Australian Government

NATIONAL URBAN POLICY

CONSULTATION DRAFT

May 2024

Australian Government

Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian Government acknowledges First Nations people as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Australia. We respect and celebrate the inherent strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and their commitment to the land, waters and their communities. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

First Nations

First Australians belong to the world's oldest living culture, composed of many distinct communities and groups, with their own languages and traditions. First Nations people have successfully lived on Country and managed the lands, waters and resources throughout mainland Australia for at least 65,000 years. Their unwavering connection to Country, and its care, should inspire all of us to work towards a more sustainable future. The National Urban Policy presents an opportunity to take a holistic approach to incorporating First Nations perspectives, promoting cultural inclusion and empowering communities through capability building.

First Nations people maintain this enduring bond with the land, and view our cities and suburbs not only as spaces for habitation but as extensions of their ancestral lands, carrying profound cultural significance. Their traditional knowledges provide valuable insights into sustainable land management practices, urban resilience and environmental and cultural stewardship. This stewardship underscores the interconnected relationship between people and the natural world, emphasising the significance of responsible custodianship for the wellbeing of both the environment and the community.

The interests and aspirations of First Nations people are integral to shaping the future of our cities. A significant number of First Nations people live in urban areas. This includes people who move from smaller, more remote First Nations communities to gain better access to education, employment opportunities and essential services – in particular specialised health services. This increased First Nations presence creates more opportunities for cultural connection and stronger urban First Nations communities, and contributes to the diversity and vibrancy of our cities.

The Government thanks all First Nations people who have generously shared their valuable knowledge and expertise to inform the development of this National Urban Policy consultation draft.

State of the Cities – snapshot

The majority of our **population growth** occurs in our cities: our 20 biggest cities grew by **3.2 million people** in the 10 years to 2023[1]

2013–2023
+3.2 million

Population weighted density in the 5 largest capital cities had increases ranging from **10%–18%** between 2011–2021[2]

2011–2021
+10–18%

4 capital cities exceed the national average of **23.5%** for people who speak a **language other than English** spoken at home[3]

4 captial cities
>23.5%

34% of **renting households** spend more than 30% of their income on rent

16.3% of **households with a mortgage** spend more than 30% of income on mortgage repayments[4]

34%   16.3% **30% income**
2021
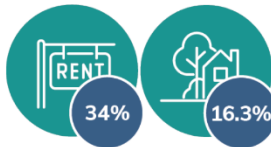
Road transport is the predominant mode for moving freight within and between states, cities and urban areas in Australia

Road freight volumes increased by 25% in capital cities in the 10 years to 2021[5]

2011–2021 **+25%**

Severe disadvantage in cities tends to be clustered in **middle** or **outer areas**[6]

New dwelling approvals have declined by an average of **10.5%** across the **8 capital cities** from 2020[7]

2021–2023
-10.5%

51.6% of **First Nations people** in Australia live in our **20 largest cities**[8]

First Nations people
51.6%

Figure1: [1][2][3][4][5][6][7][8]

State of the Cities – snapshot

The cities with the **lowest levels of public transport access** also have the **lowest levels of walkability**, making them car dependent[9]
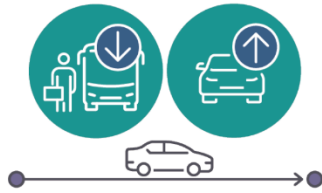
Our **20 largest cities** generate **77.8%** of the nation's **GDP**[10]

Gross Domestic Product
77.8%
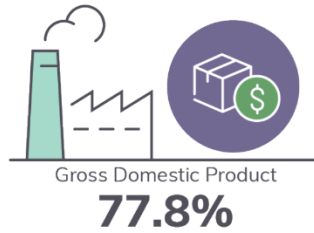
Cultural attendance declined across Australian cities as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, with attendance of at least one cultural venue or event dropping from **84% in 2017–18** to **65% in 2021–22**[11]

2017–2022
-19%
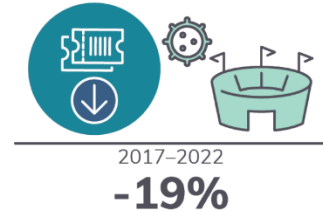
In 2021, **cultural and creative industries** made up **5.9% of total employment** **80.7%** of people employed in those industries lived in our capital cities[12]

2021
80.7%

NDIS participation saw rapid take up in the last 4 years in the 20 largest cities with an average annual **increase of around 18%**[13]

2019–2023
+18%

The **social infrastructure health index** is **2– 3 times higher** in the **inner city locations** than the outer rings of our 5 largest cities[14]

Buildings account for around **18%** of direct carbon emission in Australia and **passenger cars** account for **10%**[15]

18% 10%
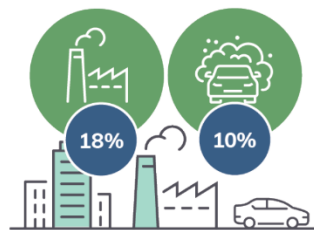
Extreme heat accounted for **7,104 injury hospitalisations** and **293 deaths** between 2012 and 2022[16]

7,104 293
2012–2022
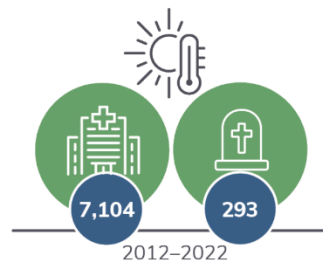
Figure 2: [9][10][11][12][13][14][15][16]

The National Urban Policy

A shared government vision

PLACEHOLDER
The Australian Government is working with state and territory governments to reinstate a vision for sustainable growth in cities. This will be included in the final version of the National Urban Policy.

Australian Government goals: What we want our cities to be

Liveable Equitable Productive Sustainable Resilient

Australian Government objectives: Areas of focus

No-one and no place left behind
- Housing availability
- Housing affordability
- Homelessness and overcrowding
- Access to social services and transport
- Urban development patterns

All people belong and are welcome
- Accessible participation in community life
- Access to arts and culture
- Preservation of First Nations cultural heritage
- Night-time economy management
- Sustainability and accessibility in tourism
- Protection of natural and culturally important heritage sites and landmarks
- Investments in sport infrastructure

Our urban areas are safe
- Inclusivity and safety in public spaces
- Safety for marginalised groups
- Crime prevention and community safety
- Safety in movement
- Resilience

Our urban areas are sustainable
- Net zero and urban emissions reduction
- Transport emissions
- Building and construction emissions
- Circular economy and sustainability
- Green and blue spaces

Our urban environments and communities promote health and wellbeing
- Urban health and liveability
- Housing quality
- Active transport and social infrastructure

Our urban areas promote productivity
- Labour mobility
- Income inequality
- Transport and enabling infrastructure
- Active and public transport
- Future technologies
- Skills shortages
- Digital connectivity
- Urban freight and land use planning

Principles

| City planning and governance must be collaborative and adaptive | Purposeful place making increases wellbeing and connection | Urban development should actively improve social, environmental and economic outcomes | Improving the evidence base will underpin urban innovation | Fair and inclusive development builds equitable communities | Fostering innovation and creativity hubs enhance diversity and broadens opportunities |

Contents

Part 1: Introduction

Overview

The National Urban Policy (the Policy) outlines the Australian Government's goals and objectives to enable our urban areas to be liveable, equitable, productive, sustainable and resilient. The Policy includes a shared vision for sustainable growth in our cities and suburbs, that has been committed to by all Australian Governments. Principles (Appendix 1) have been developed to support all governments to achieve this vision.

The Policy seeks to better integrate an urban lens across policy-making to ensure future Australian Government policies, programs and investment are supporting sustainable growth in urban places. This will be facilitated by cross-portfolio engagement on urban policy matters.

Following the development of the Policy, the Australian Government will also work with states and territories to develop initiatives that deliver on the shared vision, consistent with our Policy objectives. Implementation of the Policy is intended to address urgent challenges facing our cities, such as housing, productivity, social cohesion, disaster resilience and climate action.

Purpose

The Policy supports the achievement of United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11: Sustainable cities and communities, and links with a range of other SDGs, including Goal 3: Good health and wellbeing; Goal 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure; and Goal 13: Climate action.

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts leads Australia's work towards SDG Goal 11,[17] while the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet lead Australia's implementation of the broader United Nations 2030 Agenda.

Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

The Policy aims to facilitate a national lift in the quality of life in our cities and urban areas. It will also help prioritise and guide Australian Government investment and policy decisions in our regional cities. The Policy is an opportunity to consider our historical and contemporary settlement patterns. It is an opportunity to plan for and create future-proofed, adaptive urban environments in the face of change and uncertainty. Australia's cities need to prepare for, and adapt to, the anticipated structural changes that will shape urban economies, industries and settlement patterns.

The Policy supports other national priority agendas, such as housing, productivity, social cohesion, disaster resilience and climate action. It will also:

- contribute to the Australian Government's State of the Cities report, to inform action at all levels of government, with the Policy providing urban goals and objectives and the State of the Cities report measuring key aspects of our cities and providing insight on where more needs to be done
- complement the Australian Government's net zero targets, circular economy transition, sector decarbonisation plans and the National Adaptation Plan
- consider urban-relevant climate risks identified in the National Climate Risk Assessment.
- Support infrastructure deliver in conjunction with the Infrastructure Policy Statement and work with the National Housing and Homelessness Plan to address urgent housing delivery priorities.

Australia's National Urban Policy

Australia's previous National Urban Policy[18] was released in 2011 and set out the then Australian Government's aspirations for a national approach to planning and managing our cities, based on three key themes of improving productivity, sustainability and liveability.

Through the 2023–24 Budget, the Australian Government committed:

- $11.9 million to establish a new Cities and Suburbs Unit to deliver on its urban policy agenda, which includes delivery of a National Urban Policy (informed by an Urban Policy Forum of experts), production of regular State of the Cities reports, and provision of support for National Cabinet urban planning matters to be discussed in Planning Ministers' Meetings.
- $150 million for an Urban Precincts and Partnerships Program to help transform our cities and suburbs in partnership with state, territory and local governments, and local organisations. This program supports transformative investment in urban Australia based on the principles of unifying urban places, growing economies and serving communities. This program will fund the development of precincts through facilitating planning, design and consultation, leading to business cases for investment-ready proposals, as well as a stream to support delivery of larger-scale precinct projects.
- $200 million for a Thriving Suburbs Program to provide investment in community and economic infrastructure that enhances liveability and prosperity in suburban communities. This program provides funding for merit-based and locally driven projects that address shortfalls in priority community infrastructure in urban and peri-urban communities.

Developing a new National Urban Policy

This consultation draft is the result of the Cities and Suburbs Unit undertaking a comprehensive program of national policy research, whole-of-government consultation, and engagement with multiple stakeholders. It includes a statement on the challenges of, and responses to, urbanisation as it is currently understood at the national scale.

State, territory and local governments

The Australian Government undertook consultation on this draft policy with state and territory governments to ensure a national perspective. This was undertaken through several mechanisms. These include the Planning Ministers' Meeting forum, the Heads of Planning Group and an interjurisdictional working group.

The Australian Government has also consulted with local government, to ensure consideration of local views. This has included direct engagement with the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) and the Council of Capital City Lord Mayors. ALGA also participates in the interjurisdictional working group.

Urban Policy Forum

In May 2023, the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, the Hon Catherine King MP appointed members to the Urban Policy Forum (the Forum). The Forum was established to support the Australian Government's urban agenda and provide advice on the development of the Policy. It comprises 13 urban policy expert members, including academics, peak body representatives and other urban planning professionals. The Forum has provided valuable input to this draft Policy both through formal meetings and engagement with individual members to draw on their expertise. It also contributed to the development of principles, which will support all governments to achieve the shared government vision.

First Nations Engagement

Murawin, a First Nations owned consultancy, led engagement with First Nations stakeholders to inform this draft policy. Consultation activities took place from August to November 2023. During this period, Murawin engaged with more than 100 First Nations stakeholders across all states and territories. Consultation included online workshops, face-to-face meetings, written submission requests and an online survey.

Through this extensive consultation, Murawin identified 31 topics of importance to First Nations people in the context of what makes a good and liveable city. The key topics which emerged included culture, housing and climate change. In the final report provided by Murawin, these topics are broadly grouped around three focus areas: aspirations; challenges; and equity, productivity and resilience.

The final report also includes 15 recommendations in three categories:
- Embed specific, quantifiable, key elements of a liveable city.
- Enhance opportunities for key principles in successful urban initiatives.
- Strategies to increase traction for the anticipated outcomes of the National Urban Policy.

International urban policy

In developing the Policy for consultation, the Australian Government has also considered international approaches to national urban policies. The application and implementation of a national urban policy differs internationally as influenced by the organisation of a country's governance, differing national priorities, demographics, economic conditions, and other factors. Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Singapore, and Scotland are among the comparable countries with a national urban policy considered in developing this Policy. While Singapore and Scotland have different governance structures from ours, their approaches to urban development offer relevant insights:

- Similar urban challenges – Australian cities share common challenges with Singapore and Scotland, including population growth and demographic changes (urbanisation trends, ageing and migration), land constraints and climate change impacts, and the need to transition to a low-carbon and circular economy.
- Innovative solutions – Both Singapore's and Scotland's national urban policies acknowledge technological changes such as digitalisation and the emergence of artificial intelligence, and both countries have implemented innovative strategies such as green infrastructure and compact urban growth which offer practical models to address sustainability challenges in Australian cities.
- A place-based approach to the inclusion of wellbeing is a feature of both the Scotland and Singapore's national urban policies.

Regional Investment Framework

Cities are fundamentally linked to our regions. Australia's diverse regional places – including large regional cities – will benefit from the new Regional Investment Framework, which establishes the Australian Government's approach to supporting strong, stable and sustainable regions across Australia.

The Regional Investment Framework outlines the need for broad and diversified investments across people, places, services, industries and local economies, to appropriately respond to diverse opportunities and challenges across regional Australia. It places regions and their people at the centre of decision-making – valuing local voices and priorities, listening to and building on the latest evidence to inform investment, operating with flexibility and transparency, and coordinating across governments to make investment work better for regions.

Together, the Regional Investment Framework and the National Urban Policy will seek to support the sustainable growth of cities and regions across Australia.

Part 2: Share Government Vision and Roles

Shared vision

In order to respond to the challenges facing our cities, a strong vision is needed to better coordinate urban policy across our nation, and better integrate and guide future decision-making, investment and policy.

This was recognised by National Cabinet which, in discussing a better future for the Federation on 28 April 2023, agreed better planning for stronger growth is a national priority. First Ministers agreed to support a national approach to the growth of our cities, towns and suburbs with 'the Commonwealth [to] reinstate a vision to ensure growth in cities is sustainable in partnership with state and territory governments via the National Urban Policy.'

In February 2024 an inter-jurisdictional working group was established to support drafting the shared vision for sustainable urban growth, and for the Commonwealth to consult in developing the Policy and State of the Cities Report.

Placeholder

The Australian Government is working with state and territory governments to reinstate a vision for sustainable growth in cities. This will be included in the final version of the National Urban Policy.

Urban roles and responsibilities

Consistent with the shared vision, the Australian Government supports stronger alignment and partnerships between, across and with governments. Everyone can influence how our cities and suburbs are planned and operate, from individuals and households to community groups and businesses.

The Constitution sets out formal roles and responsibilities for the Australian, state and territory governments. Local governments make up the third level of government. The three levels of government, as well as communities and businesses, all have a vital role to play in urban planning and development, with each supporting Australia's cities, towns and suburbs to thrive.

Federal Government	State/Territory Governments	Local Councils
Federal matters such as:	**State matters such as:**	**Local matters* such as:**
Infrastructure, foreign policy, postal and telecommunications services, Medicare and welfare payments	Infrastructure, public transport, hospitals and police and ambulance services	Building approvals, waste management, local roads/footpaths/cycleways **Local councils vary according to State/Territory*

Australian Government

The Australian Government plays a substantial role in our cities and suburbs, through coordinating policies, delivering on international commitments, and through direct and indirect investment to provide needed infrastructure and improved urban spaces. The Australian Government is also responsible for national level policies that are key inputs to urban development, including housing, infrastructure, transport, climate, migration and labour.

The Australian Government is committed to strong engagement with other levels of government on urban policy matters, through forums such as the Planning Ministers' Meeting, Heads of Planning and an urban interjurisdictional working group.

As a partner in urban policy, the Australian Government also has a role to play in improving information and data about Australian cities, in collaboration with other levels of government. The Australian Government is fulfilling this role by publishing a regular State of the Cities report to provide an accurate and up-to-date picture of life in our cities.

The Australian Government's new Infrastructure Policy Statement sets the strategic direction for Australian Government investment in land transport infrastructure projects. It will guide investment decisions, improve transparency and accountability, and ensure Australia's infrastructure pipeline is directed to nationally significant projects that support and enhance liveability, equity, productivity, sustainability and resilience. The Australian Government is working collaboratively with states and territories to identify shared priorities and objectives based on the Infrastructure Policy Statement. These shared priorities and objectives will underpin the next national partnership agreement on land transport infrastructure.

State and territory governments

State and territory governments are critical for planning and investing in our cities and suburbs, directly funding or co-funding (often with the Australian Government) critical and community infrastructure, and services. This includes:

- schools, hospitals, public amenities and transport projects
- services corresponding to these projects, such as services provided by nurses, transport operators and teachers.

State and territory governments also work alongside local governments in the management, implementation and governance of planning, and to ensure communities have the services they require and are engaged in the process of creating effective place-based policies.

Local governments

There are 537 councils Australia-wide. Around 25 per cent are located in urban and urban fringe and 20 per cent urban region councils. Local governments' roles and responsibilities can differ between jurisdictions, with some municipalities having more complex roles and powers in comparison to others. Local governments focus on matters which are closer to home in the communities they represent, such as building regulations and development, public health, local roads, footpaths, parks, playing fields, libraries, local environmental issues, waste disposal, and many community services.

Private sector

The private sector plays an important role in the way our cities are developed, influencing the built environment and contributing to the growth and sustainability of our urban places.

Key ways in which the private sector influences the development of our cities include:

- property development: private developers and investors are central to financing and delivering critical urban projects. This can include large apartment complexes, retail centres, urban and industrial precincts (including renewal projects), and smaller developments such as individual houses
- public–private partnerships: co-financing with government to deliver essential infrastructure such as public transport, roads, hospitals and other special-purpose buildings
- technology and innovation: early adoption and adaption of innovations and technology in buildings and infrastructure to drive efficiency, better liveability and environmental sustainability.

Communities and people

Community participation in the planning and development of our cities and suburbs is critical to ensure planning outcomes reflect the needs and aspirations of the individuals affected. This involvement in the planning of our cities and suburbs can bring together diverse knowledge, mutual learnings and a sense of ownership of results.

Effective community engagement and participation leads to greater support for urban planning initiatives put forward by government and private entities.

Part 3: Australian Government Goals

The Australian Government has five key goals for our urban places:

| Liveable | Equitable | Productive | Sustainable | Resilient |

The goals are part of an interrelated and dynamic system in our cities and suburbs. The six objectives and their associated key urban challenges all relate to one or more of these goals. In many cases, addressing one goal in isolation may have a positive or negative impact on the others. The symbols used for each goal in this part of the document also appear alongside each objective to help illustrate these interrelationships.

Liveable

Where people can live in a place of their choosing, within their means, suitable to their needs. This is a safe, well designed, well-built city that promotes active, independent living, quality of life and connections within the community.

Livability can be broadly defined as the combination of factors that contribute to people's quality of life and wellbeing.[19] Liveable cities offer a high quality of life and are socially inclusive, affordable, accessible, healthy and safe.

Factors that can determine a city's liveability and quality of life include:

- the design of the built environment and how suited it is to its climate
- access to green and open space
- water and air quality
- opportunities for recreation, arts, sport, cultural connection and social interaction
- safety
- digital connectivity and infrastructure
- connectivity to community places and employment centres
- housing design and diversity
- Preservation of built and cultural heritage
- Respect for the sacredness of Country for First Nations people.

Equitable

Where everyone has fair access to resources, opportunities and amenities, no matter where they live or their socio-economic status.

Equitable urban areas are ones that cater to the diverse needs of all community members, providing everyone with access to resources and services and to cultural and recreational activities that promote inclusion and

wellbeing. Accessible and inclusive urban development that is underpinned by equity can promote stronger social cohesion by bringing together people from diverse backgrounds and neighbourhoods.

Factors that can determine a city's equity include:

- the design of the urban environment and how accessible it is for all people
- how cities grow spatially and manage population growth
- access to jobs, services, education opportunities, transport and digital and social infrastructure
- the provision of affordable housing, social housing, and homelessness services
- Provision of targeted services, including so they are responsive to groups who need them, including women, young people and First Nations communities.

Productive

Where cities foster shared prosperity and provide economic opportunities by enabling goods and services to move efficiently, and providing people with access to employment, services and infrastructure.

Our cities have a key role to play in driving national productivity, currently producing around 80% of Australia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).[20] They are economic centres where the workforce, industry and the institutions that support economic activity are concentrated.

Factors that can determine productivity include:

- the skills, mobility and wellbeing of the workforce
- technology and innovation
- the education system and training opportunities
- the provision and efficiency of transport and freight networks and digital infrastructure
- The effectiveness of the agglomeration of people, industries, business and markets.

Sustainable

Where governments, industry and community work together to appropriately plan for urban growth, reduce emissions, promote a circular economy and adapt to climate change to ensure that our urban areas meet the needs of diverse communities and that our natural environments are rehabilitated for future generations.

As our urban areas continue to grow, we need to ensure they are carefully planned and managed to protect our natural environments and promote wellbeing in communities. Moving towards net zero emissions, circular economies and incorporating climate adaptation principles will help ensure a more sustainable future for our cities and suburbs.

Factors that can determine our sustainability include:

- the rehabilitation, restoration and protection of natural environments and ecosystems
- urban biodiversity
- the health of waterways and air quality
- circular economies and how we produce, consume and dispose of materials

- efforts to reduce emissions across all industries
- adaptation to physical risks including those posed by climate change
- Insights from the tradition knowledge of First Nations people.

Resilient

Where our cities are economically, socially and environmentally resilient to the impacts of change, including changing climate and increasing exposure to climate-related hazards.

Resilient communities have the ability to resist, absorb, accommodate, recover, transform and thrive in a timely, effective manner in response to shocks and stresses that cities can experience. A wide array of acute and incremental climate events are impacting our communities, economies and built and natural environment. These factors affect urban areas especially when impacts combine, such as the effects of storm surges and sea-level rise on our coastal cities. The spatial distribution of population growth can also expose both people and infrastructure to climate-related hazards. Urban resilience has become increasingly important as we deal with these challenges.[21]

Factors that can determine our resilience include:

- climate-resilient infrastructure and planning frameworks
- a circular economy approach to managing supply chains
- diverse ecosystems and appropriate land-use policies
- digital connectivity and infrastructure.

Part 4: Australian Government Objectives

Six Australian Government objectives support achievement of the five goals (see Part 3) of the National Urban Policy. A list of initiatives that contribute to these objectives can be found in Appendix A.

Objective 1: No-one and no place left behind

To create equitable urban areas where everyone feels safe and secure, access to housing, infrastructure, education and jobs is essential. Housing affordability remains a major issue, especially in urban areas, due to a shortfall in diverse, well-located housing and demand outpacing supply. Limited access to social services and transport, particularly in outer urban areas also contributes to inequity among communities. Addressing these problems requires initiatives to increase housing supply, improve access to housing that is affordable, and invest in transport and social infrastructure. Densification and infill development can also increase sustainability.

Objective 2: All people belong and are welcome

Promoting equitable access to arts and cultural facilities, as well as ensuring universal design in urban planning, fosters inclusive environments. Celebrating First Nations cultural heritage, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and effectively managing the night-time economy can further contribute to a vibrant, culturally diverse urban landscape. Increasing sustainability and accessibility in tourism, and investing in sport infrastructure can improve social cohesion and a sense of belonging in communities.

Objective 3: Our urban areas are safe

Urban safety encompasses inclusivity and crime prevention strategies while enhancing climate resilience and disaster preparedness. Paying attention to public spaces, addressing crime risks for marginalised groups, and implementing evidence-based safety measures are crucial for promoting community wellbeing. Cities must also address climate challenges, such as flooding, through improved planning, infrastructure standards, and urban design.

Objective 4: Our urban areas are sustainable

Achieving net zero emissions by 2050 is a priority for cities, requiring emissions reduction in transport and buildings. A modal shift to active and public transport and electric vehicles can significantly lower emissions and improve air quality. The transition to a circular economy can reduce waste and resource consumption.

Objective 5: Our urban environments and communities promote health and wellbeing

Urban areas must support healthy, active lifestyles through access to green and blue spaces, high-quality housing, and active transport options. Integrating green and blue networks, ensuring equitable access to recreational areas, and prioritising high-quality housing can enhance the health and wellbeing of urban residents.

Objective 6: Our urban areas promote productivity

Improving labour mobility and addressing income inequality are critical for enhancing economic equity and workforce participation. Efficient, reliable transport networks and equal access to digital infrastructure can connect people to jobs and services, therefore contributing to work-life balance. Strategic urban freight and land use planning improves logistics and protects residential amenity. Embracing emerging technologies such as automated vehicles and intelligent transport systems offers potential for increased efficiency and sustainability.

No-one and no place left behind

Creating communities with equitable access to infrastructure, education, jobs and cultural activities. We will increase the availability of housing that is well located, well designed, accessible and affordable so everyone can feel safe and secure. As our communities grow and change, our urban spaces should adapt to meet people's needs.

Key urban challenges

- Housing availability: Demand for housing is outpacing supply, leading to shortages that negatively impact affordability, rental vacancy rates, and housing ownership rates, especially for younger households.

- Housing affordability: A lack of well-located, diverse housing options is causing stress for an increasing number of households.

- Homelessness and overcrowding: These persistent challenges in urban areas are particularly affecting marginalised communities, including First Nations people, people with disability, and low-income households.

- Access to social services and transport: Outer urban areas particularly face access challenges, creating equity issues and isolation for residents.

- Urban development patterns: Continued outward growth contributes to sustainability concerns, loss of agricultural land, increased greenhouse gas emissions, urban heat island effect, high material footprint and greater infrastructure investment needs.

Discussion

Significant, strategic action is needed to alleviate Australia's housing pressures so more people can access secure, affordable and accessible housing. The Australian Government has agreed to a National Housing Accord (Accord) with states and territories, local government, institutional investors and the construction section. National Cabinet agreed to an ambitious national target to build 1.2 million new well-located homes over 5 years from 1 July 2024. The Government is delivering a range of housing initiatives to support states and territories achieve their share of well-located homes target under the Accord, including the Housing Support Program, New Homes Bonus and the Social Housing Accelerator payment.

To further support the achievement of this target, National Cabinet agreed to a National Planning Reform Blueprint that outlines planning, zoning, land release and other measures to improve housing supply. Implementing these reforms will be critical in addressing the housing challenges in our cities, and are a good opportunity to test and pilot better ways of building houses that are more resilient and more suited to the changing climate, and encourage the building industry's transition to net zero.

Housing affordability is important for Australians seeking to buy a home and rent in the private rental market, as well as for those in need of assistance through social and affordable housing. High demand coupled with limited suitable supply has led to surging housing and rental costs, disproportionately affecting younger households and those with low to moderate incomes. This situation exacerbates housing stress and homelessness, with First Nations people nine times more likely to experience homelessness, as well as older women, and women and children who are victim-survivors of family and domestic violence increasingly facing homelessness.

An adequate supply of housing that is high in building quality, sustainably built, well located and affordable is critical to the health of our economy and labour markets and the achievement of sustainability goals.[22] Housing should be in close proximity to where employment opportunities are located, as well as to transport

and other services. Housing also needs to be located in areas that do not face a high risk of natural hazards, or where development is predicated on design and investment which reduces disaster risk, informed by future climate scenarios. Adequately housing our workforce will support productivity and growth in our cities, improving our lives and ensuring we can adapt to future challenges.

Our cities provide access to the services needed for individuals and communities to thrive. Equitable access to essential services and social infrastructure such as education, healthcare and disability services is integral to ensuring the people living in our cities are healthy and are socially and economically connected.

Ensuring all communities, and particularly disadvantaged communities, have access to services and infrastructure is essential to creating more equitable urban areas. For example, areas with greater childcare availability have higher female workforce participation rates. It is also key to Australia's future productivity as early access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) services can reduce a parent's long-term likelihood of unemployment and use of income support. The Australian Government recognises this dependency and delivers a range of supports to help families access the ECEC services they need.

The provision of schooling should be front and centre in new urban developments to ensure all children have access to high quality education. There is shared commitment across all governments to improve student outcomes and address education equity. This includes the need for planning to take account of the effects concentrations of advantage and disadvantage have on the wellbeing and educational outcomes of children and young people.

Overseas migration and an ageing population make it critical to strategically plan and prepare our cities for the decades to come. Health infrastructure, including hospitals and medical professionals, is not evenly distributed throughout our cities. Inner-city areas tend to have greater access to health services and infrastructure compared to suburbs further away from the central business district.[23] Access to childhood education and care, schooling and tertiary education is also not equal across our cities. Smaller cities and outer urban areas face greater shortages in education services and skilled workers to meet community needs. The distribution of education opportunities and services in cities is closely related to urban inequality and therefore must be considered in the growth and planning of urban areas.[24]

Certain groups, including people with disability, migrants, and First Nations people often face greater barriers in accessing social infrastructure. A history of exclusion, trauma and lack of cultural safety means that many First Nations people and other disadvantaged groups are unable to access the services they need. Disparities in health and education outcomes particularly impact First Nations people and some migrant communities. Access to transport, including public transport, is vital in facilitating settlement and integration, including access to education and work. It is important to ensure all communities receive adequate support and opportunities, to promote their social inclusion and overall wellbeing.

The expansion of remote work due to advancements in technology presents new opportunities for flexible employment but also presents challenges such as access to services in regional and rural areas. Policymakers must address these issues to fully leverage the potential of remote work.

Possible actions

- Collaborate with state, territory and local governments and community organisations to:
  - support the development of a nationally consistent framework for national growth areas that establishes standards for infrastructure and services
  - strategically plan for growth through investment in data gathering capabilities
  - update land use planning systems to accommodate a greater mix of housing and higher-density housing in well-located areas, close to transport connections, amenities, services, and education and employment opportunities (currently being delivered through the National Planning Reform Blueprint)

- – supporting the capacity and capability of the construction sector to increase the supply of housing
- Invest in supporting infrastructure, such as:
  - – social infrastructure, transport and services
  - – telecommunications infrastructure
- Expand support for those in need, such as:
  - – state and territories delivery of homelessness services
  - – innovative financing to encourage institutional investment in social and affordable housing
  - – rental assistance and support, particularly for marginalised communities and vulnerable populations
  - – incentives for private rental developments, particularly in the inner and middle rings of cities
- Improve data capture and better integrate data and projections into planning processes.
- Leverage the knowledge and experience of First Nations and multicultural communities, to develop better, more innovative solutions.

All people belong and are welcome

Supporting community participation and creative talent though cultural organisations that sustain the arts, entertainment and culture in Australia's cities, particularly in partnership with First Nations and multicultural communities. We will grow sustainable tourism and ensure heritage outcomes are embedded in urban planning and infrastructure frameworks. We will promote equitable access to sport precincts in our urban areas and foster a sense of belonging in our communities.

Key urban challenges

- Accessible participation in community life: Community participation is hampered by non-accessible buildings, costs, transport and outdoor spaces, particularly affecting people with disability and older people.

- Access to arts and culture: Many urban infrastructure plans fail to adequately provide accessible arts and cultural facilities, resulting in inequitable access across cities. A lack of access can hinder social cohesion and impede urban economies.

- Preservation of First Nations cultural heritage: First Nations cultural heritage is underappreciated in urban areas.

- Night-time economy management: Managing the night-time economy requires addressing issues related to safety, accessibility, and the provision of mixed-usevenues.

- Sustainability and accessibility in tourism: The tourism industry faces challenges related to ensuring accessibility for people with disability and older people. We also need proactive consideration of environmental resilience to manage the impacts of climate change and population growth on tourism.

- Protection of natural and culturally important heritage sites and landmarks: Urban development and densification can threaten heritage sites and landmarks.

- Investments in sport infrastructure: Investments in sporting facilities must focus on promoting community values and fostering a sense of belonging and pride in local communities. Careful planning is necessary to integrate these facilities effectively into the urban landscape.

Discussion

Australia's urban areas face challenges in ensuring equitable access to arts, culture, and community life. Many infrastructure plans lack accessible arts and cultural facilities, which leads to inequitable access across cities and affects social cohesion and economic vibrancy.

Promoting inclusive social and cultural environments contributes to the Australian Government's commitments under Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031 and to Goal 10 and Goal 11 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Urban areas play a crucial role in fostering inclusive and vibrant communities by supporting a spectrum of creative talent, community participation, and cultural organisations. Supporting arts and cultural sectors contributes to more vibrant, inclusive urban environments and enhances the cultural richness of cities through art, creative expression, and community collaboration. Tourism, heritage and sport contribute to wellbeing and liveability of urban areas. Urban areas should promote sustainable tourism and provide equitable access to sport precincts. Positive heritage outcomes need to be progressed through planning, attracting international investment and showcasing Australia's unique natural and cultural heritage.

Participation and engagement in accessible arts and culture facilities is fundamental to social cohesion and thriving urban economies. Urban infrastructure planning must consider and supply access to fit-for-purpose

arts and cultural facilities through a whole-of-government approach. Without coordinated policies and continued support, access to arts and culture will remain inequitable across urban areas.

Tourism also plays a critical role in enhancing Australia's prosperity and sense of identity on the global stage. The Re-Imagined Visitor Economy (THRIVE) Strategy 2030 prioritises measures to support recovery from COVID-19 while addressing long-term opportunities and trends. Making tourism facilities more accessible broadens their appeal to people with disability, older people, and families with young children allowing more equitable access and enjoyment for all.

Australia benefits from being one of the most successful multicultural nations in the world, with an increasingly diverse make-up of ethnicities and cultures. This diversity increases opportunities for creative participation in shared civic life and harmony between different cultures.

First Nations cultural heritage is part of the fabric of Australian cities, enriching urban landscapes and promoting cultural richness and community engagement. To elevate the significance of cultural facilities that celebrate First Nations art, history and traditions, we need spaces that promote inclusivity, cultural richness, and community engagement. Such facilities are not only repositories of cultural heritage but also vibrant hubs for communal gatherings, interactive storytelling and the exchange of cultural knowledge, fostering a sense of pride and belonging within the broader urban landscape.

The night-time economy plays an important role in Australia's lifestyle and culture, making a diverse range of businesses and services available to people beyond traditional trading hours. The hospitality, entertainment and arts sectors make up a large part of this economy, however, supporting sectors including transport, retail and education also contribute to its vibrancy and productivity.

A well-planned night time economy that provides diverse experiences not only drives economic growth by encouraging more foot traffic and driving more employment, but also creates community connectedness and safety in these areas. In order to ensure the night time economy provides a diverse range of accessible venues and services, all levels of governments must support fit-for-purpose mixed use design facilities. The provision of walkable and safe streets, with appropriate lighting, will improve perceptions of safety and further encourage greater participation among a diverse range of people.

Well-planned night-time economies can drive economic growth, create community connectedness and ensure safety. Accessible events and venues can remove barriers to participation, strengthening cultural cohesion and economic performance.

The live music and performing arts industries are significant parts of Australia's creative economy, fostering a connected and vibrant community while driving new job opportunities and promoting tourism. The COVID-19 pandemic heavily impacted these sectors, leading to a drastic reduction in events and, consequently, to substantial financial hardships.[25]

Australia's significant natural and cultural heritage requires proactive strategies to identify and preserve heritage sites in urban areas. Our heritage in urban areas and cultural sites are at risk from urban development and densification, requiring proactive strategies to accurately identify and preserve heritage. Well-considered development in urban areas including tailored zoning regulations to protect heritage precincts and building from inappropriate development will be crucial. The establishment of a comprehensive understanding of our Australian cultures and historical significance through collaboration with historians, cultural experts and local communities can also aid to protect heritage landmarks in urban areas.

Sport touches many aspects of Australian urban life, promoting physical health, fostering community and contributing to the cultural identity of cities. Investments in sporting facilities provide significant opportunities for urban regeneration, revitalisation and promotion of community values.

Possible actions

- Collaborate with state, territory and local governments, the private sector and community on cultural and creative opportunities, such as:
  - providing national guidance for funding priorities relating to the creative sector, tourism, heritage and sport infrastructure
  - partnering with First Nations communities to create dedicated places for cultural practices and identify significant cultural sites
  - ensuring community infrastructure can be used by diverse groups during the day and for the night-time economy
  - ensuring public spaces are safe, practical and accessible, with access to public transport, attracting a diverse range of people to access arts and cultural facilities
  - identifying and capitalising on innovation and growth precincts
- Engage in open collaboration across all levels of governments and between public and private stakeholder partners to find solutions, such as though:
  - engaging with communities to promote community values
  - encouraging First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse and youth participation through the strategic design and delivery of venues and facilities.
- Enhance the visitor experience of our tourism and sport precincts through improvements to transport infrastructure, accommodation options, and public amenities that support mobility, accessibility and amenity.
- Support protection and enhancement of our significant heritage places and cultural landmarks in the urban environment. This includes committing to the recognition of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property.
- Improve legacy infrastructure and facilities to support and strengthen our urban communities and grow youth participation.

Our urban areas are safe

Urban environments should be safe for all. This includes creating spaces that are inviting and where crime is reduced, particularly for marginalised groups. Safety also extends to ensuring people can live in places that are resilient to changing hazards, including heatwaves and storms.

Key urban challenges

- Inclusivity and safety in public spaces: Urban areas must be safe and inviting, promoting participation of people of all ages, cultures, abilities, genders, religions and backgrounds. Accessible and safe public spaces are vital for community wellbeing.

- Safety for marginalised groups: Certain groups, such as First Nations people, women and girls, people with disability, migrants and refugees, older people and LGBTIQA+ people, face higher risks to safety in public spaces. We need coordinated planning to address these risks.

- Crime prevention and community safety: Crime prevention and transport safety are essential aspects of urban safety, requiring evidence-based strategies that involve spatial and socio-economic data and community engagement.

- Safety in movement: Australia's cities should be safe to travel in, whether in a private vehicle, on public transport or walking and cycling.

- Resilience: Australia's cities face increasing hazards and disasters, making it crucial to improve community resilience. This includes addressing flooding, sea-level rise, heatwaves, bushfires and storms. Strategic planning and resilient infrastructure development are necessary to manage risks to housing and critical infrastructure.

Discussion

Urban areas should be safe, welcoming and inclusive for everyone, promoting participation across ages, cultures, abilities, genders, religions and backgrounds. Our public spaces including parks, roads and streetscapes, plazas and communal open spaces are typically used freely and for a variety of reasons including passive and active recreation, social connection and wellbeing.

Daily journeys to work and school also influence the way that street networks and adjacent public spaces are used, and by whom. Road safety is a national priority and all Australian governments are working to deliver the National Road Safety Strategy 2021-30. Under this Strategy, governments have committed to a target of reducing deaths on Australian roads by 50 per cent by 2030.

Evidence demonstrates that some individuals and communities experience higher risks to safety, for example First Nations people, women and girls, people with a disability, migrants and refugees, and LGBTIQA+ people. Addressing these disparities through evidence-based crime prevention strategies, such as design treatments, situational crime prevention and community policing, is crucial to creating safe environments for everyone. The United Nations Habitat Safer Cities Programme[26] and Global Public Space Programme[27] both identify the increased need for coordinated 'safe city planning' as urbanisation intensifies. The increased density and diversity of Australian cities present new opportunities and challenges in how we should design and use public spaces.

Safety concerns can limit the ability of people to fully engage in and contribute to community life. Public spaces play an important role in crime prevention and ensuring cities are safe. For example, people feel safe in public areas when they can easily see and interact with others so urban planning and design can facilitate this by incorporating clear sightlines, adequate lighting and accessible pathways.

Australian cities maintain high standards of public safety, ranking well internationally. Governments can facilitate further community safety improvements by incorporating inclusive urban design and strong community partnerships. As guided by the UN, the International Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) Association and international best practice, creating safer Australian urban environments has expanded beyond the considerations of the physical and built environment. Moving forward, Australia's design and management of public spaces should focus on social cohesion and how safer public spaces can contribute to improved belonging, liveability and sustainability.

Crime prevention strategies form an important element of community safety. As articulated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, safety is a human right and an important determinant of health and wellbeing. Crime prevention strategies are most successful when evidence based, drawing on a combination of spatial and socio-economic data that incudes community and stakeholder consultation and codesign, to form meaningful multifaceted place-based partnerships that build community capacity.

Public spaces, including parks, streets, shopping centres and public transport access points play a key role in urban life for recreation, social connection and wellbeing. Daily movement patterns influence the use of these spaces. Future investment should also seek to make public and active transport into more attractive modes of travel. This means the delivery of public and active transport infrastructure needs to be well-planned for safety. Safe road environments are important for encouraging active transport. The high number of private vehicles in our cities and suburbs heightens road safety risks, especially for vulnerable road users, pedestrians and cyclists. Addressing this challenge requires a shift from traditional road design to a focus on designing streets to maximise safe access for shared use. Core to urban safety and mobility are safe and appropriate speed limits and roads designed to safely support multiple modes of travel, including walking and cycling.

An increasingly important aspect of safety in Australian cities is resilience to the impact of weather-induced hazards like flood and bushfire. Failing to consider local risks, or to appropriately consider future risks, can limit community resilience and reduce safety. Investing in resilience measures can reduce the cost and impact of climate-related disasters. Initiatives such as improved stormwater management and sustainable drainage, flood management systems, water-sensitive urban design, and nature-based solutions like wetland restoration can contribute to greater resilience. It is also essential that communities and households are prepared, informed and connected so they can mitigate risks to their dwellings and recover faster from the impacts of climate-related hazards.

Extreme weather events impact the safety of people both at home and in the community, with issues like urban heat and lack of shade particularly impacting movement and safety. Community participation in local strategic development planning has shown to be a key enabler community-based resilience and improved safety against extreme weather events. First Nations knowledges should also be embedded into disaster resilience planning across all urban areas.

Possible actions

- Collaborate with state, territory and local governments, to:
  - provide guidance on inclusive urban design principles to enhance urban safety for all
  - promote the benefits of inclusive co-design of public spaces through the land use planning process across jurisdictions, to better inform the design and use of accessible, liveable and safe places
  - support research and reporting on national urban safety priorities, including indicators that measure access, safety and cohesion in cities in a placemaking context
  - support the development of urban areas that are informed by current and projected climate risks and prioritises risk reduction over construction
  - consider disaster and climate risk in land use planning

- – implement measures to mitigate the impacts of rising sea levels, coastal erosion, flooding, bushfire and heat hazards in our planning and infrastructure frameworks
- – utilise road safety programs to make travel safer for all road users by improving safety standards and road design
- Invest in place-based initiatives that seek to activate public spaces whilst also improving community safety and addressing the underlying causes of crime.
- Manage future climate risks for the built environment by identifying high risk locations and revising policy, regulation and such as:
  - – revise planning systems to prevent building homes and critical infrastructure where risk is not proposed or able to be mitigated in high-risk zones
  - – for existing buildings, support communities and households to invest in risk reduction infrastructure, retrofit their buildings, or plan for managed retreat.
- Incorporate First Nations communities' valuable knowledge into resilience approaches.

Our urban areas are sustainable

Supporting urban areas to improve sustainability and achieve net zero emissions by 2050. This will include ensuring strategic planning, land use and infrastructure frameworks improve climate mitigation, and aid the transition to a circular economy.

Key urban challenges

- Net zero and urban emissions reduction: Urban areas need to transition to a lower carbon future and achieve net zero emissions by 2050 to align with global climate goals and Australia's commitments.

- Transport emissions: Transport is a major contributor to urban emissions, making up 21% of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions. A modal shift to active travel, public transport and electric vehicles are critical for emissions reduction.

- Building and construction emissions: Buildings contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions. Improved energy performance and sustainable materials can help decarbonise the built environment.

- Circular economy and sustainability: Transitioning to a circular economy in urban areas is essential for reducing waste and repurposing materials, thus supporting sustainability and climate action.

- Green and blue spaces: A lack of or inequitable distribution of natural spaces in urban areas can impact on biodiversity and climate resilience.

Discussion

Since the 2015 Paris Agreement there has been global momentum to limit global warming to as close as possible to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In September 2022, the Australian Government introduced targets to reduce emissions by 43% below 2005 levels by 2030, and for net zero emissions by 2050. These legislated targets provide policy and investment certainty for governments and industry to proceed with the transition to low-emissions technologies.

Urban areas play a pivotal role in combating climate change by transitioning to zero emissions by 2050. Modal shift to public transport and active transport, reducing household energy use and sustainable building materials all contribute to lowering emissions in our cities. However, coordinated leadership from government and industry on emissions reduction actions will be key to achieving effective climate action in our major cities. Changes to our systems, regulatory and otherwise, that incentivise and allow for different and innovative responses will be essential in achieving zero emissions.

Cities can lead the climate solution by promoting sustainable transport. Reducing transport emissions is crucial for achieving urban emissions reduction targets. Promoting active travel, public transport and transitioning to electric vehicles are vital strategies to curb emissions and improve air quality. Cycling and walking are healthy forms of transport that use energy, land, financial, and material resources wisely with minimal impact on neighbourhoods, city and town centres, urban bushland, air and water quality. They offer a low-cost form of transport and improve access to services and activities for people with otherwise limited transport choices. Measures like establishing mode share targets are needed to create cleaner and more sustainable cities. These strategies not only contribute to environmental sustainability but also enhance public health outcomes and the liveability of our cities.

Buildings and construction activities are significant contributors to urban emissions. Improving the energy performance of homes and buildings helps to bring down emissions and support health outcomes through improved thermal comfort. Improving energy efficiency standards, adopting sustainable building materials,

and implementing innovative design practices are essential steps to decarbonise the built environment. Retrofitting older buildings will also be critical to get Australia to zero emissions. By prioritising sustainable and circular practices in construction, cities can significantly reduce their carbon footprint and contribute to achieving global climate goals.

Urban form can also have impacts on energy use and emissions. A city's level of energy consumption is closely linked to its physical form – that is, the spatial distribution and dimensions of buildings, streets and parks, as well as the spatial coordination of residences, workplaces and other amenities.

Transitioning to circular economies is essential for urban sustainability. Like many developed nations, Australia has largely adopted linear models of production since industrialisation, meaning materials have been sourced, made, used and then discarded. This model places significant strain on our finite resources and is unsustainable, as demand for resources exceeds what the environment can provide. Embracing principles of waste reduction, recycling, and material reuse can minimise resource consumption and waste generation. By transitioning towards circular models of production and consumption, including in building design, cities can promote resource efficiency, environmental conservation, and reduce emissions.

Green spaces, such as parks, bushland and canopies, and blue spaces, such as lakes, oceans, wetlands and rivers, play a key role in encouraging the uptake of active transport and mitigating the urban heat island effect by providing shaded pathways, cooler environments and more comfortable conditions, and help to preserve urban agriculture. Green and blue spaces also encourage biodiversity in our cities, providing areas for native plants and animals, as well as movement pathways and habitat corridors that connect wildlife populations across fragmented urban landscapes. Supporting and reintroducing diversity into our cities will also contribute to sustaining urban biodiversity into the future. This means that the protection, restoration and rehabilitation of our urban green and blue networks is essential as our cities continue to evolve.

Possible actions

- Collaborate with state, territory and local governments, to:
  - support the strategic coordination of the circular economy to guide Australia's regulatory, policy, research and industry landscapes
  - better integrate and incentivise circular economy principles in urban planning, including the use of recycled and bio-based materials, more sustainable resource-efficient urban design, waste reduction and a focus on refurbishment and re-use
  - support supply chain boosts, improving access to cost-effective low- and zero-emissions vehicles, including electric vehicles
  - reform urban planning and zoning rules to support emissions reduction outcomes, including prioritising mixed-use neighbourhoods that are close to amenities and employment and encouraging lower emissions active travel, such as walking and cycling
  - continue to improve energy performance ratings for new buildings to minimise their contribution to emissions production, through changes to the National Construction Code, in partnership with Building Ministers Meeting and the Australian Building Codes Board.
  - develop a national standard for considering disaster and climate risk in land use planning
  - support the development of a national approach to developing urban areas which addresses current and projected climate risks and prioritises preparation and mitigation over rebuilding.
  - increase greening of public open spaces, streets and suburbs to act as natural cooling systems against heat-island effects.
  - support the development of urban areas with networks of green and blue spaces to enhance liveability, support biodiversity, and provide places for recreation and connection to nature

- Invest in sustainability initiatives, such as:
  - measures to identify and mitigate the impacts of rising sea levels, coastal erosion, flooding, bushfire and heat hazards in our planning, building and infrastructure frameworks
  - promoting greater use of active and public transport by improving the safety, connectivity and convenience of walking and cycling infrastructure and of electrified public transport options
  - incentives for existing households and buildings to improve their energy efficiency and sustainability
  - supporting education of current and future workforce skills in sustainable design, planning and construction methods
  - promoting circular economy initiatives, including at the community level, such as green waste programs for outer urban areas and composting facilities for inner-city areas
  - investing in nature-based solutions and green spaces to improve air quality, combat the effects of urban heat and improve general health and wellbeing
  - supporting the installation of green roofs and walls to absorb heat and insulate homes and buildings
  - planting trees and other vegetation to provide cooling and shading
  - creating more wetlands to slow water flow and filter stormwater, to improve the health of our waterways
  - increasing wildlife movement solutions infrastructure, such as land-bridge overpasses, fauna-exclusion fencing and log culvert koala crossings, to bridge the gap between habitats that have been broken up by human-made barriers.
- Ensure First Nations communities' valuable knowledge is incorporated into climate initiatives.

Our urban environments and communities promote health and wellbeing

Strengthening connections between public spaces in urban neighbourhoods to enable people from all communities to lead healthy lifestyles, socially connect, and access natural environments and services.

Key urban challenges

- Urban health and liveability: The increasing urban population puts pressure on our cities to ensure environments and communities are healthy by increasing opportunities for people to lead active and socially connected lives.
- Housing quality: Poor-quality housing, particularly for lower-income households, can result in negative health impacts and hinder community liveability.
- Active transport and social infrastructure: A lack of safe and accessible walking and riding paths, community spaces and healthy food outlets can contribute to adverse health outcomes and social isolation.

Discussion

As population growth places more pressure on our cities, effective urban planning, and the provision of high-quality housing will be critical to promoting liveability, productivity and good community health. Urban infrastructure, suburbs, and precincts that are designed sustainably and are resilient to climate impacts will also be increasingly important as our cities experience more frequent climate events and population growth.

Cities and suburbs that enable safe active travel options also encourage healthier lifestyles.

The walkability and rideability of an urban area is critical to community wellbeing and is particularly important for the health of older people, people with disability and people in higher density living environments. Crucially, outdoor physical activity such as walking and cycling plays an important role in improving communities' physical and mental health. Active travel infrastructure needs to be safe, accessible and well maintained, however, urban design and amenity such as lighting, landscaping and shade is just as important for encouraging active travel and healthier lifestyles.

Access to community spaces is also important for fostering good community health, social cohesion and inclusivity. Infrastructure such as community centres, sporting facilities, health hubs, libraries and parks support social cohesion, inclusion and identity. First Nations people emphasise the importance of creating community spaces within urban areas for nurturing a sense of belonging and interaction.

For many First Nations people, an essential feature of a liveable urban environment where communities thrive is one where emphasis is placed on the importance of connecting to Country. Country signifies the whole environment of an area and includes Sea Country and Sky Country. To create a liveable city with healthy, happy communities, it is imperative to nurture not only the deep-rooted connection to Country but also the vital connections among people, fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility.

Well-designed neighbourhoods feature good access to supermarkets, grocers and food markets. As urban areas continue to grow, cities need to avoid the development of 'food deserts', particularly in outer suburbs. Lack of accessibility to food suppliers can greatly impact the health of urban communities, particularly for people living in suburbs with poor transport options who would need to travel greater distances to access healthy food options.

Healthy urban communities integrate good urban design not only at the neighbourhood planning scale but also in the way we design and build our homes. How our homes are designed and built also impacts community health and liveability. Moving towards liveable housing design – which represents a significant shift from traditional housing design in Australia – is important for meeting the needs of all people, including older people and people with mobility limitations. Inadequate insulation, ventilation and climate control can result in houses that cannot stay cool or stay warm. Designing homes that can heat and cool naturally improves community health and liveability, while also providing cost-of-living and environmental benefits.

Possible actions

- Collaborate with state, territory and local governments to:
  - support strategic development and transport plans supported by land use planning systems that encourage walkability and rideability through the creation of networks of local destinations with good connections and amenity
  - support the development of safe and well-designed community infrastructure
  - promote neighbourhood and land use planning that provides for well-designed social infrastructure to foster social cohesion, inclusion and identity within urban communities
  - support well-designed neighbourhoods that ensure access to grocer and food markets are integrated as an essential service
- Invest in community and environmental initiatives, in collaboration with state, territory and local governments, such as:
  - delivering safe, accessible active transport infrastructure to encourage walking and cycling, improving health outcomes and reducing emissions
  - delivering inclusive social infrastructure such as community centres, parks and public spaces within easy reach of residents to promote social interaction and wellbeing
  - supporting measures that support urban heat resilience such as the use of cool paints
  - supporting the development of community gardens and parks to encourage connection with nature

Our urban areas promote productivity

Improving connection between people and goods through efficient, low-cost, accessible and active transport options and expanded telecommunications connectivity so people from all communities can work from anywhere and easily move between jobs, contributing to improved work-life balance. Ensuring that the migration system attracts workers with the right skills and that an effective and inclusive education system supports workers from all communities.

Key urban challenges

- Labour mobility: Many people who are willing and able to work face challenges accessing employment opportunities in urban areas due to issues such as housing affordability and inadequate transport infrastructure.

- Income inequality: Persistent income disparities and systemic barriers affect workforce participation, impacting groups such as single-parent families, people with disability, and First Nations people.

- Transport and enabling infrastructure: We need efficient transport networks to connect people and goods and relieve congestion in cities. Continuing to prioritise road infrastructure leads to reliance on private vehicles, which contributes to congestion and environmental challenges.

- Active and public transport: The limited availability and uptake of active and public transport hinders liveability and productivity. Safe, accessible and affordable options are essential for promoting sustainable travel and reducing dependency on private vehicles.

- Future technologies: Emerging transport technologies and data-driven planning offer potential solutions for improving traffic flow, reducing emissions, and enhancing safety and efficiency in urban areas. Planning for digital infrastructure to support emerging technologies.

- Skills shortages: Australia is currently experiencing extensive skills shortages. This is due not only to a lack of people possessing suitable qualifications, experience and range of skills but also to the location of employment opportunities and to undesirable working conditions or pay.[28]

- Digital connectivity: Uneven access to digital connectivity, internet and mobile phone access, particularly in lower-income households, exacerbates inequalities and limits access to services and employment, including remote work opportunities.

- Urban freight and land use planning: Poorly integrated freight and land use planning leads to congestion and conflicts between industrial and residential development, affecting the efficiency and viability of freight networks.

Discussion

Interconnected challenges in Australia's urban areas affect their functionality, liveability and sustainability. These challenges encompass labour mobility, income inequality, transport and enabling infrastructure and skilled labour to deliver key infrastructure, digital connectivity, urban freight and land use planning, resilience and sustainability, and emerging technologies.

As with the five pillars of the Australian Government's productivity agenda – a more dynamic and resilient economy, a more skilled workforce, harnessing data and digital technology, delivering quality care more efficiently, and investing in net zero – the interconnectivity of the challenges also impacts the solutions. For example, labour mobility is critical to a more dynamic and resilient economy and can be enabled or hindered by digital connectivity and emerging technologies.

At the same time, wide adoption of work-life balance is critical to manage the competing priorities between paid work and life commitments and is heavily impacted by the physical connectivity of homes to jobs. Supporting a mobile workforce will enable individuals to move easily between their residence and workplace, minimising travel fatigue and wasted commute time. The ability to balance paid work with other responsibilities can have a big impact on overall levels of wellbeing, ultimately contributing to liveability, productivity and equity in urban areas.

Labour mobility and income inequality are central concerns in cities and suburbs. Addressing systemic barriers for disadvantaged groups, including single-parent families, people with disability, and First Nations people, is critical for promoting economic equity and workforce participation. Access to housing that is affordable, particularly rental options, allows workers to move for new jobs. Accessible transport allows workers to move easily between jobs and take up employment opportunities close to home. Strategic planning should also ensure the preservation of productive land in urban and suburban locations, ensuring that a range of jobs are available close to where people live.

Efficient, low-cost, accessible and reliable transport networks are essential for connecting people and transporting goods across urban areas. The dominance of private vehicles exacerbates congestion, delays and environmental challenges. Increasing the availability and adoption public transport and of active transport options such as walking and cycling can enhance liveability and productivity while reducing congestion and vehicle emissions.

Exploring and adopting emerging technologies such as connected and automated vehicles, intelligent transport systems, and mobility as a service, such as buses, trains and ride share options can enhance efficiency, safety and sustainability in urban areas. These innovations offer the potential to improve traffic flow and promote shared mobility, including by harnessing data and digital technology to enable data-driven decision-making in urban planning and management. Data generated by road transport technologies and systems can be analysed in real-time to enable better responses to incidents and manage road network demand as well as, over the longer term, improve transport planning, investment and maintenance decision making.[29]

Digital connectivity is fundamental for modern cities, especially as people shift towards digital ways of working, learning, and accessing services. Ensuring equal internet and mobile phone access across urban areas, particularly for lower-income households, is vital to reduce inequalities, support remote work and online education, and deliver high-quality care more efficiently.

By 2033, digital and technology jobs are projected to grow by 21%, the care and support industry will grow by 22%, and the clean energy workforce will need to expand by 30% to drive the net zero transformation.[30] To increase tertiary education attainment rates and meet skills shortages, our education system needs to be responsive to evolving industrial changes, more inclusive, and accessible for all. Tackling gender imbalance in key sectors can also help address skills shortages if industries traditionally dominated by workers of one gender can do more to attract all people. Approximately 65% of occupations experiencing shortages have workforces that are over 80% men or 80% women.[31] Short-term migration policies have a key role to play in filling existing skills shortages and longer-term migration policies will continue to fill emerging skills gaps, allowing education, skills and training systems time to adjust to evolving skills requirements. Given the high percentage of migrants that settle in our cities, well-coordinated, effective migration has the potential to address identified skills shortages in Australia's urban areas.

Urban freight and land use planning requires careful coordination to balance the needs of residential areas and freight operations. Congestion and land-use conflicts between freight operations and residential development can increase costs and hinder the smooth movement of goods. The urban freight task will continue to grow and is critical to serving all communities. Strategic planning is crucial to protect land around ports, airports and freight terminals to avoid conflicts and support efficient logistics.

Possible actions

- Collaborate with state, territory and local governments to:
  - improve strategic planning at all levels and consultation between governments and industry to ensure better coordination between freight infrastructure and networks, land use planning and urban development
  - increase the quality and availability of infrastructure for active transport, such as walking, cycling and e-mobility, and support behavioural shifts to promote increased active travel within communities
  - better coordinate Australia's migration settings, including through the development of a principles-based multi-year planning model for migration. Targeted and well-planned migration will help deliver better outcomes for Australia in infrastructure, housing, service delivery and the environment.
  - streamline and facilitate the rollout of telecommunications infrastructure in greenfield developments and urban fringe areas (already underway through the Planning Ministers' Meeting)
  - develop a nationally coordinated approach to mobile telecommunications provision to improve access to modern telecommunications in new developments.
- Invest in productivity initiatives, such as:
  - supporting development of secure, accessible housing closer to jobs, particularly affordable housing for key workers to access inner city jobs
  - providing targeted support for vulnerable Australians, including people with disability, to help them travel to job opportunities and access education and training opportunities
  - improving the resilience of critical infrastructure that are critical to the economic resilience and vulnerable to climate risks
  - increasing the role of public transport in urban commuting to help develop more productive central business districts and precincts
  - improving connectivity on the fringes of cities and particularly in disaster-prone urban areas.

Appendix A: Principles

Principles

Through engagement in developing the National Urban Policy (Policy), shared principles were suggested by the Urban Policy Forum to guide decision-making as it relates to investments in, and policies for, urban development.

These principles are intended to inform the achievement of the Policy's goals and objectives.

The principles align with Australia's commitments to the UN-Habitat New Urban Agenda for the planning, construction, development, management and improvement of urban areas. They underline the links between good urbanisation and job creation, livelihood opportunities, and improved quality of life.

Complementing the Australian Government's Infrastructure Policy Statement, these principles are intended to guide the way cities and other human settlements are planned, designed, financed, developed, governed and managed, and thereby help us achieve the Policy goals and objectives.

1. City planning and governance must be collaborative and adaptive

Cities need integrated long-term strategic planning (vertically across all levels of government and horizontally across different portfolios). This should align with the shared government vision for sustainable growth, informed by local communities and delivered in partnership with all levels of government.

Urban strategic planning must:
- provide clear guidance and set specific targets which consider projected urban development (or change), support physical and social infrastructure and environmental services (blue and green space, biodiversity, water and air quality)
- consider urban planning challenges and opportunities at the larger system level (e.g. natural river catchment level planning for flood resilience, supporting interdependencies and relationships between urban and regional areas)
- prioritise any future urban investment and housing within the existing urban footprint first, and ensuring any development assessment or rezoning decisions falling outside the city's strategic plan are made on a case-by-case basis and aligned with the National Urban Policy principles
- create high-quality compact urban spaces by:
  - identifying the appropriate built form (mass and scale), providing the appropriate structural density for urban areas (e.g. developing a nationally consistent definition of urban density and its gradation)
  - ensuring higher density areas at the edges of cities are approved only if they are well located, supported by good public transport, are self-contained for day-to-day requirements and provide support to surrounding regional areas
- reflect a place-based approach that delivers shared value through:
  - meaningful engagement with local communities including Traditional Owners, First Nations people, multicultural groups, all levels of government, industry and academia
  - co-design processes to create functional, aesthetic and regenerative design reflective of the local culture, character and vibrancy of place
  - transparency and shared accountability – informed people, informed decisions in a framework characterised by transparency, accountability, probity and good community engagement
  - ensuring decisions do not place urban communities on unsustainable pathways over the longer-term
- achieve close alignment between:

- the Australian Government's National Urban Policy and Infrastructure Policy Statement and wider government objectives, such as the Urban Freight Planning Principles
- state and territory-level strategic, infrastructure, climate and disaster plans, including for government-funded infrastructure and place-based investment
- local-level planning and community values, to the maximum extent possible.

2. Purposeful place making increases wellbeing and connection

Our human nature and needs are to belong, connect and be a part of a community. Our places now need to nurture the way we relate to each other, our environment and our culture, and foster reconnection for the health and wellbeing of our nation. This will require master-planning to ensure connected, environmentally regenerative, sustainable urban precincts and neighbourhoods.

To achieve this all new investment, development and retrofitting must result in:

- urban areas designed in line with national best practice guidelines such as *Creating Places for People: an urban design protocol for Australian cities* and its 12 broadly agreed principles for quality urban places in Australia
- urban areas that improve human health and wellbeing and connection to nature, that significantly increase the area, quality and connectivity of green and blue spaces and ensure equitable access and share of benefits
- environmentally sensitive, healthy precincts and infrastructure that live within their ecological limits and achieve nationally recognised sustainable building and precinct ratings
- increased resilience through local and regional self-sufficiency
- urban areas that prioritise an adequate standard of living, quality of life and wellbeing, including accessibility and affordability of housing for all. This will be achieved through minimising capital and operational costs for occupiers to the maximum extent possible, including through designs and delivery approaches that:
  - appropriately mitigate the impact of climate and natural hazards and retain or improve insurability of infrastructure and housing (where relevant); urban policies should align with national and international climate goals
  - provide easy access to transport, services and employment options
  - improve availability of community amenity and infrastructure
  - use existing infrastructure or deliver common-user/multiple-use infrastructure where possible.

3. Urban development should actively improve social, environmental and economic outcomes

We cannot achieve sustainable urban development through business-as-usual approaches. We need transformational change across and within all five domains of urban planning (public, natural, social, economic, built) to promote actions that support equity, wellbeing and respect for individual rights while protecting our natural and built environment.

To achieve this, through our urban investment and decision-making we must:

- reduce urban greenhouse gas emissions, integrate circular practices, achieve net zero targets in line with global science-based targets, and lead innovation in the built environment sector
- prioritise local circular economies to reduce (and avoid) natural resource dependency and use, eliminating waste and circulating materials and products at their highest value

- employ sustainable procurement practices by contracting locally first, diversifying the supplier base (supporting small and medium enterprises, First Nations businesses, minority businesses) and prioritising supplier sustainability credentials.

4. Improving the evidence base will underpin urban innovation

We need to monitor implementation of changes in cities to provide the evidence to inform future changes and drive improvement and innovation, especially through:

- collaboration between governments to improve the national urban evidence base, information and data
- a commitment to evidence-based policy interventions based on fundamental drivers of change
- ensuring public investment delivers publicly reported data and outcomes
- fostering increased innovation through rigorous evaluation of outcomes, living labs, and investment in high quality research
- a place-based approach to collecting evidence, shared measurement evaluation and learning which involves communities and stakeholders
- clear and consistent frameworks to measure progress and monitor implementation of plans, policies and programs in cities

5. Fair and inclusive development builds equitable communities.

Inclusion, equity and fairness are integral to ensure that improved wellbeing outcomes are shared across urban communities. While economic factors play an important role in national wellbeing, there are additional factors that influence quality of life in Australia. Consideration of social and environmental outcomes must also be a mandatory part of decision-making to enhance urban wellbeing and equity.

We must prioritise:

- plans and developments that address housing affordability and social equity. This involves implementing strategies to provide affordable housing options, reduce homelessness, and ensure that urban development benefits all segments of the population
- conserving biodiversity in urban areas and creating green spaces by integrating nature into urban planning to enhance environmental sustainability, provide recreational spaces, and improve overall wellbeing
- public health outcomes by promoting active transport, creating health-focused urban environments, and ensuring access to healthcare facilities
- providing equal access to services, in line with the UN-Habitat New Urban Agenda, eliminating discrimination through promoting inclusion and social cohesion across urban communities
- establishing urban communities that are safe where people are treated equally and feel a sense of belonging
- supporting sustainable use of resources to protect and repair the environment and in turn build restorative and safe urban communities
- improving results against indicators in the Measuring What Matters Framework, supported by strong urban indicators and performance measurement tools that inform urban plans, policies, programs, development, targeted investment and decision-making.

6. Fostering innovation and creativity hubs enhance diversity and broadens opportunities

Australia's education system is a strong national asset that supports our economy, enhances employment opportunities and enriches our lives. Supporting lifelong learning will enable urban communities to diversify and expand skill sets for the jobs of tomorrow. Australia's cities must embrace technological innovation,

harnessing data and smart solutions to enhance efficiency, improve services and empower residents, while developing interconnected urban centres that leverage technology for the benefit of communities, businesses and the environment. Similarly, supporting cultural and creative industries to contribute to the unique identity of each city will enhance social sustainability through shared participation in urban life.

This will involve actions to:

- fully integrate culture and creativity into local development strategies and plans, and ensure strategic cultural planning encourages local communities to respond to changing social, recreational, leisure and economic needs, in conjunction with:
  - recognising and preserving cultural heritage in urban areas, fostering a sense of place and cultural vibrancy
  - improving access to and participation in cultural life and the enjoyment of cultural goods and services, notably for marginalised or vulnerable groups and individuals
- encourage economic diversity, investment and innovation by understanding the competitive advantage the city offers and supporting a range of industries, fostering entrepreneurship, and supporting research and development
- prioritise education and lifelong learning opportunities in urban areas through supporting educational institutions, skill development programs, and initiatives that enhance access to quality education for all residents
- embrace digital city technologies and innovation to improve urban efficiency, enhance services, and address contemporary challenges. This includes digital infrastructure, data-driven decision-making, and technology solutions that contribute to sustainable urban development
- ensure adequate provision of mixed-use developments to facilitate community value and cultural services (libraries, museums, art galleries and performing arts centres); employment of and assistance to professional cultural workers; encouragement, promotion, development and implementation of cultural activities; and preservation of unique cultural activities.

Appendix B: National Initiatives Underway

Objective 1: No-one and no place left behind

Initiative	How the initiative supports the objective
National Housing Accord	Commits to a shared ambition to build 1.2 million new well-located homes over five years from 2024 to help increase the supply and affordability of homes.
Social Housing Accelerator	Will deliver thousands of new social homes across Australia, increasing housing supply for people on social housing waiting lists.
Home Guarantee Scheme	Supports eligible home buyers to buy a home sooner through reduced deposit requirements.
National Housing Infrastructure Facility	Provides financing for eligible housing, enabling critical infrastructure projects that will unlock new housing supply, particularly of social and affordable housing.
Housing Australia Future Fund	Legislated in September 2023, the $10 billion Housing Australia Future Fund will help to build 30,000 new social and affordable housing properties in its first five years.
National Housing Supply and Affordability Council	Provides independent, evidence-based expert advice on matters that affect housing supply and affordability.
National Housing and Homelessness Plan	Will help more people access safe and affordable housing. Will broadly assess issues constraining the current housing system and set out a shared vision to inform future housing and homelessness policy in Australia.
National Planning Reform Blueprint	Outlines planning, zoning, land release and other measures to improve housing supply and affordability. Agreed by National Cabinet in August 2023.
New Homes Bonus	Aims to provide performance-based funding to state and territories that achieve more than their share of the one million well-located homes under the National Housing Accord. The bonus will incentivise states and territories to undertake the reforms necessary to boost housing supply and increase housing affordability.
Housing Support Program	The program will provide targeted activation payments for initiatives such as connecting essential services, amenities to support new housing development, or building planning capability to kick-start housing supply in well-located areas.
Help to Buy Scheme	Will support people who otherwise would not be able to purchase a home, by providing eligible homebuyers with an equity contribution of up to 40% for new homes and 30% for existing homes.
Commonwealth Rent Assistance	Supports people who otherwise would not be able to pay their rent. Maximum rates of Commonwealth Rent Assistance increased by 15% in the 2023–24 Budget, which is the largest increase in more than 30 years.
Migration Strategy	Targeted and well-planned migration will help deliver better outcomes for Australia in infrastructure, housing, service delivery and the environment.
Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031	Joint commitment of all Australian governments to: • ensure built environments are accessible and enable people with disability to participate in work, education, and social and cultural life • ensure people with disability achieve their full potential through education and learning[32] • Ensure transport systems are accessible for the whole community.

National Agreement on Closing the Gap	Recognises disability across all socio-economic targets and priority reforms under Closing the Gap to ensure that First Nations people with disability are central in national policies, programs and reforms. Priority Reform Two commits to building formal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors to deliver services to support closing the gap.
Disability Discrimination Act 1992	In place to eliminate discrimination against people with disability as far as possible, and to promote community acceptance of the principle that people with disability have the same fundamental rights as all members of the community. The Act provides that direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of disability is unlawful in a broad range of areas of public life, including employment, education, access to premises and access to goods, services and facilities.
Disability Standards for Education 2005	Sets expectations to ensure that all education providers make reasonable adjustments to assist students with disability to participate in education on the same basis as their peers.
Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards 2010	Sets expectations to ensure that people with disability have equitable, cost-effective, dignified and reasonably achievable access to public buildings.
Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002	Establishes the national minimum accessibility requirements that providers and operators of public transport must meet to remove discrimination and ensure accessibility for people with disability.
Reform of the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)	From 1 January 2025, will deliver a new AMEP business model providing greater flexibility and enhanced client and teacher supports to improve English language, employment and settlement outcomes for AMEP clients.
Plan for Cheaper Child Care	Will make early childhood education and care more affordable and accessible through changes to the Child Care Subsidy. Includes inquiries by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and the Productivity Commission that will make recommendations to reform the sector to improve access to and quality of child care.
The Better and Fairer Schools Agreement	Needs-based recurrent school funding through the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) arrangements model to supports equitable access to a quality education. Provision of recurrent school funding relies on there being a national agreement in place between the Australian Government and states and territories. The Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (BFSA) is currently being developed to replace the National School Reform Agreement, due to expire at the end of 2024. The BFSA will provide the basis for setting the school funding and reform agenda.
Australian Universities Accord	The Australian Universities Accord Final Report released in February 2024 recommended an ambitious target of 80 per cent of our workforce having a tertiary qualification by 2050. The Accord makes clear that if we are going to reach this target, we need more people from the outer suburbs to get the opportunity to go to university and/or undertake vocation education. The Government's response in the 2024-25 budget will be the first stage of a multi-year reform agenda to achieve this.
Suburban University Study Hubs	Provide local study facilities and wraparound support services for tertiary students, targeted towards under-represented and educationally disadvantaged students (including people from low socio-economic backgrounds, people with disability, First Nations people, and people with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds) living in outer metropolitan and peri-urban areas.

Tertiary Access Payment	Assists school leavers from regional or remote areas who need to relocate for full-time tertiary education (Certificate IV and above) at an education provider located at least 90 minutes by public transport from their family home.
Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program	Supports people from under-represented groups to access higher education.
Indigenous, Regional and Low-SES Attainment Fund (IRL SAF) – National Priorities Pool Program	Provides funding to eligible higher education providers to conduct research projects and trial initiatives to inform equity policy development and practice nationally and at an institutional level.
Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success	Works with the university sector to connect research, policy and practice to improve higher education outcomes for people from under-represented backgrounds. This includes improving access, participation, retention, success and attainment rates, and transition to meaningful employment or further study.
Higher Education Disability Support Program	Helps to improve equity outcomes for under-represented groups by providing funding to eligible higher education providers to assist with supporting students with disability to access, participate and succeed in higher education.
Early Years Strategy	Will contribute to a more integrated and coordinated approach to early childhood development.
Community Child Care Fund	The Community Child Care Fund (CCCF), including Connected Beginnings, will improve access in regional and remote, disadvantaged, and First Nations communities. Around 70 per cent of the allocated funding in 2024–25 will support services in regional and remote locations, and currently the CCCF and Connected Beginnings programs support around 900 services nationally.

Objective 2: All people belong and are welcome

Initiative	*How the initiative supports the objective*
National Cultural Policy – Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place	Contains a range of actions that will renew and revive Australia's arts, entertainment and cultural sector. These include increasing funding to the Australia Council and expanding its functions, establishing Creative Australia, partnering with the Western Australian Government to establish a world-class Aboriginal cultural centre in Perth, and providing funding to secure the future of Australia's national collecting institutions.
Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support program	Helps fund the operations of First Nations owned art centres, art fairs, regional hubs and industry service organisations that are at the heart of Australia's First Nations visual art movement.
Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031	Includes policy priorities to: • ensure built environments are accessible and enable people with disability to participate in work, education, and social and cultural life. • ensure people with disability achieve their full potential through education and learning.
Revive Live program	Provides essential support to live music businesses, including venues and contemporary music festivals, to present live Australian contemporary music.

National Agreement on Closing the Gap	Recognises connection to culture and establishes targets and priority reforms to ensure that First Nations cultures and languages are strong, supported, flourishing and central to national policies, programs and reforms. There is increased interest in and growing recognition of the roles of the sport, tourism and heritage sectors in reducing the health and social inequities and inequalities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – that is, in closing the gap.
Multicultural Framework Review	Will identify the best institutional, legislative and policy settings for building Australia's multiculturalism over the next decade and meeting the needs of Australia's increasingly diverse community.
Australian Government funding for cultural infrastructure projects	Supporting cultural infrastructure projects in partnership with state and territory governments and First Nations groups – for example, the Larrakia Cultural Centre in Darwin.
Sport 2030 National Sport Plan	Will be an important mechanism to deliver on the Australian Government's commitments and priorities for sport, and to ensure success for Australia throughout the 'green and gold decade' (2022–2032) and beyond. Under development.
Play our Way	This initiative will contribute to providing safe, inclusive, quality and sustainable facilities to help women and girls remain involved in sport and physical activity.
Playwell: Australia's Sport Participation Strategy	Supports the objective of increasing participation in sport through six priority areas, two of which are activating places and spaces and equitable access. Released in November 2023 by the Australian Sports Commission.
Australia's High Performance 2032+ Sport Strategy	This strategy aims to shape the future of hi9gh performance sports in Australia by fostering a performance-driven, athlete-focused, exceptionally led, and purposeful collaborative sporting system.
National Preventive Health Strategy 2021–2030	Sport and physical exercise are key preventive health enablers to reduce the risks of poor health and wellbeing, and therefore the public health cost burden.
National Integrity Framework	Sets rules in relation to conduct and behaviour in sport, supporting the aspiration of promoting inclusion and belonging.
Sports Diplomacy 2030	Outlines Australia's international and regional approach to sports diplomacy, supporting the aspiration of promoting Australia as a welcoming place for all, including international delegations and visitors.
THRIVE 2030 Strategy	Supports accessibility upgrades and general improvements to tourism facilities and infrastructure. Invests in climate resilience mitigation measures for landmarks and tourist attractions to ensure longevity of the visitor economy.
2015 Australian Heritage Strategy	Supports safeguarding of Australia's World Heritage sites. This includes improving heritage management and conservation efforts, and ensuring collaboration between all levels of government.

Objective 3: Our urban areas are safe

Initiative	How the initiative supports the objective
National Road Safety Strategy 2021–30	Commits to strengthening all elements of our road transport system to make road safety a priority for all users, including drivers, pedestrians and cyclists.

National Housing Accord	Commits to a shared ambition to build 1.2 million new well-located homes over five years from 2024 to help increase the supply and affordability of homes.
Social Housing Accelerator	Will deliver thousands of new social homes across Australia, increasing housing supply for people on social housing waiting lists.
Home Guarantee Scheme	Supports eligible home buyers to buy a home sooner through reduced deposit requirements.
National Housing Infrastructure Facility	Provides financing for eligible housing, enabling critical infrastructure projects that will unlock new housing supply, particularly of social and affordable housing.
Housing Australia Future Fund	Legislated in September 2023, the $10 billion Housing Australia Future Fund will help to build 30,000 new social and affordable housing properties in its first five years.
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National Housing and Homelessness Plan	Will help more people access safe and affordable housing. Will broadly assess issues constraining the current housing system and set out a shared vision to inform future housing and homelessness policy in Australia.
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Commonwealth Rent Assistance	Supports people who otherwise would not be able to pay their rent. Maximum rates of Commonwealth Rent Assistance increased by 15% in the 2023–24 Budget, which is the largest increase in more than 30 years.
Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031	Joint commitment of all Australian governments to: • ensure built environments are accessible and enable people with disability to participate in work, education, and social and cultural life • ensure people with disability achieve their full potential through education and learning[33] • Ensure transport systems are accessible for the whole community.
National Agreement on Closing the Gap	Recognises disability across all socio-economic targets and priority reforms under Closing the Gap to ensure that First Nations people with disability are central in national policies, programs and reforms. Priority Reform Two commits to building formal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors to deliver services to support closing the gap.
Disability Discrimination Act 1992	In place to eliminate discrimination against people with disability as far as possible, and to promote community acceptance of the principle that people with disability have the same fundamental rights as all members of the community. The Act provides that direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of disability is unlawful in a broad

	range of areas of public life, including employment, education, access to premises and access to goods, services and facilities.
Disability Standards for Education 2005	Sets expectations to ensure that all education providers make reasonable adjustments to assist students with disability to participate in education on the same basis as their peers.
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The Better and Fairer Schools Agreement	Needs-based recurrent school funding through the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) arrangements model to supports equitable access to a quality education. Provision of recurrent school funding relies on there being a national agreement in place between the Australian Government and states and territories. The Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (BFSA) is currently being developed to replace the National School Reform Agreement, due to expire at the end of 2024. The BFSA will provide the basis for setting the school funding and reform agenda.
Australian Universities Accord (the Accord)	Recommendations include: needs-based funding for students who require additional targeted support to succeed in higher education, and to support regional delivery; changes to the Higher Education Loan Program to make it fairer and simpler; and First Nations leadership at the heart of the higher education system.
Suburban University Study Hubs	Provide local study facilities and wraparound support services for tertiary students, targeted towards under-represented and educationally disadvantaged students (including people from low socio-economic backgrounds, people with disability, First Nations people, and people with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds) living in outer metropolitan and peri-urban areas.
Tertiary Access Payment	Assists school leavers from regional or remote areas who need to relocate for full-time tertiary education (Certificate IV and above) at an education provider located at least 90 minutes by public transport from their family home.
Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program	Supports people from under-represented groups to access higher education.
Indigenous, Regional and Low-SES Attainment Fund (IRL SAF) – National Priorities Pool Program	Provides funding to eligible higher education providers to conduct research projects and trial initiatives to inform equity policy development and practice nationally and at an institutional level.
Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success	Works with the university sector to connect research, policy and practice to improve higher education outcomes for people from under-represented backgrounds. This

	includes improving access, participation, retention, success and attainment rates, and transition to meaningful employment or further study.
Higher Education Disability Support Program	Helps to improve equity outcomes for under-represented groups by providing funding to eligible higher education providers to assist with supporting students with disability to access, participate and succeed in higher education.
Early Years Strategy	Will contribute to a more integrated and coordinated approach to early childhood development.
Community Child Care Fund	The Community Child Care Fund (CCCF), including Connected Beginnings, will improve access in regional and remote, disadvantaged, and First Nations communities. Around 70 per cent of the allocated funding in 2024–25 will support services in regional and remote locations, and currently the CCCF and Connected Beginnings programs support around 900 services nationally.

Objective 4: Our urban areas are sustainable

Initiative	*How the initiative supports the objective*
Net Zero Economy Authority	Established to promote the orderly and positive net zero economic transformation as the world decarbonises.
Net Zero 2050 plan	Will help Australia maximise the benefits of the global transition to net zero. Will provide certainty through long-term policy and help drive investments in low emissions and renewable technologies.
Transport and Infrastructure Net Zero Roadmap and Action Plan	Will examine potential pathways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050 across all transport modes (road, aviation, maritime and rail), freight and supply chains, active transport planning, and supporting infrastructure.
Active Transport Fund	The Australian Government has committed $100 million to a new Active Transport Fund for the upgrade and construction of bicycle and walking paths in Australian communities. This will support zero emissions travel, provide a safer environment for cyclists and pedestrians, and promote active and liveable communities.
National Electric Vehicle Strategy	Provides a nationally consistent framework to get Australia's road transport sector on a pathway to net zero emissions by increasing the uptake of electric vehicles, which will reduce emissions and improve wellbeing.
New Vehicle Efficiency Standard	Will increase the availability of new cleaner, cheaper-to-run vehicles and contribute to a cleaner, greener and more sustainable transport sector over time. Will also encourage supply of hybrid vehicles and zero-emissions vehicles, such as electric vehicles, to the Australian market.
Emissions standards	Will contribute to reducing vehicle emissions. The Australian Government has mandated the international Euro VI noxious emissions standards for newly approved heavy vehicle models from 1 November 2024, and for all models from 1 November 2025.[34]
National Energy Performance Strategy	Will provide a national plan to accelerate demand-side action, including energy efficiency and electrification. Implementation of this strategy will reduce energy cost pressures on premises, while also reducing emissions and increasing energy reliability.[35]
National Battery Strategy	The National Battery Strategy will guide governments and industry towards a shared vision of a diverse and competitive battery industry. The Strategy will help grow and

	scale Australia's battery industry, supporting the transition of our industries and regions to 82% renewables, and securing Australia's place in global battery supply chains.
Energy Price Relief Plan	Will help to limit gas and coal prices and drive investment in cleaner, cheaper, more reliable energy for the future. To be delivered in partnership between the Australian Government and the states and territories.
National Construction Code – proposed changes	Would upgrade commercial building energy performance provisions. Under consideration by Building Ministers in 2023–24.
Trajectory for Low Energy Buildings plan	Contributes to achieving zero-energy and carbon-ready commercial and residential buildings in Australia.[36]
Community Energy Upgrades Fund	Supports energy upgrades for community facilities such as pools, sporting clubs and community centres. Will assist councils to fund high-impact energy upgrades and cut emissions.[37]
National Circular Economy Framework	Will set the strategic direction for a national effort across the regulatory, policy, research and market-based landscape, including consideration of opportunities to support circularity in urban planning, construction and manufacturing.
Recycling Modernisation Fund	Is expanding Australia's capacity to sort, process and remanufacture glass, plastic, tyres, paper and cardboard.
Food Waste for Healthy Soils Fund	Contributes to building and improving organic waste recycling infrastructure to support waste being put to productive use on agricultural soils, rather than into landfill.
National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework	Sets out the foundational work required nationally, across all sectors, to reduce existing disaster risk, minimise new disaster risk, and deliver better climate and disaster risk information.
National Climate Risk Assessment	Will deliver a framework to inform national priorities for climate adaptation and resilience and enable consistent monitoring of climate risk across Australian jurisdictions.
National Adaptation Plan	Will provide a consistent national approach to increase adaptation efforts and build national resilience to climate impacts.
Nationally agreed principles for disaster and climate resilience	Will provide a national approach to disaster and climate risk considerations in land use planning decisions, based on agreed principles. The New South Wales Government is leading the development of a framework for and guidance on these principles. This work will be progressed through the Planning Ministers' Meeting.
Australian Climate Service	Draws together national data, systems and expertise needed to inform climate and climate-related disaster decision-making.
National Adaptation Policy Office	Coordinates climate adaptation work across all governments. Provides a central point of contact and information for businesses and communities.
National Health and Climate Strategy	Sets out a plan to address the health impacts of climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the Australian health system. This includes a commitment to develop a National Health-Heat Action Plan.

Objective 5: Our urban environments and communities promote health and wellbeing

Initiative	How the initiative supports the objective
National Health and Climate Strategy	Sets out a plan to address the health impacts of climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the Australian health system. This includes a commitment to develop a National Health-Heat Action Plan.
Urban Precincts and Partnerships Program and Regional Precincts and Partnerships Program	Will provide funding for both the development of precincts and the delivery of construction-ready precinct projects, including active transport initiatives.
Thriving Suburbs Program	Will provide investment funding for capital works in urban, suburban and peri-urban areas that enhance liveability, including provision for active transport infrastructure.
Trajectory for Low Energy Buildings plan	Contributes to achieving zero-energy and carbon-ready commercial and residential buildings in Australia.
National Adaptation Plan	Will provide a consistent national approach to increase adaptation efforts and build national resilience to climate impacts.
National Construction Code – Liveable Housing Design Standard	Establishes technical provisions for constructing dwellings that better meet the needs of the community and improve the liveability of newly built homes. Building Ministers may consider development of potential future updates to the residential energy efficiency provisions in the National Construction Code
National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan	Will set national targets to halt and reverse biodiversity loss nationally and will promote high-quality green and blue spaces in urban and densely populated areas.
National Water Initiative renewal	Will ensure that Australia's primary water management framework is fit for purpose and addresses current and emerging challenges.
National Water Quality Management Strategy	Supports state, territory and local governments, and regional natural resource management bodies, to develop water quality management strategies, plans and regulatory arrangements.
Urban Rivers and Catchments Program	Supports projects that improve waterways in urban areas.
Threatened Species Action Plan 2022–2032	Provides a pathway to protect, manage and restore Australia's threatened species and important natural places.
Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 reform	Will deliver better environmental protection. As part of this reform, regional plans will work in concert with the new National Environmental Standards, to guide decision-makers, developers and communities on biodiversity protection requirements in specific locations.

Objective 6: Our urban areas promote productivity

Initiative	How the initiative supports the objective
Infrastructure Investment Program	Invests in faster, more affordable and more accessible public transport and active transport in areas where employment opportunities are concentrated. Provides

	targeted investment in land transport infrastructure to alleviate congestion, better connect the regions, improve road safety and meet the national freight challenge.
Digital investment	Supports increased uptake of digital technologies and infrastructure to reduce the need for job-related travel.
Closing the Gap	Outcome 7: Increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth (15–24 years) who are in employment, education or training to 67% by 2031.
Disability Standards for Education 2005	Sets expectations to ensure that all education providers make reasonable adjustments to assist students with disability to participate in education on the same basis as their peers.
National Housing Accord	Commits to a shared ambition to build 1.2 million new well-located homes over five years from 2024 to help increase the supply and affordability of homes.
Social Housing Accelerator	Will deliver thousands of new social homes across Australia, increasing housing supply for people on social housing waiting lists.
National Housing Infrastructure Facility	Provides financing for eligible housing, enabling critical infrastructure projects that will unlock new housing supply, particularly of social and affordable housing.
Housing Australia Future Fund	Will help to build 30,000 new social and affordable housing properties in its first five years. Legislated in September 2023.
National Housing and Homelessness Plan	Will help more people access safe and affordable housing. Will broadly assess issues constraining the current housing system and set out a shared vision to inform future housing and homelessness policy in Australia.
High Speed Rail Authority	Oversees the planning, development and construction of a high-speed rail network in Australia, starting with planning and corridor works for the Sydney to Newcastle section of the network.
Employment White Paper	Provides a roadmap to position the Australian labour market for the future. Outlines the practical actions being taken and further reform directions required to achieve our potential.
Australian Skills Guarantee	New national targets for apprentices, trainees and paid cadets working on Australian Government funded major infrastructure projects, including specific targets for women.
Jobs and Skills Australia	Provides independent, evidence-based advice on current and emerging skills, labour needs and workforce challenges.
Jobs and Skills Councils	A tri-partite body bringing together employers, unions and governments to ensure the VET sector meets workforce needs and delivers better outcomes for learners and employers.
National Skills Agreement	Five-year agreement with states and territories to ensure that critical and emerging industries have access to the skilled workers they need. The NSA has $50 million to support priority cohorts (including women and First Nations) to complete training.
National Teacher Workforce Action Plan	Sets out actions to attract and retain more teachers, including overseas teachers and teachers where they are most needed. Also includes actions to better understand future workforce needs.
VET sector reforms	Will ensure the quality and relevance of training into the future.
New Energy Apprenticeships Program	Provides incentives to support new apprentices taking up an apprenticeship to work in the clean energy sector, to support a pipeline of talent for Australia's transition to a renewable energy economy.

Migration Strategy	Provides a roadmap for reforming Australia's migration system, informed by the recent review of the migration system. Includes a greater role for states and territories to contribute to migration settings.
National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy	Provides a roadmap for actions to achieve a sustainable and productive care and support economy that delivers high-quality care with decent jobs.
Australian Universities Accord	Will improve higher education opportunities and outcomes for under-represented cohorts, including addressing barriers associated with access, affordability, participation, success and attainment.
National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy	Sets out a national vision for freight systems and supply chains that contribute to a strong and prosperous Australia.
National Urban Freight Planning Principles	Guide land use decision-making across all levels of government to improve planning for freight in Australia's cities.
Urban Precincts and Partnerships Program and Regional Precincts and Partnerships Program	Will provide funding for both the development of precincts and the delivery of construction-ready precinct projects, including active and public transport initiatives.
Thriving Suburbs Program	Will provide investment funding for capital works in urban, suburban and per-urban areas that enhance liveability, including provision for active transport infrastructure.
National Reconstruction Fund	Facilitates increased flows of finance into seven government identified priority areas of the Australian economy through targeted investments, as decided by an independent board, to diversify and transform Australian industry. One of the priority areas for funding is transport, which includes support for manufacturing emerging transport technologies and electric vehicles and their charging equipment.
National Road Transport Technology Strategy (draft)	Intended to guide Commonwealth, state and territory governments to take a nationally consistent and harmonised approach to supporting road transport technology deployment and adoption. If approved, it will replace the current National Policy Framework for Land Transport Technology. Public consultation on the draft strategy occurred in late 2023.
2024–27 National Connected and Automated Vehicle (CAV) Action Plan	Sets out national actions to support development and deployment of emerging road transport technologies like vehicle automation, vehicle connectivity (including C-ITS) and MaaS. If approved, it will build on the 2020-2023 National Land Transport Technology Action Plan. Public consultation on the draft action plan was undertaken in late 2023
Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF)	The NAIF is a Commonwealth Government financier, providing concessional loans for the development of infrastructure projects in northern Australia and the Australian Indian Ocean Territories. The independent NAIF Board target projects for investment that will help to grow the northern Australian economy and encourage private sector investment in all industries including resources, agriculture and water, energy, financing partnerships, social infrastructure, and transport and logistics.
Principles for a National Approach to Co-operative Intelligent Transport Systems (C-ITS) in Australia	Sets out how Australian governments will work together – and with industry – towards nationally consistent support for the rollout of C-ITS in Australia.

Telecommunications in new developments policy	Outlines expectations for property developers to ensure that developments have modern telecommunications infrastructure to provide, as relevant, fixed and mobile broadband and voice services.
Peri-Urban Mobile Program	Targets longstanding mobile phone coverage and reception issues in the urban fringes of Australia's capital cities and large regional cities through government co-investment in mobile phone infrastructure.
National Broadband Network (NBN)	Provides services nationwide using a combination of fixed-line, fixed wireless and satellite technologies.
Boost Fibre and Fast Track the NBN Repairs Job	Providing NBN Co with funding to expand fibre to an additional 1.5 million premises, which will enable access to speeds of up to 1 gigabyte per second to 10 million premises by 2025.[38]
National Audit of Mobile Coverage	Will help the Australian Government to better identify mobile phone coverage black spots, target future investment and assess the accuracy of carrier coverage maps.
First Nations Digital Inclusion Plan (2023–26)	Sets out actions to support improved digital inclusion – access, affordability and digital ability – for First Nations people.

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