

Greater Sydney
experiencing
housing stress



What we do

Households have a weekly median income of \$2,173 on the Northern Beaches, \$428 more than the Greater Sydney median.

The Northern Beaches Council area has a highly educated resident population with 32.3 percent of people having gained a Bachelor or Higher degree qualification, higher than Greater Sydney at 28.3 percent.

The labour force participation rate in 2016 was 66.2 percent compared with Greater Sydney 61.6 percent. On the Northern Beaches 52.1 percent of residents are working in the area. The number of employed people in Northern Beaches Council area increased by 7,337 between 2011 and 2016.

In 2016 there was a relatively low unemployment rate at 3.5 percent however this is likely to have grown with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

In 2016, 0.6 percent of the community identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Analysis of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander household income levels in the Northern Beaches Council area in 2016 compared to total household income levels in New South Wales shows that there was a larger proportion of high-income households (40 percent earned \$2,500 per week or more compared to 15 percent) and a lower proportion of low income households (9 percent earning less than \$650 per week compared to 21.2 percent).

A socially sustainable and inclusive community

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 change¹.

Successful communities don't just happen - they require planning and work to create places where people want to live and work in the long term².

Socially sustainable and inclusive communities work together with governments, private sector and other stakeholders to create more inclusive societies, empower citizens, and foster more resilient, peaceful communities.

During consultation, our community have used the word 'inclusive' to describe a place that is welcoming to everyone and offers services that welcome and meet the needs of different cultures and age groups. Many in our community acknowledge that more needs to be done to engage with culturally diverse minorities. When visioning the future for the Northern Beaches, residents would like to see community life celebrated, and for this to be inclusive of all cultures and areas.

In becoming a leader in social sustainability, five elements of socially sustainable communities have been identified (Figure 1) for the Northern Beaches community to aspire to. By focusing on these five core elements the Northern Beaches can harness the power and strengths of the community, integrate the key principles of social sustainability within a broader planning approach and break down both social and physical barriers that exist.



Active, inclusive and safe



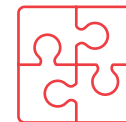
Well served - hospitals and other public and community services



Well run - everyone participates



Fair for everyone



Thriving local economy - everyone contributes



The Northern Beaches will face unique challenges over the next 20 years. As a community it is important to consider how our choices affect the people living and working here now and into the future to ensure that everyone continues to enjoy a safe, inclusive and connected lifestyle.

A Social Sustainability Strategy will give the community the tools they need, providing a roadmap into tomorrow. It will:



Social change on the Northern Beaches

Social change has been extensive and rapid both globally and within Australia, fuelled by factors such as population ageing, low birth rates³ and an exodus of young people from metropolitan areas, particularly in Sydney, where more moved from the city to regional areas than those moving from regional areas to the city⁴.

Affordability, lifestyle considerations and perceptions of career advancement are frequently cited as key factors in explaining why millennials - people aged between 20 and 35 years - are choosing to leave the city^{5 4}. These issues are magnified for young people living on the Northern Beaches - with a high cost of living, ongoing challenges relating to housing affordability and transport contributing to the exodus of young people to other areas of Sydney and beyond.

Although the Northern Beaches is a naturally beautiful and socio-economically advantaged area - it is not immune to the impacts of these broader societal trends. These unique features of the Northern Beaches also make it a key challenge in remaining a socially sustainable and inclusive community for all.

We need to understand local factors that increase the impact of social change trends on the community, and provide a nuanced and localised response to ensure we maintain the vibrant, diverse and socially cohesive lifestyle we enjoy.

As the response to the COVID-19 pandemic continues to unfold, it is difficult to fully comprehend or forecast what the primary and lasting impact of the pandemic will be on the community. To date the data and analysis coming from the research sector about the evolving impact on the community indicate it is primarily exacerbating existing social issues. Examples include an increase in domestic violence, household financial stress and an increase in mental health concerns.

Within the context of the Social Sustainability Strategy, this indicates that it is possible to move forward with a long-term outlook and be confident that these issues will be captured within the proposed engagement process. More consideration will be made as the project progresses around the prioritisation of issues, as this is likely to be where changes in community need occur rather than the creation of new areas of focus. For example, the reduction and loss of income and employment experienced disproportionately by women and younger workers may affect the prioritisation of this priority group higher now than pre COVID-19.

Council is committed to continue to review the impact of COVID-19 as the ongoing impact locally, nationally and internationally is better understood. As new local information emerges, Council will engage in discussion about the effect of any impact to the community.



Northern Beaches strengths

The Northern Beaches is amongst the most socially advantaged areas in Sydney and Australia⁶. This underpins a number of the community's strengths and contributes to the resilience and overall high quality of life experienced by the community. Our many and varied strengths provide the tools to meet and respond to the challenges facing the community in the next 20 years.

One of the core values consistently expressed by the community is having connected, vibrant communities, one of the main reasons for living in the region. Residents associate the area with a sense of neighbourhood safety (from crime, traffic, pollution etc.). The Northern Beaches has many strengths that contribute to social sustainability and the key strengths have been highlighted in this section.

High levels of community safety

There are high levels of community safety on the Northern Beaches with 96 percent of residents agreeing with the statement "I feel safe" and 97 percent of residents indicating they are at least somewhat satisfied with community safety/crime prevention in the Northern Beaches area.

**96%**

agreeing with the statement "I feel safe"

**97%**

indicating they are at least somewhat satisfied with community safety/crime prevention in the Northern Beaches area

Telephone Survey Community Safety Plan, 2019

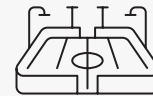


Thriving social, recreation and sporting opportunities

A vast network of cultural, sporting and recreational opportunities exists on the Northern Beaches. This provides opportunities for connection, inclusion and contributes to health and wellbeing.

Residents have access to both natural and developed open spaces offering opportunities for passive and active sport and recreation. With 116.5 hectares of sportsfields, two National Parks, three State Parks, 69 foreshore parklands, ocean and harbour beaches and varied park experiences, our open space network provides for a diversity of opportunities including play, walking and cycling, picnic facilities, swimming and other recreational pursuits for all ages and abilities⁷. The community also have access to 41 council owned and managed multi-use community centres⁸, six libraries, other art and cultural spaces and indoor recreational facilities that enable participation in social, health and learning activities.

This extensive network of infrastructure sustains a diverse and popular range of sporting, cultural and recreational organisations and associations. Currently Council is completing supporting strategies to plan for the ongoing growth and needs of the Northern Beaches to strengthen access to these natural and built assets for all.



116.5ha

sportsfields



2

National parks



3

State parks



69

parklands and beaches



15,500ha

Bushland



41

Community centres



6

Libraries



4

Cultural and
creative spaces



7

community gardens

High rates of volunteering

Volunteering is an important aspect of communities that contributes to sustaining social connectedness and supporting programs and activities across the Northern Beaches network of facilities, spaces and recreational facilities.

Volunteering makes 'hidden contribution' to well-being, producing goods and services that are not captured by conventional economic statistics, and building social capital through fostering cooperation and trust.^{9, p. 6}

The same research also confirms that people who have more for themselves can afford to give more to others. As a high socio-economic area, the volunteering statistics for the Northern Beaches LGA tell the same story- with 21.9 percent of the population reporting doing some form of voluntary work in 2016, a much greater percentage than Greater Sydney (16.7 percent.).

People who volunteer also benefit from the opportunity to participate in volunteering work, with volunteers feeling more satisfied with their lives as a whole⁹, providing a win-win for wellbeing.

Self-sufficient economy

Ninety seven percent of the labour force living on the Northern Beaches are employed, with a 3.5 percent unemployed rate, which is much lower than the Greater Sydney rate of 6 percent. Our labour force participation rate of 66.2 percent is also higher than the Greater Sydney average of 61.6 percent¹⁰. Residents of the Northern Beaches experience a range of local employment opportunities, having both the highest proportion of local jobs filled by local residents (self-sufficiency) and residents working locally (self-containment) in Greater Sydney - a testament to its strong economy and willingness of people to work locally (over 52 percent).

While the Northern Beaches does have an especially high overall rate of self-containment, it is worth noting that this does vary between industries. For example, whilst 77 percent of local Food and Accommodation resident workers work locally, this drops to 18 percent for those in Finance and Insurance jobs, meaning over 80 percent of resident workers in this sector must commute out for work. Similarly, only 40 percent of Professional or Managerial resident workers work locally, while 60 percent commute out for work, largely to Sydney CBD, North Sydney and Macquarie Park. This highlights the mismatch between qualifications/skills of resident workers and jobs available locally.



These features of the local economy contribute to a socially sustainable Northern Beaches with most of the available workforce employed and participating in the economy. With over half of that employment within the LGA, a significant share of the economic activity is cycling through local businesses. It also helps residents maintain good work-life balance as time spent travelling is often identified as a contributing factor to overall individual wellbeing and quality of life¹¹.

Council anticipates COVID-19 will have an impact on some of the factors identified within this strength. As the economic and behavioural impact becomes better understood in the local context, they will be incorporated into the Strategy development and review process.



A socio-economically advantaged area

Northern Beaches is amongst the most socio-economically advantaged areas in Sydney and more broadly Australia. The high SEIFA (Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas) scores are indicative not only of the high standard of living and skilled population, but also the larger number of opportunities available to the local residents⁶.

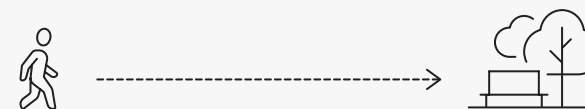
Against the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) Northern Beaches Council in 2016 had the tenth highest score in New South Wales: 1,120.

Access to open space

Our LGA has very high levels of open space provision compared to the World Health Organisation's benchmark and other Sydney Metropolitan Councils. Most residents are within 400 metres of a public open space. Further work is being undertaken to improve pedestrian connection and improve access and use of these areas.

There is widespread agreement that parks and recreation are critical for community wellbeing. Residents consider themselves lucky to live in such a great area, surrounded by the natural environment and part of a great community. So much so, that the majority said they would never leave.

This means people have spaces that are used to connect with nature, family, and friends. The connection with the environment, exercising and socialising contributes to several aspects of wellbeing. People want healthy, safe spaces that encourage community building, social connection and a sense of belonging.



Most residents are within **400m** of a public open space







Safe ways to participate

The opportunities that exist for the community to participate in community life and contribute to decision making are offered in a way that aims to include as many people as possible.

Council is working hard to ensure community assets are accessible to all. Accessibility of space is a key principle underpinning Council's Disability Inclusion Action Plan, Asset Management Strategies, and the Move Northern Beaches 2038 Transport Strategy and associated action Plans, Open Space and Recreation Strategy (under development), and Community Centres Strategy (under development).

These strategies and plans highlight the community's expectations and Council's commitment that our local social infrastructure is accessible for people of all ages and abilities and will remain a key priority for Council into the future.

Council events and activities are designed and delivered to include everyone in the community who choose to participate.

A strong not-for-profit presence

There is a well-established, dedicated and active community and social support sector. In the past couple of years there have been a number of local start-ups, social enterprises and social campaigns/movements utilising online platforms to address relevant social issues. The area also has a good supply of services in key areas including disability and aged relative to other local government areas.

Challenges for social sustainability

Some of the challenges that face the Northern Beaches community over the next 20 years are complex and require a whole of community response. Social Sustainability provides a way of considering the social impact created by these challenges to identify solutions that deliver positive wellbeing and resilience outcomes for our community.

It is important to understand the complexity of the challenges facing the community in order to:

1. Empower people by supporting them to be drivers of their own solutions.
2. Strengthen resilience of households and communities to withstand change.
3. Increase opportunities for priority populations to participate fully in society and address deep rooted systemic inequalities.
4. Work alongside economic and environmental sustainability activities to support an inclusive and resilient community where everyone has a voice and contributes to shaping their future.

A review of academic literature, other Council strategies and plans, and feedback gathered during community consultation over the past four years has identified the following challenges as most likely to impact on our ability to achieve a social sustainable and inclusive community.

There are some emerging priority populations for the Northern Beaches who have a unique set of circumstances that need to be considered in planning for future social wellbeing and resilience on the Northern Beaches. The impact on these groups has been considered for each of the challenges.



Population changes



Housing affordability and suitability



Social services funding



Access to services and support



Mental health and social isolation



Pockets of disadvantage



Shortage of essential workers



Access to information

Priority populations



Young people



Older people



People with a disability



Families



Culturally and linguistically diverse



Essential workers



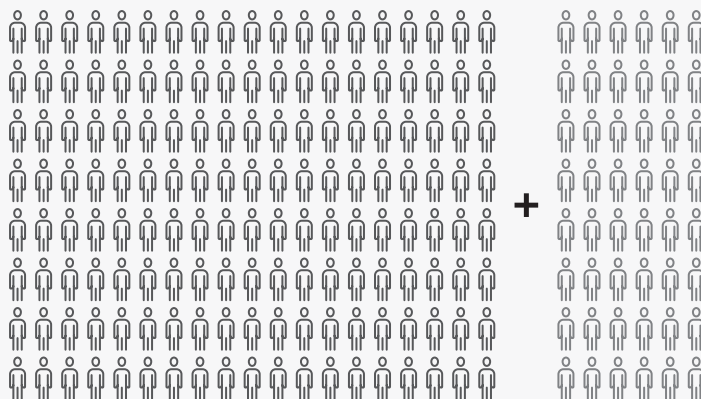


Priority
populations



Population changes

The population is forecast to increase by approximately 35,000 over the next 20 years. This increase combined with anticipated demographic changes as the population ages will change the demand for services and support within the community. With this brings new challenges for maintaining a socially sustainable and inclusive Northern Beaches. The two key challenges are:



35,000

population is forecast to increase over the next 20 years

An increasingly ageing population

The population is ageing at a higher rate than Greater Sydney and North District averages¹². Advances in medicine and better general health and living standards means people are living longer and more often than not choosing to age in place. An ageing population will increasingly require accessible dwellings which are located close to town or village centres, and health and community services.

This is partly due to the decline of adults (30-45 years) between 2011 and 2016 and Young Adults (20-30 years). Young adults are increasingly deciding to migrate from the Northern Beaches choosing locations closer to the Sydney CBD (Sydney, Inner West and North Sydney) most likely due to lifestyle, educational opportunities, proximity to work and nightlife, exacerbating effects of this national trend.

Retaining young people

Young People are increasingly choosing to migrate to other locations with over 2,000 young people between 18 and 34 choosing to leave the Northern Beaches between 2011 and 2016. The factors influencing this include a lack of access to education, lack of affordable housing options, and a lack of proximity to transport networks, work and nightlife.

The Northern Beaches LGA does not have a university campus located within its boundaries, which could be contributing to the lower ratio (7 percent) of young people aged 18 - 24 in the area compared to 9.6 percent in Greater Sydney.



While it is understood young people are more likely to move between areas to live work and study, the statistics show on the Northern Beaches that this extends to young adults 25 to 34 years (11.7 percent), also much lower than the Greater Sydney average of 16.1 percent .

There are some in the community that fear changes will impact their quality of life and that population growth will change the character of the area. They like their current ability to use services and facilities, and enjoy knowing they live here, with few wanting to move out of the area.

Effect on social sustainability and priority populations

The community have identified the importance of providing healthier and safer spaces, along with multi-generational living and appropriate dwelling design as solutions to population retention, good health and growth.

The need to plan for an ageing population was raised, including the need to assist older residents in staying in their own homes, improving mental health, and concerns expressed regarding profit-driven aged care facilities.

It will be difficult to balance the social issues associated with an ageing population if young adults continue to leave the community. In the context of social sustainability some of the issues created by an ageing population are:

- Decline in workforce participation including lack of care workers for elderly people
- Increasing demand on health and social services
- Risk to local economy with less workforce potentially spending money at local businesses
- Lack of vibrancy and multi-generational community life
- Social isolation as families move further apart and social networks are impacted

Social inclusion is an essential building block of a socially sustainable community. Understanding how all of the priority populations are connected formally and informally, and how they provide support to each other, will enable the strategy to set directions that effectively address social isolation.



Priority
populations



Housing affordability and suitability

Like a lot of metropolitan Sydney, social and affordable housing (SAH) stock is at historically low levels across the LGA with wait times in excess of five years. Median property prices and rents have increased significantly in the last 10 years, with growth expected to continue in an upwards trajectory¹³.

Council estimates that there is currently unmet demand for SAH to the order of 8,100¹³. This potentially disguises additional unmet demand from households who want to live in the Northern Beaches but have been forced to relocate often at the expense of family and community networks.

The community places a high value on developing healthy, active communities that are friendly and supportive. There is great enthusiasm for initiatives that build a connected community, cultural and lifestyle opportunities.

There is limited diversity of housing across the Northern Beaches and the lack of supply in some housing types provides challenges for social sustainability¹³.

This is further impacted by the ageing population remaining in detached housing stock and the increasing demand for detached housing or larger apartments driven by growth in households of couples with children.

For the most recently available quarter, rents in the Northern Beaches LGA were rated as Severely Unaffordable to Extremely Unaffordable for a typical rental household¹⁴.

Effect on social sustainability + priority populations

Affordability is important because the Northern Beaches region is losing people to other areas due to the high cost of living and the shortage of jobs with the exception of jobs in services, which tend to be lower paid. There is an acknowledged need for affordable housing for essential workers and for young people.

As more and more people struggle to afford to live on the Northern Beaches, the diversity of people who live here is likely to decrease, and therefore our adaptive capacity, is at risk.

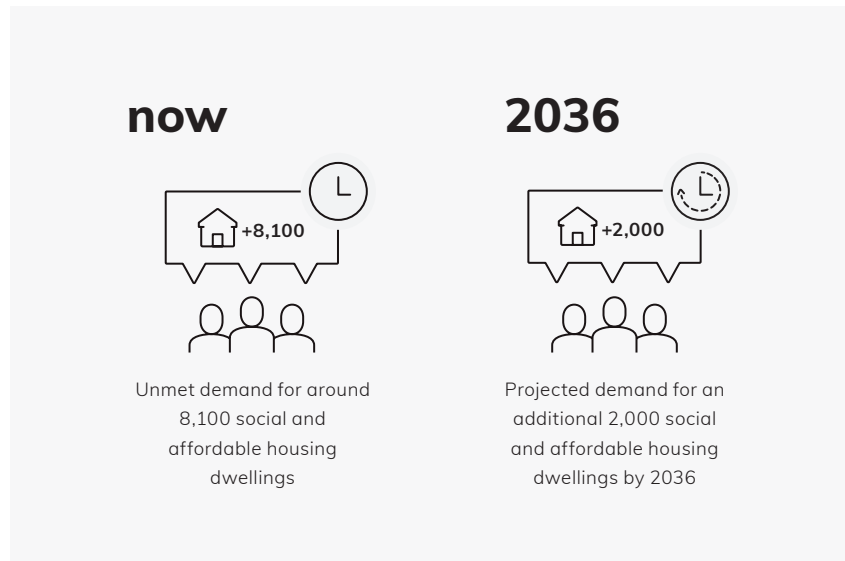
Many residents acknowledge that increased density is required to provide more affordable options, which would then bring families into the area, and that housing affordability drives diversity. Affordable housing and affordable rental accommodation are required for inclusive and diverse communities.

Families, young people and key workers will continue moving out of the area to access affordable housing stock. Research shows that as housing prices increase there are effects on social cohesion, exclusion and social polarisation¹⁵.



The continued loss of these cohorts will further exacerbate the ageing population and a decrease in young people living on the Northern Beaches.

Social sustainability in housing means the ability to create inclusive, secure and healthy communities that are well integrated into the wider systems of the community. The community can support affordable housing projects that connect design of the physical environment with how the people living there need to use the space and relate to each other.





Social services funding

Due to geographic isolation, limited and widely spread population base and perceptions of overall wealth and wellbeing, there are a limited amount of services and service diversity in some sectors and areas. This can mean that there are limited providers of a specific service, with little opportunity for service choice, access or diversity for clients.

The state and federal government's 3-5 year competitive grants model has exacerbated a more competition based framework, making effective partnerships and collaboration more difficult. In some cases, this has led to services working less collaboratively with each other than in the past.

Local Not-for-Profits face the challenges of high purchase or rental costs for their premises, as well as accommodation and travel costs for their employees. This is one of a number of factors that support a community hub and co-location of services model.

Several services now operate out of more affordable industrial areas such as Brookvale or Warriewood, which are not highly visible or accessible for many people. Ideally such services would be located in, or near, town centres with good visibility, accessibility and close to transport. and where people live, work and shop.

High housing prices also mean that employees of Not-for Profits, many of whom are on low to average incomes, find it exceptionally difficult to afford to live in the area. This can mean long commuting times from areas such as the Central Coast or outer Sydney suburbs, making staff retention very difficult for service providers. The health, age and disability care sector seem particularly prone to this and has the added disadvantage of staff needing to work evening and weekend shifts, where transport options are limited. These care staff are also predominantly female and there can be perceptions of safety with night time travel.

The lack of social housing options means that many services are dealing with repeat clients and issues. Client's problems are ongoing and exacerbated by their inability to access local affordable housing, a core human need. Clients can become despondent and more desperate, subsequently the demand for local short-term support services increases, with diminishing hope of long-term positive outcomes.





Priority
populations



Access to services and support

Suicide rates, loneliness, household stress, and homelessness are issues that continue to exist in the community. Residents' comments acknowledge the importance of reasonable access to facilities and services and the establishment of smaller community hubs for community building.

Social and community services are predominantly delivered by Not-For-Profit and charitable organisations. The funding landscape for this sector has changed dramatically over the last decade with a move away from traditional block funding through introduction of systems such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The transition to these systems has not been smooth for all participants and has had a significant impact on many smaller local service providers who have either merged with bigger organisations or ceased operation. The full impact of these changes will not be completely understood for a number of years.

Adding to this challenge is an increasing push from government funding bodies to streamline funding contracts with a trend towards awarding contracts to organisations who can cover multiple geographic areas or regions such as all of Northern Sydney.

The result has seen an increasingly competitive tendering landscape and for some areas a reduction in the number of providers in the area. One challenge of this approach to funding is it often means services are located outside of the Northern Beaches LGA and the community need to travel to access support when it is needed.

This is particularly challenging for the Northern Beaches Not-For-Profit sector who anecdotally already have difficulty securing funding. This is largely to do with the ongoing perception of being an affluent area based on the available demographics and data with the inability to evidence existing unmet demand for service other than anecdotally. This will increasingly become an issue as demographics continue to change and will impact on the ability of service providers to obtain funding required to meet increasing demand, especially with an ageing population.

Pockets of LGA with less access to services

Due to the geographic constraints on the LGA, some local centres are still relatively isolated from district level services. Access to higher order social infrastructure, requires residents to drive to larger town centres which will increasingly become an issue with an ageing population.



The Northern Beaches is a highly car dependent LGA which directly affects those who for whatever reason must utilise public transport to move around the LGA. Within each community and town centre, there should be a range of local social infrastructure within walking distance, or at minimum the ability for people to move easily within the LGA to access the services they need.

Currently the LGA has limited accessibility by public transport, which can make it difficult to accommodate new dwellings close to jobs and services as well as to access essential services for those with mobility challenges¹³.

The community feel wellbeing and mental health services should be strengthened, particularly for those in at-risk groups. Improved health outcomes for youth and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population should be a priority. There is a concern that youth suicide is a significant problem despite the affluence of the area.

Residents reported the lack of local services for people with disability means that many must travel to other parts of Sydney to access specialised services.

There are also issues around the lack of housing options and support for people with disabilities, and services to allow the elderly to age in their own homes.

Effect on social sustainability and priority populations

Without appropriate services available to meet the needs of the changing demographics, it will be increasingly challenging to promote and ensure ongoing participation of priority populations.

Access to services such as health (including allied), aged care, community services and childcare is critical for maintaining participation within the community (economic and social) as well as ensuring equity between demographic groupings. If unable to effectively plan and adapt services for the changing population in the next 20 years, there is a risk that some groups will be adversely affected by insufficient access.

It is more important than ever to monitor and plan for the impacts of our changing demographics, especially for trends that are different or accelerated to Greater Sydney. As state and federal government funding changes, careful advocacy and planning is required to ensure funding of services that are locally based and meet the changing needs of the community.



Priority
populations



Mental health and social isolation

The Northern Beaches community are passionate about addressing the effects of social isolation and improving our ability to respond to changing need. Social isolation is fast becoming a major challenge to ensuring connection and inclusion to the wider community, with one in five people now living alone on the Northern Beaches.

Evidence also shows that 10 percent of our children under 15 and 12 percent of our young people aged 15-18 are affected by mental illness, which is consistent with other LGA's within the Northern Sydney Department of Communities and Justice District¹⁶. While overall the outcomes for these groups are expected to be better than the NSW average, the exception is a higher percentage of this group (40 percent) expected to use NSW mental health services in the future compared to the average across NSW (36 percent).

This indicates a strong likelihood that demand for Mental Health services will continue to grow with increasing demand on an already stretched system experiencing long waiting lists of up to three months. With rapid population increases and stagnate staffing levels in services leading to acute and severe cases being prioritised.



10%

Northern Beaches children under 15 affected by mental illness



12%

Northern Beaches young people aged 15-18 affected by mental illness



40%

expected to use NSW mental health services in the future



Local service providers have indicated there are many factors impacting on young people including loneliness, normalisation of use and access to drugs and alcohol, social isolation and social media, and the stigma associated with mental health leading to concerns about reaching out. These factors seem to be contributing to increased community anxiety around youth suicide, despite local police data now indicating that middle aged men are at highest risk of death by suicide on the Northern Beaches.

Effect on social sustainability and priority populations

“Mental health is recognised as the leading cause of disability worldwide and that it can severely impact on the social functioning of those affected, it undoubtedly affects the social sustainability of communities globally.”¹⁷

Addressing mental health challenges within the community is critical to restore the social capital which is lost through mental illness (housing, education, employment and community connectedness) as well as relating to the societal support required to continue providing care.

For mental healthcare to remain socially sustainable on the Northern Beaches, the area needs to be able to maintain a workforce that can provide this care.

If the current trend towards working from home becomes permanent it is timely to consider the effects of this trend for our ability to remain a socially sustainable and inclusive community. The importance of work to strengthen social connections is widely recognised particularly for people living in apartments to support social sustainability as housing density continues to increase.

While the Northern Beaches overall has a lower level of high density living than Greater Sydney, as the Northern Beaches move to look at ways to address housing affordability and suitability it is prudent to consider as a community how best to maintain social cohesion to mitigate the significant social sustainability challenges that potentially arise from an increase in social isolation.



Pockets of disadvantage

It is acknowledged as a strength the high level of socioeconomic advantage for the Northern Beaches. However, there are small pockets of relatively disadvantaged populations. These pockets are primarily located in Narraweena, Dee Why, Narrabeen and Brookvale⁶.

For these populations, the unique experience of being a low-income earner in a high socioeconomic area brings additional challenges. Some of these challenges are related to the perceived lack of need in the area which results in Social Services funding frequently being directed to areas with data-based evidence demonstrating socioeconomic need, as well as potentially the high cost of living in the area magnifying the effect of poverty on health¹⁸.

It is important to identify these populations so that targeted support can be provided that enables them to participate and promotes social inclusion.

The OECD also express concerns that while volunteering on a whole is a positive for the community and individuals, there is a risk that it further excludes those who have less to start with⁹. In building on our significant strength in the area of volunteering, it is important to ensure that volunteering opportunities can be accessed by a wider range of people, delivering the wellbeing benefits also to more disadvantaged populations living in the community.





Priority
populations



Essential workers

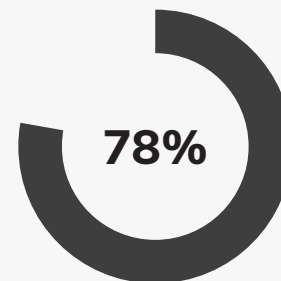
Every community requires essential workers to deliver essential services, highlighted recently with the COVID-19 pandemic, and to ensure diversity across the community. The Northern Beaches is no different and with an ageing population there will be an increasing demand for roles providing health and care support for this demographic. Essential workers are increasingly being acknowledged as the new working class, moving away from the “white, male manufacturing archetype”^{19, p.3} towards a much more diverse workforce who are more likely to be serving and caring for people.

Along with delivering critical services for the community, essential workers are also an important contributor to the diversity of the community. Essential workers are more likely to be women and/or Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD), for example 78 percent of the Health Care and Social Assistance industry in Australia is made up of women²⁰. This means the people employed as essential workers are more likely to be marginalised and statistically more likely to experience discrimination and structural inequalities.

Effect on social sustainability and priority populations

Attracting and enabling essential workers to live and work on the Northern Beaches is critical to managing the changing demographic profile of the LGA and creating a socially sustainable community in the long term.

Diversity, and the ability of a community to successfully manage the integration of cultures is essential for the long-term resilience and capacity of a community to withstand and successfully navigate social change²¹.



of Health Care and Social Assistance industry
in Australia is made up of women²⁰.





Priority
populations



Access to information

Gaps in access to information and news by some groups has been identified throughout the COVID-19 pandemic response. This highlights the existing impact of a trend towards ceasing circulation of print copy news and relying on electronic and virtual access to information.

Access to information plays a pivotal role in sustainable communities that it is recognised by UNESCO²² as a way to improve people's opportunities to enhance their social, political and economic integration within their communities.

Effect on social sustainability and priority populations

People need access to information to facilitate their participation in community life and democratic processes. As information increasingly relies on electronic and virtual means to be distributed there is an increasing risk that particularly vulnerable populations are excluded from participating and understanding the opportunities available to them within the community.



Definitions and key terminology

Adaptive capacity

The ability of the community, systems and individuals to adjust to potential damage, to take advantage of opportunities, or to cope with the consequences over time.

Capacity building

The process used by which individuals and organisations obtain, improve and retain the skills, knowledge, tools, equipment and other resources needed to their jobs competently.

Inclusion

When a diversity of people (e.g. of different ages, cultural backgrounds, genders) feel valued and respected, have access to opportunities and resources, and can contribute their perspectives and talents to improve their community.

Resilience

The ability of communities to respond positively to unexpected social, political, environmental and economic events.

Social capital

Networks (links between groups or individuals) together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups.

Social cohesion

A socially cohesive society is one that works towards the wellbeing of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility.

Social isolation

The absence of social contact that can lead to loneliness.

Social sustainability

The OECD definition of social sustainability blends traditional social policy areas and principles, such as equity and health, with emerging issues concerning participation, needs, social capital, the economy, the environment, and more recently, with the notions of happiness, wellbeing and quality of life.

Wellbeing

A complex combination of a person's physical, mental, emotional and social health factors. Wellbeing is strongly linked to happiness and life satisfaction. In short, wellbeing could be described as how you feel about yourself and your life.



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