



2025

Annual Report



Healthy
Cities
Australia

**Healthy People.
Healthy Cities.**

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Healthy Cities Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live and work. We pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

Healthy Cities Australia warmly welcomes everyone, irrespective of their ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation or gender identity. We are committed to eliminating all forms of discrimination.



healthycities.org.au

From Our Board Chair



Dr Lina Engelen
Chair

Lina Engelen

What a year we have had. As Chair of the Board, it is a privilege to witness firsthand the remarkable transformation and growth that has defined Healthy Cities Australia in the last year.

Our transition from Healthy Cities Illawarra to Healthy Cities Australia, led with vision and determination by our CEO Kelly, signals our commitment to scaling impact nationally while staying true to the community-centred approach that has been our hallmark for nearly four decades.

This year we are proud of several key achievements:

- **Building strong partnerships:** Our collaboration with Asthma Australia through Breathe Better in the Gong exemplifies the power of working together to address complex health challenges. Similarly, our partnership with the NSW EPA on food rescue initiatives has positioned us at the forefront of tackling food insecurity—an issue affecting nearly two million Australian households.
- **Leading innovation:** Healthy Cities Australia was the first region to deliver the groundbreaking Regional Food Coordinator Program, addressing food waste and food insecurity simultaneously.

- **Creating knowledge networks:**

The establishment of the Healthy Urban Environments Community of Practice in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven has enabled knowledge sharing, collaborative problem-solving, and collective action among practitioners committed to healthier urban environments.

- **Shaping the national conversation:**

Our Conversations about the Wellbeing Economy event in October 2024 brought together diverse voices to explore how economic models can better serve community health and wellbeing.

- **Expanding capacity:** With new staff and programs, and through our collaboration with UNSW's Cities Institute, we have strengthened our ability to deliver evidence-based solutions across the social, environmental, and commercial determinants of health.

As we look to the future, our movement toward a national presence comes at a critical time. Cities that place health at the centre of policy, co-design solutions with communities, and treat urban planning as health planning are seeing real results. Healthy Cities Australia is uniquely positioned to facilitate this transformation nationwide, building on our strong Illawarra roots while extending our impact across Australia.

As we expand our national reach, I warmly invite organisations and individuals who share our vision to join us as members. Together, we can amplify our collective voice and drive the systemic change needed to build healthier, fairer cities where all Australians can thrive.

On behalf of the Board, I extend heartfelt thanks to our staff, volunteers, partners, and supporters. Your commitment makes everything we do possible.

About Us

At Healthy Cities Australia, we focus on preventative health, reducing disease and creating inclusive, thriving communities across Australia. Our vision is simple yet ambitious: a healthier, brighter future for everyone.

Founded in 1987 as Healthy Cities Illawarra, we have grown from our local roots into a national organisation, rebranding in March 2025 to reflect our leadership role of the Healthy Cities movement in Australia. Now 38 years young, we continue to build on our legacy of leadership, collaboration, and prevention.

Since 2007, we have proudly served as the Secretariat of the Australian Chapter of the Alliance for Healthy Cities. We also sit on the Steering Committee of the Alliance, guided by the World Health Organisation's Healthy Cities framework, which recognises that the social, economic, and physical environments are key to community health and wellbeing.

Healthy Cities Australia is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that brings people, partners, and communities together to create long-lasting change. We champion prevention over cure, working at the intersection of health, environment, and social wellbeing to deliver real impact where it's needed most.

Our current issue and impact statements:

Issue

There is a decline in health and wellbeing in Australian cities

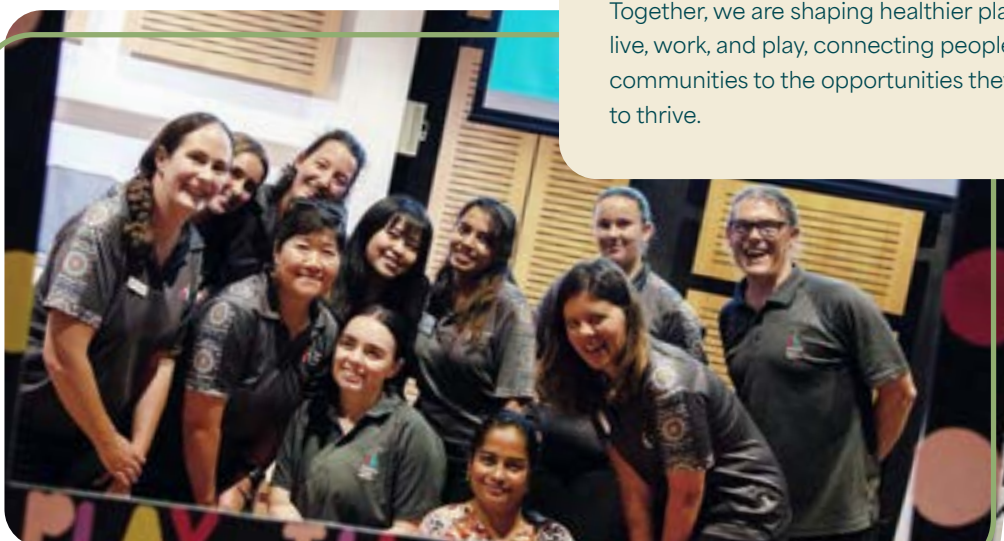
Impact

Healthy Cities Australia leads a bold transformational social policy movement that drives improvements in health, equity and community wellbeing.

Our Impact in 2025

- **20** staff driving programs and advocacy
- **143** active volunteers contributing their time and skills
- **6,137** volunteer hours delivered
- **53** community programs delivered
- **633** participants actively engaged
- **1,563** program delivery hours supporting healthier communities

Together, we are shaping healthier places to live, work, and play, connecting people and communities to the opportunities they need to thrive.



What We Do

At Healthy Cities Australia, we turn preventative health into practical action. We design and deliver programs, campaigns, and partnerships that make it easier for people to eat well, move more, breathe cleaner air, and feel connected to their community.

We focus our efforts where they matter most:



Healthy Eating & Food Security

– improving access to nutritious, affordable food and supporting healthier choices.



Physical Activity and Active Transport

– encouraging walking, cycling, and other active ways to get around safely.



Community Wellbeing – creating inclusive spaces and opportunities for people to connect, belong, and thrive.

Our approach is grounded in collaboration. We work alongside councils, schools, community organisations, researchers, and universities to co-design solutions that reflect the needs of each community.



Our Values



Integrity

We develop evidence-based programs, which work to prevent and control chronic ill-health and disease in humans. We adhere to the principles of the WHO Healthy Cities Movement.



Equity

We participate in the development of public policy to effect change for population health outcomes. We aim to reduce inequity by building capacity. We recognise the diverse needs of our communities.



Collaboration

We are active members of the WHO Alliance for Healthy Cities. We partner with government and private organisations as well as grass roots community groups to prevent and control ill-health and disease in humans and protect our environment.



Inclusivity

We aim to foster social connection and inclusion of all those who are marginalised in our communities.



Looking Ahead

Our Commitment to the Future

In 2025, we set a bold new direction with the launch of our Healthy Cities Australia Strategic Plan. This three-year plan will guide our efforts to strengthen leadership, scale impact, and build sustainable foundations for the future.



Our Focus for the Next Three Years



Leadership & Advocacy

We develop evidence-based programs, which work to prevent and control chronic ill-health and disease in humans. We adhere to the principles of the WHO Healthy Cities Movement.



Data & Evidence

We are investing in the creation of a Healthy Cities Data Hub, designed to capture, share, and translate evidence into action. This will strengthen our advocacy and demonstrate the real impact of preventative health.



Service Delivery

We are active members of the WHO Alliance for Healthy Cities. We partner with government and private organisations as well as grass roots community groups to prevent and control ill-health and disease in humans and protect our environment.



Organisational Sustainability

We are focused on growth and resilience, increasing our revenue, diversifying income streams, and investing in our people, systems, and partnerships to ensure long-term impact.



Strategic Partnerships

Collaboration will remain at the heart of our work. We will build stronger partnerships with local councils, peak bodies, universities, health organisations, and community groups to expand our influence and deliver meaningful change.



Our Vision



“By 2027, Healthy Cities Australia will be recognised as a national leader in preventative health, with stronger evidence, stronger partnerships, and stronger communities”



Healthy Cities Australia delivers place based community wellbeing programs—including initiatives focusing on healthy eating, active transport, mental health, and social inclusion. This year, we used a nationally validated tool developed by The Australian Social Value Bank (ASVB) to begin to demonstrate the social value, in dollar terms, of our programs.

The ASVB is a nationally developed toolkit that assigns monetary values to more than 60 common social and wellbeing outcomes—such as improved mental health, increased confidence, employment, community connection, and healthy behaviour. Developed by Alliance Social Enterprises in collaboration with social scientists from Simetrica-Jacobs, the values are estimated using Wellbeing Valuation based on large Australian datasets. This approach allows us to quantify not just the number of outcomes achieved, but the net social value created—both primary effects on individuals and secondary effects such as reduced government expenditure—using an online cost-benefit analysis tool.

By using the ASVB Value Calculator, Healthy Cities Australia:

- Identifies relevant ASVB outcomes (e.g. increased social connection, improved dietary behaviours, greater active transport uptake).
- Surveys participants before and after interventions to collect data aligned with ASVB-supported indicators.
- Calculates both individual wellbeing gains and government cost offsets to estimate total social value of specific programs.
- Provides credible evidence for funders, partners, and local government stakeholders showing the return on investment in real dollar terms.

Example of the Social Impact of Active In-Betweens:

Every \$1 invested by HCA

\$1



=

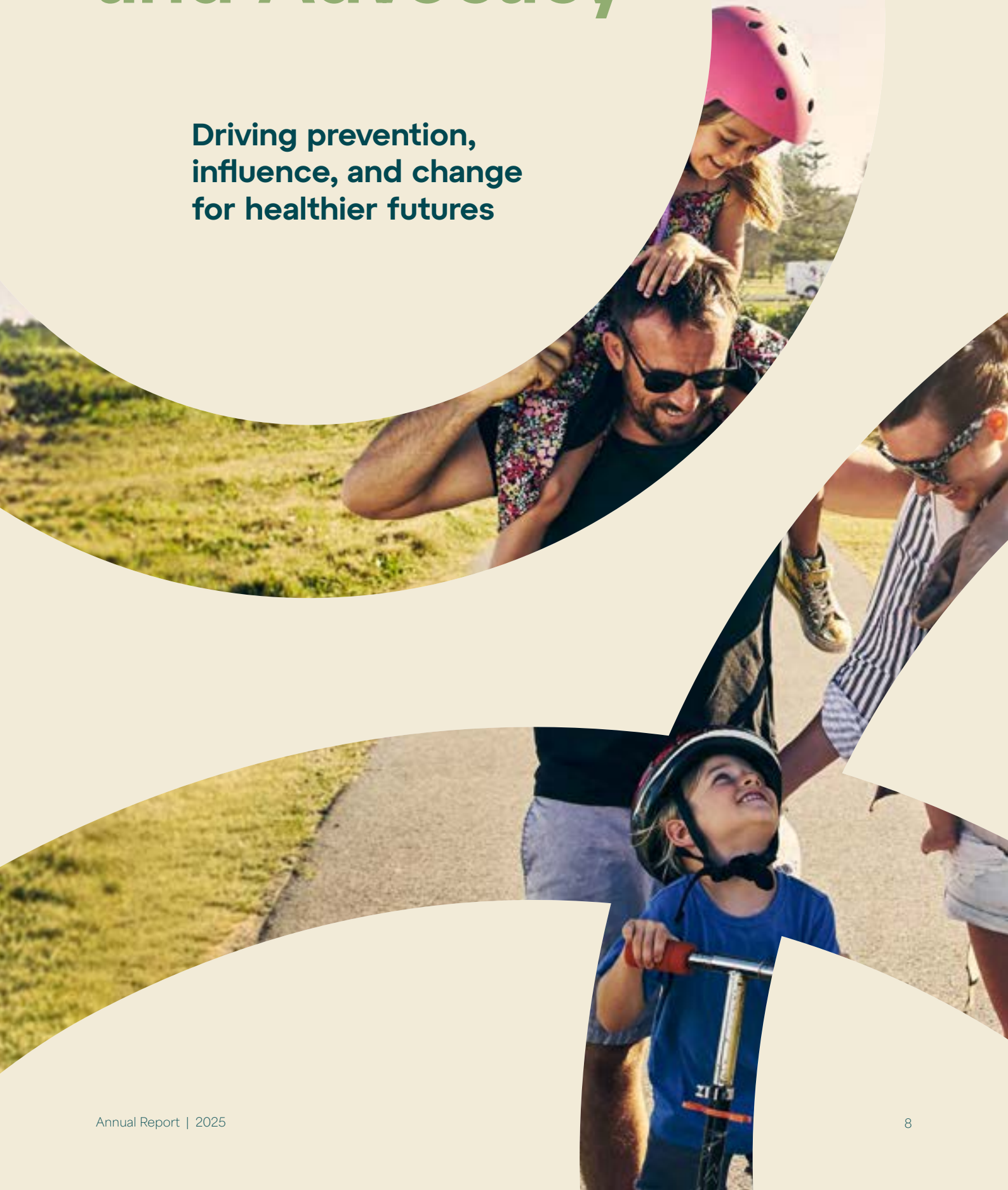
Returns \$6 in social and economic value

\$6



Programs and Advocacy

Driving prevention,
influence, and change
for healthier futures



Volunteers

This year, we welcomed **55** new volunteers to our programs. Together, our volunteers contributed an impressive **5,585** hours to support community programs, health campaigns, events, and research initiatives, representing a contribution valued at over **\$251,325.00**.

Our dedicated volunteer team played a vital role in helping us engage with vulnerable communities and deliver impactful health promotion and

education initiatives. Over the year, our volunteers also supported more than 20 different community events, reaching over 1,000 community members through various pop-up activations and activities.

We are also proud to share that our inspiring youth volunteer team was nominated for Volunteering Australia's National Volunteer Team of the Year – a well-deserved recognition of their passion, dedication, and impact.

“I really like being a youth volunteer because of all the amazing opportunities and different experiences. I also really enjoy working with the kids, it's really great to get to know each of them and their interests”

Alysse

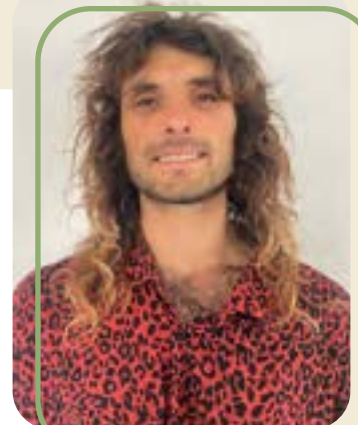
Active In-Betweens Volunteer



“I loved working at HCA and felt that I was given lots of opportunities to learn new skills, contribute to awesome projects, like the Illawarra Edible Garden Trail, and get as creative as I wanted when it came to advocacy and education”

Connor

Food Fairness Illawarra Volunteer



Acknowledging our Board of Directors

We gratefully acknowledge the outstanding contribution of our volunteer Board of Directors, whose commitment and expertise guide the strategic direction, governance, and sustainability of our organisation. Their dedication—offered freely alongside their own professional and personal responsibilities—ensures that we uphold the highest standards of accountability, transparency, and impact. By lending their time, skills, and passion, our board members play a vital role in shaping our vision, strengthening our community partnerships, and stewarding Healthy Cities into a strong and sustainable future.



Andrew Mastroianni



Franca Facci



Dr Lina Engelen
Chair



Dr Mary-Anne Land



Kelly Andrews
Secretary & Public Officer & CEO



Vicky Wallace



Dr Lance Barrie
Deputy Chair



Katie Singh



55

new volunteers have been onboarded since July 2024



5,500

volunteer hours contributed over the past financial year



\$251k+

in in-kind staffing support provided

Food Fairness Illawarra

foodfairnessillawarra.org.au

The Global Goals For Sustainable Development

2

ZERO HUNGER



3

GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



4

QUALITY EDUCATION



10

REDUCED INEQUALITIES



11

SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



12

RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



13

CLIMATE ACTION



16

PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



17

PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



Food Fairness Illawarra (FFI) is a community coalition established in 2005 to work towards food security for all in the Illawarra region. Our collaborative efforts involve working closely with local councils, the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District, the University of Wollongong, community groups, charities, businesses, and passionate individuals.

In 2024-25, FFI continued to strengthen community knowledge and engagement through education, advocacy, and resource-sharing. We maintained and updated the Low Cost & Free Meals Directory, an essential resource for those facing food stress. We also grew our reach via our newsletter by over 1,000 subscribers since last year, and social media by over 200 followers, and continued to empower the community with knowledge of local food access and food waste reduction.

A highlight was our 'Bread Fort' installation at the Yours & Ours Festival, designed to raise awareness about the 7.6 million tonnes of food wasted in Australia each year. Made entirely of rescued bread, it sparked conversations with hundreds of festivalgoers about household food waste and local food systems. In November, we auspiced the Illawarra Edible Garden Trail, which engaged more than 500 people across 30+ gardens. The event not only showcased the region's homegrown food but also empowered community members with the skills and inspiration to grow their own nutritious food at home.

Food Fairness Illawarra appeared as a case study in 'Vulnerability and resilience in a local-scale alternative food network in Australia' chapter of "Re-imagining Food Systems: Connecting research with citizen politics." Published by Vernon Press (forthcoming 2025) Edited by Kiah Smith, Camille Freeman and Alana Mann co-authored by A/Prof Liesel Spencer, Dr Katherine Kent and our very own CEO Kelly Andrews. We also collaborated with University of Wollongong researchers Dr Katherine Kent and Professor Karen Charlton on the 'Let's Talk About Food' survey, which revealed that while 38% of Illawarra and Shoalhaven households experience food insecurity, only 23% of severely food-insecure households and 10% of moderately food-insecure households access emergency food relief. It also shone a light on the vital need to support smaller community organisations, finding that 73% of people attending community centres experience a higher severity of food insecurity. These findings underscore the urgent need for local action and provide crucial data to advocate for systemic change.

"Local networks such as Food Fairness Illawarra play an integral role connecting eaters to locally grown and accessible options, as well as events to grow our diverse community."

Sarah Anderson
Popes Produce



Illawarra Food Rescue and Relief Program



The Global Goals For Sustainable Development



We are proud to lead the Illawarra Food Rescue and Relief Program, the first of its kind in NSW, thanks to funding from the NSW Environmental Protection Authority. This three-year initiative aims to strengthen connections and collaboration across the food relief and rescue sector to divert more edible food from landfill and support people experiencing food insecurity.

So far, the program has focused on strengthening relationships between local food relief organisations and reaching out to hospitality and food retail businesses to increase awareness.

We launched the Illawarra Food Donations WhatsApp Group to enable real-time, food donations from businesses to charities, resulting in approximately 130kg of surplus food donated to date. The group was covered on WIN News.

[Win News Youtube Video](#)

A standout moment was rescuing leftover bread rolls from the Yours & Owls Festival in March 2025, providing an on-the-ground trial of what food rescue looks like at large-scale community events.

“Wollongong Community Corrections clientele are often vulnerable, homeless, and struggle financially for the basics such as food and hygiene. The bread rolls we received have made a huge impact this week as our offenders have left with food and dignity. We are very grateful for the food donation.”

Wollongong Community Corrections

We also issued a pilot survey to gather baseline data, a first step toward mapping the regional food rescue landscape. Additionally, we partnered with Warrawong Residents Forum to support

a part-time coordinator for their weekly food service, which will provide integral insight into the social and economic impact of even small investments in community food relief.

Partners: OzHarvest, SecondBite, St Vincent De Paul (Coniston), Wollongong Homeless Hub & Housing Services, Warrawong Residents Forum

Cook Chill Chat



The Global Goals For Sustainable Development



In the last financial year, Cook Chill Chat continued to make a meaningful difference in our community. Thanks to the support of our funders, we delivered programs that not only taught healthy cooking skills but also created safe spaces for women and families to connect, share experiences, and build resilience.

Australian Government Department of Social Services – Strong and Resilient Communities Activity



This funding supported the delivery of eight Cook Chill Chat groups, tailored to the needs of women and families across the Illawarra:

- Sustaining NSW Families (Farmborough Heights Public School, Term 3 2024) – 8 young mothers with children aged 0-2.
- Women Illawarra – 15 women (Term 3 2024) and 17 women (Term 2 2025).
- Macedonian community, Warilla Neighbourhood Centre (Term 4 2024) – 11 women.
- Illawarra Women's Health Centre (Term 4 2024) – 14 women.
- Barrack Heights Public School (Term 1 2025) – 8 participants..
- Berkeley Neighbourhood Centre (Term 2 2025) – 16 women.

We also piloted two NDIS cohort groups, exploring how CCC can support people with disability and their carers:

- Flagstaff Port Kembla (Term 1 2025) – 16 participants plus 6-7 support workers.
- Bulli (Term 2 2025) – 5 participants plus 6 support workers.



Spotlight: Young Mothers Building Confidence

Our partnership with Sustaining NSW Families highlighted the transformative impact of CCC. The program brought together young mothers, many of whom had experienced domestic violence, social isolation, or other challenges.

Over six weeks, participants learnt how to cook simple, healthy meals, navigate nutrition information, and prepare healthy baby- and toddler-friendly foods. With childcare provided on site, the mothers gained confidence being apart from their babies for short periods, and discovered the value of social connection with peers in similar circumstances.

As one social worker described:

“The impact Cook Chill Chat has had on the mums was more significant than I can probably describe. They built confidence being away from their babies, made friendships that continue today, and feel proud preparing healthy meals. One mum even began sharing her new skills with others.”

For participants, the program was about much more than cooking, it was about feeling capable, connected, and supported.

Australian Government Department of Defence – Family Support Funding Program

This funding enabled us to deliver two 8-week CCC groups at the Shoalhaven Defence Families Association’s Kookaburra Retreat in Nowra Hill:



- Defence CCC 1 (Term 1 2025)
– 14 participants.
- Defence CCC 2 (Term 2 2025)
– 19 participants.

For defence families, the program provided a vital opportunity to connect with others who understand the pressures of military life. Cooking together became a way to share experiences, strengthen resilience, and build community support networks.

Impact at a glance (FY 2024–25):

- **10** Cook Chill Chat groups delivered.
- **143** women and families reached.
- **2** NDIS pilot groups trialed.
- Participants consistently reported increased confidence, stronger social connections, and healthier eating habits.

CCC post-program survey comments:

“Cooking as a group gave us the space to get to know each other – gaining knowledge of healthy eating / cooking. Also, the recipes to take home were of great benefit.”



The Dinner Table Project



The Global Goals For Sustainable Development



Families Connecting Over Food

The Dinner Table Project (DTP) continued to bring families together around cooking, conversation, and connection. This 2.5-hour, 6-week program (held from 5-7:30pm) is designed to make healthy eating fun and achievable while giving families the chance to slow down and share a meal. Uniquely, DTP engages entire households, including fathers, creating a space where every family member has a role to play.

Funded by the Australian Government Communities for Children initiative, and managed in the Shellharbour LGA by Barnardos, Healthy Cities Australia delivered three Dinner Table Project groups:

- Flinders Community Centre (Term 3 2024) – 20 participants.
- Illawarra Women's Health Centre (Term 1 2025) – 18 participants.
- Albion Park Rail Community Centre (Term 2 2025) – 25 participants

A Unique Approach

The Dinner Table Project is more than a cooking program. It gives families the chance to sit together, share food, and reconnect, something many struggle to do in busy daily life. By involving children and parents side by side, DTP not only teaches practical skills but also builds confidence, strengthens relationships, and fosters a sense of belonging.

From a mother who had recently gone through hard times:

“The group restored a bit of my faith in my belief of others - all the volunteers and how much they involved and engaged with myself and the kids. Special mentioned of (volunteer1) and (volunteer2), Great support!”



Creative Cooking



The Global Goals For Sustainable Development



Inspiring Confidence in the Kitchen

We continue to collaborate with UOW Pulse to deliver the Creative Cooking series as part of their student wellbeing program. University students are among the groups most vulnerable to food insecurity, often juggling study, work, and social life while learning to live independently for the first time. Many lack food literacy or basic cooking skills, and with the rising cost of living, healthy eating can feel out of reach.

Creative Cooking provides a vital opportunity for students to gain the skills and confidence to prepare budget-friendly, healthy meals while connecting with peers in a supportive and welcoming environment. Each session blends practical cooking with social connection, helping students build both life skills and friendships.

Impact at a glance (FY 2024–25):

- Semester 2, 2024: **5** sessions, **58** students reached.
- Semester 1, 2025: **4** sessions, **71** students reached.

Delivered in partnership with UOW Pulse.



Delivered in partnership with UOW Pulse

Stir it up!



The Global Goals For Sustainable Development



Legacy of Healthy Eating and Community Connection

For 14 years, from 2010 to 2024, the Stir it up! (SIU) program stood as a vibrant example of peer-led health promotion in the Illawarra Shoalhaven. A joint initiative between Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District and Healthy Cities Australia (HCA), the program engaged more than 13,000 community members, building food knowledge, practical cooking skills, and healthier habits through an innovative peer-to-peer volunteer model.

At the heart of SIU were over 140 volunteer peer educators who generously contributed their time to inspire and educate others. Their impact was particularly felt in the communities where it mattered most. By 2020, program analysis revealed that 95% of activities were delivered in low socio-economic areas across the region, ensuring that the benefits of healthier eating reached those most in need.

The stories and voices of volunteers captured the spirit of the program:

“The training was so comprehensive that it actually helped my confidence,” and “if the program ever disappeared, then, I have made lifelong friendships from the program.”

When the co-ordination of Stir it up! transitioned from ISLHD to HCA in 2020-21, it also brought resourcing challenges as well as difficulties in re-establishing itself after the COVID pandemic. Recognising both the program’s achievements and its future potential, HCA commissioned a formal review in 2024. This review drew on a literature review, program data, and consultations with peer educators, host organisations, and past managers.

The findings confirmed what communities already knew: SIU improved skills, knowledge, and confidence—not only for participants but also for the peer educators themselves. It fostered social connection, created lifelong friendships, and provided a platform for people to become local champions of health. Importantly, it consistently reached low-income and vulnerable groups who are often the hardest to engage through mainstream health promotion.

Stir it UP!
Sharing good food & healthy eating



The review also identified barriers that ultimately led to the decision to cease the delivery of the program:

- **Funding & Resourcing:** A dedicated coordinator was identified as critical to provide co-ordination, recruitment, promotion, training, support, and consistency for volunteers.
- **Volunteer engagement:** Recruitment, diversity, and retention of peer educators need renewed focus.
- **Momentum:** The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted activities, creating a need for fresh energy and investment. The popularity of Cook Chill Chat also saw a decline in requests for Stir it up! With many community organisations requesting CCC instead.
- **Logistics:** Peer educators required greater support to overcome barriers such as travel and program costs.
- **Recognition:** Peer education and support in nutrition-related areas does not enjoy the same profile as in other health promotion areas (e.g: sexual health, mental health, substance misuse), limiting its broader uptake.

Despite these challenges, the legacy of Stir it up! remains one of innovation, generosity, and impact. Its peer-to-peer model has proven its worth in empowering communities and shaping healthier futures. The lessons learned from SIU continue to inform how HCA and its partners design inclusive, sustainable programs that place people at the heart of health promotion.

This legacy also lives on through HCA's other community nutrition initiatives, including Cook Chill Chat and The Dinner Table Project, which continue to build food confidence, connection, and resilience across the region. HCA extends heartfelt thanks and recognition to everyone who contributed to Stir it up! Over its 14 years—dedicated staff, peer educators, host organisations, and participants—whose collective effort made the program what it was. In particular, we acknowledge the invaluable leadership and commitment of Robyn Tindall from Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District, whose vision and support were central to the program's success.



Active In-Betweens



The Global Goals For Sustainable Development



Active In-Betweens is a free weekly after-school program where children learn about active living, healthy eating, and other skills that contribute to good health, resilience, and positive self-esteem. The program aligns with several national and local health strategies, including the National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030.

Currently, 95% of primary school-aged children exceed the recommended daily screen time.¹ In NSW, only 59% of children consume enough fruit, and just 2.9% meet the recommended vegetable intake.² These factors directly affect children's health and development. Combined with the higher density of fast food outlets, gambling venues, and alcohol retailers in lower socio-economic areas, they create additional vulnerabilities within the communities that Active In-Betweens supports.

The program is funded through a range of sources, primarily secured through successful grant applications.

This year, Active In-Betweens continued its programs in Albion Park Rail, Bellambi, Bundaleer, and Warilla, with a venue change from Horsley to Koonawarra Community Centre. Topics throughout the year focused on food and nutrition, safety, fundamental movement skills, and social connection. Sessions included cooking, physical activity, and creative workshops, all supported by a team of trained Health Promotion Officers and volunteers who provide a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment for children.

Active In-Betweens is **place-based and trauma-informed**, tailored to the unique needs of each community it serves. Its flexible structure encourages leadership, participation, and social engagement among children.

In 2025, the program was invited to present at the International Play Association Asia Pacific Conference, where it showcased its program logic, inputs, outputs, and outcomes to over 250 delegates from eight countries. The presentation – Advocating for the Importance of Pre-Teen Play – received strong interest, particularly in its engagement strategies and focus on play, movement, and nutrition as part of a preventative health approach.

With ongoing thanks to our partners Communities for Children via Barnardos Australia, Community Drug Action Team, Australian Drug Foundation and Dapto Leagues Club.



3054

attendances at the program across
the 5 sites in 36 sessions



Successes

92.5%



feel more connected
with peers

88.5%



know who they
can reach out to

92.5%



more able to look for
support if they need it

87.5%



likely to put what they
have learnt into practice

53%



increase in understanding
Australian Dietary Guidelines

56%



increase in
regular walking

45%



increase in moderate
physical activity

Adult feedback through the end of Term feedback form:

“Kids are so happy and look forward to Mondays. I have noticed a positive change in their wellbeing and health overall. They have made friends, improved their skills, learnt new things, their mental health and physical health have improved and so much more. It really helps parents who can't afford sports and other activities for our kids too, it relieves a lot of stress for me. It makes them excited to go to school too because they know they get to go to the program after school, haha.”

Play Illawarra

playillawarra.com.au



The Global Goals For Sustainable Development



PlayIllawarra.com.au is a free online playground and event directory for Wollongong, Shellharbour, Kiama, and Shoalhaven. It promotes outdoor, active play and community connection through a 'What's On' calendar featuring free, family-friendly events.

Play Illawarra is built on the belief that play is a powerful public health strategy. A recent Royal Children's Hospital report found that while 94% of parents recognise play is important, only 45% of children play outside daily, with time, safety, cost, and boredom being key barriers. By making play visible, accessible, and local, Play Illawarra helps families overcome these challenges and encourages outdoor activity as part of everyday life. It serves as a practical, community-driven solution that supports children's health, family connection, and wellbeing.



2024–2025 Highlights

Growing Community Engagement

- **6** Pop Up & Play events held across beaches, skateparks, and lakeside playgrounds
- **1,080** total attendees – 730 children and 350 adults
- **100%** of attendees said they'd like more events
- **38%** said they would otherwise be at home doing screen-based activities
- **12%** identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

These events brought families together to connect and play in supportive community spaces, strengthening local relationships and promoting active lifestyles.

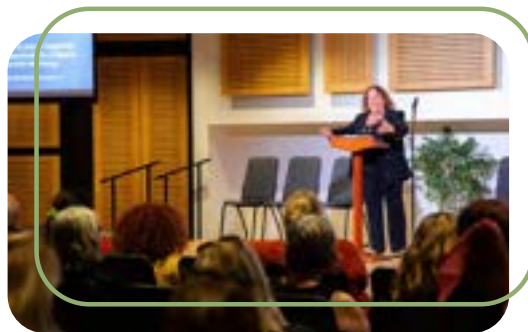
Supported by: Office of Sport's Active Pla(y)ce Making Project, University of Wollongong, and the Rotary Club of Fairy Meadow



Advocacy and Leadership in Play

Play Illawarra hosted the **Connecting Communities Through Play** forum, bringing together over 100 leaders, including MPs, Councillors, NGOs, and businesses, to explore play as a preventative health strategy. Speakers included **Robyn Miller (Play Australia CEO)** and **Dr Lisa Kervin (University of Wollongong)**.

Healthy Cities Australia also represented the region at the **International Play Association Asia Pacific Conference**, sharing research on play in pre-teens with over 250 delegates from eight nations and supporting the National Position Statement on Risky Play.

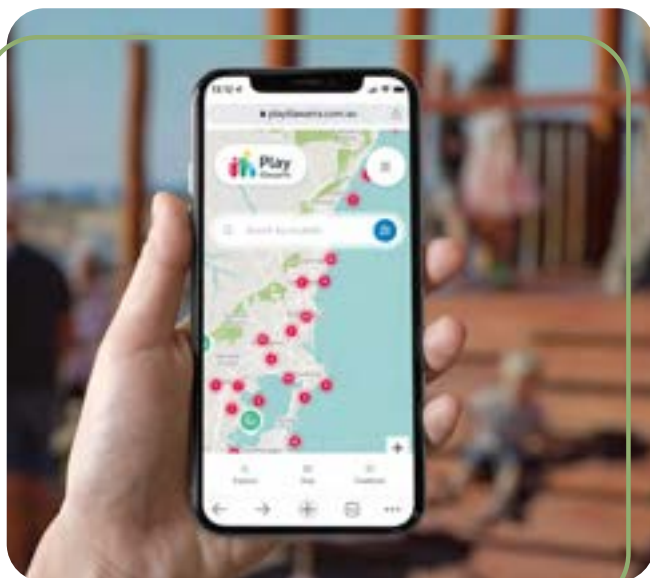


Digital Performance

Play Illawarra's digital presence drives awareness, advocacy, and access to free, family-friendly activities, positioning play as both fun and vital to community wellbeing.

2024–25 Performance Snapshot

- **10,318** website sessions with a 58% engagement rate (Nov 2024–Jun 2025)
- Organic Social was the strongest traffic source, delivering high-quality, engaged audiences
- **70.6%** engagement
- Fortnightly newsletter reached **500+** subscribers, sharing stories, play inspiration, and advocacy updates
- Launch of the new Events feature increased engagement and visibility for local play-based initiatives



Breathe Better Illawarra



The Global Goals For Sustainable Development



Asthma is one of the most common chronic diseases affecting Australians and is the single greatest contributor to the burden of disease in children. About 39,000 Australians are hospitalised for asthma each year but more than 80% of these hospitalisations are potentially preventable with the right treatment and self-management. Breathe Better Illawarra (BBI) is an HCA initiative funded by Asthma Australia thanks to the Pearl Sheppard Trust. It incorporates community asthma awareness, advocacy, and healthcare practitioner education to improve outcomes for children with asthma in the Wollongong area.

We delivered our first Give Me Space! workshop this year to support families living with asthma. Delivered at Bellambi Neighbourhood Centre in partnership with Community Asthma Educators from ISLHD, the workshop was attended by 10 adults and 14 children. Participants reported improved asthma knowledge and skills. One participant told us:

“I actually learnt so much about asthma I didn’t know before and am really glad I came.”

We worked with ISLHD Health Promotion to send asthma-related messages to schools and COORDINARE to ensure primary care practitioners receive recent updates on asthma care. Our World Asthma Day campaign in May 2025 included messaging across local radio, social media, and roadside signs. 9.4% of people surveyed recalled seeing advertising related to asthma during the campaign period and 39% recognised our campaign images when prompted.

Our advocacy has focused on phasing out indoor gas to reduce asthma risks. We convened 8 meetings of a community coalition this year, made a submission to Wollongong City Council, held a public rally on the issue attended by more than 50 people, and addressed Council’s Public Access Forum. Our advocacy has helped change the conversation about the urgent need to phase out new gas.



More than a Cyclist Illawarra



The Global Goals For Sustainable Development



✓ This year, More than a Cyclist set out to change the way our community sees people on bikes, and it did so by telling stories that went far beyond the road. Instead of focusing on rules or statistics, the campaign shone a light on the everyday lives of local riders, parents taking their kids to school, volunteers giving their time, people like Matthew McMaugh who use cycling for independence, fitness, and joy. These stories were shared through powerful photography, heartfelt interviews, and social media content that sparked conversation and connection, reaching more than 500,000 people online.

To extend the message even further, buses and billboards across high-traffic areas of the Illawarra carried the faces and words of our cyclists, ensuring the campaign was visible in the very places where tensions between drivers and cyclists often arise.



Backed by Transport for NSW, More than a Cyclist was grounded in collaboration as well as community participation, with local riders volunteering their time to be at the heart of the message. The impact was measurable and meaningful: 93% of surveyed participants recalled the campaign name or tagline, showing strong recognition, and most importantly, driver frustration towards cyclists dropped from 45% to 37%.

Beyond the numbers, the campaign shifted the conversation, reminding drivers that cyclists are not “others” but part of our shared community, building empathy on the road, and helping to create safer, more connected streets for everyone.

In 2025, Healthy Cities Australia formalised a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the original More than a Cyclist campaign founders in the United Kingdom. This partnership allows the Australian campaign to grow with consistency and integrity, while adapting to local stories and contexts. Through this agreement, Healthy Cities Australia now leads the national coordination of More than a Cyclist across Australia, supporting councils and community organisations to deliver the campaign in their own regions.

If your organisation would like to run this campaign in your local community, reach out to morethanacyclist@healthycities.org.au

Community Walking Programs



The Global Goals For Sustainable Development



Walking is one of the simplest, most accessible, and most effective forms of physical activity. According to the Australian Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines, adults should aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity each week. Regular walking not only helps people reach these targets, but also improves cardiovascular health, supports mental wellbeing, reduces the risk of chronic disease, and strengthens social connections.

Community-based walking programs are widely recognised in the evidence base as effective, low-cost interventions that improve health outcomes and reduce isolation. Research shows that walking in groups increases adherence to physical activity programs, builds social support, and improves mood and resilience compared to walking alone.

5x5 Bellambi

With funding from **COORDINARE: South Eastern NSW Primary Health Network**, we held a **5x5 walk in Bellambi (March–April 2025)**. Over five weeks, **26 participants** came together to walk 5km, once a week.



Participants told us their key motivations were:

- Meeting new people **(24%)**
- Becoming more active **(24%)**

One participant reflected:

“I loved the 5x5 event. It’s so valuable to meet people outside of your own circle of friends and so get to know the wider community.”

3x3 North Wollongong

In **May 2025**, we trialled a new **3x3 format** in North Wollongong to make walking programs more inclusive for older participants and those for whom 5km might be a barrier. The group walked 3km over 3 weeks, with sessions enhanced through partnerships with **ISLHD Health Promotion**, incorporating **fitness activities, tai chi, and nutrition education**.

The program attracted **47 participants**, with those providing feedback rating their experience an average 9.32 out of 10.

Advocacy in Action

Advocating for Safer Streets and Stronger Connections

The Illawarra Shoalhaven Active Transport Taskforce met twice this year, in February and August, bringing together local stakeholders committed to safer, more connected communities. At the February meeting, members heard about revisions to the NSW Design of Roads and Streets manual, while the August meeting featured a presentation on the benefits of 30km/h urban speed limits in creating safer, more liveable neighbourhoods.

A major focus of our work has been the **Mount Ousley Interchange**. Healthy Cities Australia has played an active role in a multi-stakeholder community advocacy effort to reinstate the pedestrian and cycling bridge in this critical piece of transport infrastructure. Multiple meetings have taken place with Alison Byrnes MP (Member for Cunningham), Ryan Park MP (Member for Keira), Paul Scully MP (Member for Wollongong), Transport for NSW, Fulton Hogan, and Wollongong City Council.

Through these efforts, the bridge has been put back on the table, with Transport for NSW now proposing two design options. With the announcement of \$12 million in funding for design and construction, active transport users can

look forward to seeing work start on this important connection in early 2026. Alongside this advocacy, other issues have been raised, including tree canopy along active transport routes and the importance of sustainable vegetation regeneration. Stakeholders represented in this advocacy include the Illawarra Bicycle Users Group, Keiraville Residents Action Group, Mt Ousley Save Our Trees, Neighbourhood Forums 4 & 5, and the Illawarra Greens.

Together, this collaboration shows the power of community voices in shaping safer and more sustainable transport infrastructure for support networks.

Impact at a glance (FY 2024–25):

- **2** Taskforce meetings held, focusing on safer road design and 30km/h speed zones.
- Mount Ousley active transport bridge placed back under consideration, with **2** design options proposed.
- Broader advocacy raised issues of tree canopy coverage and vegetation regeneration along active transport routes.



Mount Ousley Road shared path bridge © State of New South Wales (Transport for NSW)

Electrification for Health

This year HCA campaigned for all-electric new residential construction in the Wollongong LGA based on evidence that indoor gas appliances cause around 12% of the childhood asthma burden in Australia.

We initiated a community coalition to pursue this advocacy, with 6 campaign meetings taking place. We made one major submission to Wollongong City Council on revisions to its Development Control Plan, gave a speech at a Council meeting, and organised a rally attended by over 50 concerned local people outside council on 5 May. We also wrote to all councillors and met with 4 local councillors to discuss the issue.



Healthy Urban Environments Community of Practice

Healthy Cities Australia launched the Healthy Urban Environments Community of Practice (COP) this year. This exciting new initiative brings together subject matter experts in the fields of built environment, public health, social science, and communications for skill sharing and professional development. It was established after an exploratory workshop in August 2024, and began holding regular quarterly meetings in 2025.

It currently has 41 members and is continuing to grow. The first meeting held at Wollongong City Council in January aimed to establish relationships with staff and learn how to best participate in the policy process. A second online meeting in April focused on indoor air quality and the health benefits of all-electric buildings. A working group has also been established to add Wollongong to the Global Observatory of Healthy and Sustainable Cities' 1000 Cities Challenge. engagement and visibility for local play-based initiatives



Spotlight: Healthy Cities Onkaparinga



Healthy Cities Onkaparinga (formerly Healthy Cities Noarlunga) is a non-government organisation advocating for collaborative health promotion. It was established in 1987 as one of three cities (together with Illawarra and Canberra) to test the European Healthy Cities model in Australia.

Healthy Cities Onkaparinga aims to stimulate community action in Onkaparinga about issues that affect health and to develop possible solutions for these issues. Some of our objectives are:

- To increase community awareness of the social health perspective and the social determinants of health.
- To facilitate and support community participation in health, and empowerment to act on the social determinants of health. of attendees said they'd like more events
- To increase collaboration between the community, government agencies and non-government organisations to support positive health outcomes.

Onkaparinga Food Security Collaborative

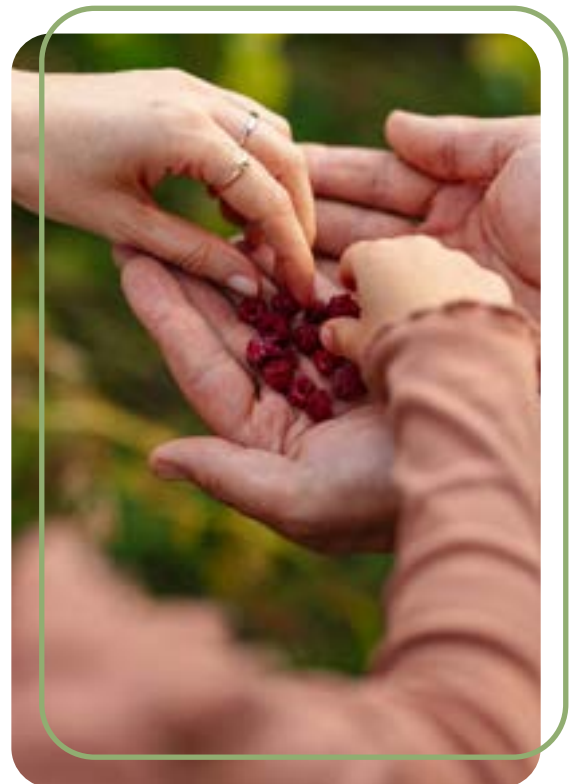
(a sub-group of HCO) conducted the Fruit Share Onkaparinga project. Volunteers visited residents who had fruit in their gardens that they were unable to pick themselves due to age or frailty. Avoiding food wastage, 3,915 kgs fruit was distributed to the residents, volunteers and about 80% to local community organisations. The volunteers enjoyed being outdoors, and getting to know each other, also chatting to the residents, so this provided a good source of interaction and connection at each harvest. The perishable nature of most fruit led to challenges including short time frames between being notified of ripe fruit and organising volunteers, and transport for distribution of fruit throughout the community. Tree pruning and fruit preserving workshops were unexpected project additions.

Partnering with Onkaparinga Council's Social Supermarket

We are collaborating with Onkaparinga Council Social Supermarket project: focus is on low-cost food with choice and dignity, support services and community connections, rather than food relief.

Home based aged care services

Our community experience notes that access to services can be expensive and complex, and digital literacy is required. Aged care services are linked to many social determinants of health such as housing, social isolation, equity, healthy food/social eating, personal agency and empowerment. We are planning a community forum to provide education and support for seniors and their families in accessing and navigating in-home care, particularly in light of the upcoming changes announced by the Federal Government.



Championing Healthy Cities in Australia:

Sandra McCarthy OAM

| Looking Back, Moving Forward

It was an honour and privilege to be invited to participate in the strategic planning day recently for the newly formed Healthy Cities Australia and in the spirit of the Global Healthy cities movement of intersectoral partners and collaboration I felt excited about change and positive for a continuing future for the Healthy cities movement in Australia. I listened to innovative ideas and potential solutions in the workshop from new advocates to this public health planning process and affirmed to see that all the factors that affect people's health and way of life are addressed and people's health is first and foremost in policy decisions and urban planning.

The experience caused me to reflect on my thirty year journey with Healthy Cities, from being elected as Deputy Mayor of Kiama Council in 1995 and representing on the management board of Healthy Cities Illawarra, as Kiama council was a founding member of Healthy cities Illawarra, as part of the Australian Healthy Cities Pilot Programme including Noarlunga South Australia and Canberra ACT.

In 2004, as Mayor of Kiama council and president of Healthy cities Illawarra I attended the inaugural meeting of the International Healthy cities Alliance in Kuching. The meeting formed the beginning of strong, collaborative partnerships and friendships with global scholars, mayors and health and local government professionals. The key message was that if the healthy cities model were to be sustained it had to be embedded in local government. The role of the elected mayor and leader was critical in bringing about behavioural change and embrace healthy cities qualities and organisation. The following year the Australian chapter of healthy cities was formed as an informal network of councils, sharing knowledge and best practice case studies of their work creating healthy communities for people to live, work and play. The Australian chapter held the responsibility

of gathering the evidence and reporting to the International Alliance of Healthy cities in the western pacific region.

The formation of Healthy cities Australia presents a more structured and purposed entity to continue with successful work of healthy cities in Australia, capturing and building on the legacy, whilst moving ahead as the strategic organisation to advise, encourage and foster relationships as local governments deal with global conflicts, health inequity, climate and environmental disasters and social wellbeing in an increasingly urbanised world.

These are significant challenges, which call to action a greater collaboration and commitment to creating healthier, more liveable communities. I endorse the bold new step of Healthy cities Australia to lead the way and invite every local government to join and be part of a global healthy cities network.

| Emeritus Mayor.



Sandra McCarthy
OAM
Life Member HCA

Communications & Reach



Through digital campaigns, social media, and our monthly newsletter, we share stories that inspire change and highlight the importance of preventative health. These platforms give our community a voice, amplifying local stories, sharing knowledge, and building momentum for healthier cities across Australia.

This year, Healthy Cities Australia transformed how we connect with people, online, in inboxes, and across communities. Our rebrand in March 2025 marked a turning point, with record growth in subscribers, stronger engagement on social media, and a growing interest for stories that put prevention first.



Stories that Resonated

National Conversations

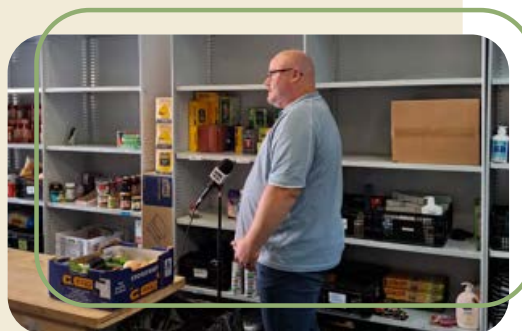
Our rebrand campaign generated a **62%** spike in website traffic, attracting **7,900** new users and lifting our visibility on search engines, with **38%** of visitors arriving organically.

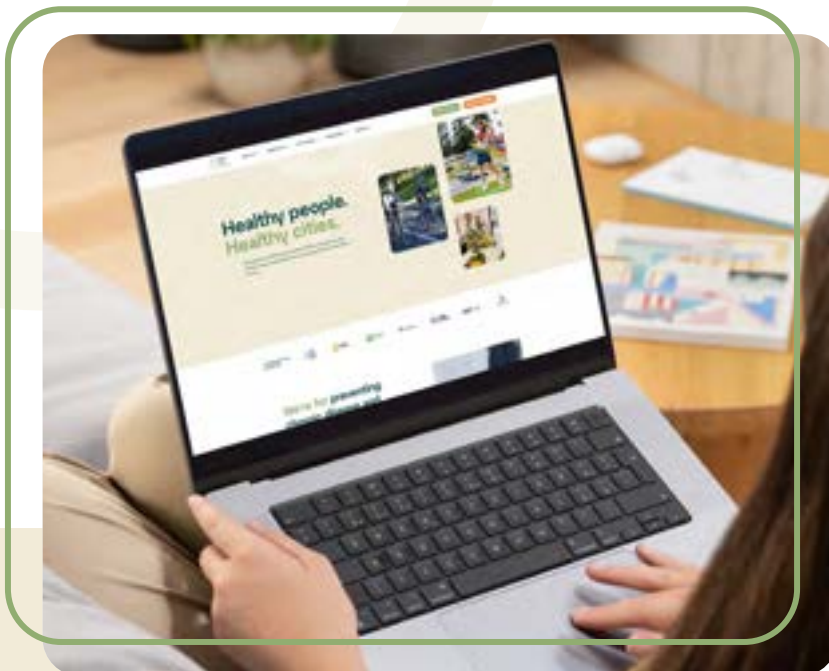
Storytelling

We are investing in the creation of a Healthy Cities Data Hub, designed to capture, share, and translate evidence into action. This will strengthen our advocacy and demonstrate the real impact of preventative health.

Families at the Heart

Parents embraced our new Play Illawarra “Events” feature, designed to showcase free local activities and places to play. In its first year, the feature helped boost newsletter sign-ups to **838**, showing strong demand for family-focused content.





By the Numbers



Newsletter Growth

Our subscriber base grew by **97%** overall, expanding from **3,354** to **6,622** subscribers across Healthy Cities Australia, Food Fairness Illawarra, and Play Illawarra

High Engagement

Newsletters open rates remained strong at **35-45%**, showing audiences value the stories we share.

Website Growth

Average monthly traffic has increased by **30%**, with a sustained lift since our rebrand launch. While paid campaigns reached **589,000** people and boosted engagement by **45%**.

Play Illawarra Pop-Up Success

Added **800** new subscribers through a simple lead magnet strategy.

Social Media Reach

Added Instagram gained **+530** followers, Facebook **+500**, and LinkedIn **+346**, while paid campaigns reached **589,000** people and boosted engagement by **45%**.



Financial Report Summary 2025

Statement of Financial Position as at 30 June 2025

Current Assets	2025	2024
Bank Cheque Accounts & Term Deposits	\$ 835,693.00	\$ 681,038.00
Receivables	\$ 5,140.00	\$ 276,947.00
Other Current Assets	\$ 6,368.00	\$ 4,404.00
Total Current Assets	\$ 847,201.00	\$ 962,389.00
Non Current Assets	2025	2024
Fixed Assets	\$ 7,100.00	\$ 9,459.00
Total Non Current Assets	\$ 7,100.00	\$ 9,459.00
Total Assets	\$ 854,301.00	\$ 971,848.00
Current Liabilities	2025	2024
Creditors	\$ 37,787.00	\$ 39,697.00
Unexpended Grants & Grants in Advance	\$ 293,621.00	\$ 508,475.00
Funds Held in Trust	\$ 12,578.00	\$ 5,924.00
Net GST	\$ 9,336.00	\$ 41,930.00
Provisions	\$ 70,071.00	\$ 47,482.00
Total Liabilities	\$ 423,393.00	\$ 643,508.00
Net Assets	\$ 430,908.00	\$ 328,340.00

Statement of Income & Expenditure for the Year ended 30 June 2025

Income	2025	2024
Grants Received	\$ 724,844.00	\$ 1,002,795.00
Program Delivery	\$ 277,136.00	\$ 88,932.00
Grants Unexpended Carried Forward	\$ 507,577.00	\$ 213,945.00
Membership Fees, Training Income	\$ 406.00	\$ 15,038.00
Interest & Miscellaneous	\$ 626,234.29	\$ 730,479.00
Total Income	\$ 2,136,197.29	\$ 2,051,189.00
Expenditure	2025	2024
Employee Costs	\$ 767,484.00	\$ 552,767.00
Program Costs	\$ 131,604.00	\$ 40,668.00
Administration & Sundries	\$ 828,340.00	\$ 912,384.00
Total Expenditure	\$ 1,727,428.00	\$ 1,505,819.00
Surplus/(Deficiency) of Income for the Year	\$ 408,769.29	\$ 545,370.00
Amounts Transferred to Unexpended Grants/Held in Trust	\$ 306,199.04	\$ 514,399.00
Net Assets Net Surplus/(Deficiency) of Income for the Year	\$ 102,570.25	\$ 30,971.00

Our Membership

In June this year, we launched the Healthy Cities Australia Membership Portal, giving individuals the opportunity to directly support and connect with our work.

Membership is a way for people to stand with us in championing prevention and creating healthier, more liveable cities. Members receive updates,

resources, and opportunities to be part of our story, while helping strengthen our collective voice for change.

We are especially proud to thank our first **50** members, who joined us this year and set the foundation for a growing national community committed to healthier futures.

- Alexander Brown
- Alex Sherley
- Alison Moore
- Bart Willems
- Cal Spencer-Rosenberg
- Corina Rowe
- Dana Mertens
- Deidre Stuart
- Emily Henderson
- Felix Bronneberg
- Franca Facci
- Geoff O'Donnell
- Graham McCabe
- Helen Piper
- Ian Stevens
- Jenny Norman
- Jess Whittaker
- Jodie Cooper
- Joe Woodward
- John Armstrong
- Jonathan Hallett
- Judith Hurley
- Karen Charlton
- Katherine Kent
- Katie Singh
- Kellie Martin
- Kelly Andrews
- Lance Barrie
- Lance W Carr
- Liliana Ructtinger
- Lina Engelen
- Linda Bunclark
- Liz Griffiths
- Loreto Medina
- Manami Henderson
- Mandy Booker
- Marg Saveska
- Maria Medina
- Martin Andrews
- Mary-Anne Land
- Maxyne Graham
- Megan Hammersley
- Michelle Barry
- Natasha Debsieh
- Nicolas Walker
- Pippa Rendel
- Robert Servine
- Robyn Tindall
- Susan Wallis
- Vicky Wallace



Illawarra Women's Day of Dance and Culture

The date of the annual Illawarra Women's Day of Dance and Culture was changed from March to September and as such, does not feature in this financial year.

Rest assured though, that there was plenty of work behind the scenes preparing for September 2025!



Reflections From Our CEO



Kelly Andrews
CEO at HCA

Kelly Andrews

This past year marks a pivotal chapter in our nearly 40-year journey. In 2024, we rebranded from Healthy Cities Illawarra to Healthy Cities Australia. This transition honours our roots in the Illawarra – one of the founding locations of the Healthy Cities movement in Australia – while recognising the national relevance of our mission. The new name, brand, and website signal our intent to lead a national effort to build a network of healthy cities, which in turn will help build a healthier nation.

At the core of our work is a simple truth: health is created where people live, work, learn, and play. That's why we are uniting and expanding the Healthy Cities network nationally, empowering local governments and communities to take bold, evidence-informed action. This rebrand has already begun to increase our visibility, strengthen partnerships, and amplify our collective voice for upstream solutions that tackle the social, environmental, and commercial determinants of health.

This year, we were proud to begin significant new projects that reflect both innovation and responsiveness to community needs. In partnership with Asthma Australia, we launched an initiative to create asthma-smart communities – a vital step in addressing respiratory health in a time of rising air quality challenges. With the NSW Environment Protection Authority, we have embarked on an ambitious program to advance food rescue and reduce food waste, building resilient and fairer local food systems. Alongside these new endeavours, we have continued to consolidate and grow our flagship programs – from Active In-Betweens to Cook Chill Chat, the Dinner Table Project, Play Illawarra, and Food Fairness Illawarra. Each program continues to deepen its impact, providing connection, skills, and healthier choices in the communities we serve.

Internationally, our voice is also growing stronger. In September 2024, I had the privilege of attending the Alliance for Healthy Cities Global Conference in Seoul, South Korea. More recently, in June 2025, I represented Healthy Cities Australia at the European Healthy Cities Network Business Meeting and Technical Conference in Bursa, Türkiye. These experiences were both inspiring and grounding. Across continents, cities are grappling with similar challenges: urbanisation, climate change, inequity, and disconnected health systems.



L to R – Estelle Grech, Committee for Sydney; Dr Kira Fortune, Regional Advisor Healthy Cities WHO Euro; Kelly Andrews, HCA; Prof Ilona Kickbusch, a founding thought leader of the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion and 'mother' of Healthy Cities; Dr Jinhee Kim, UNSW Cities Institute. Photo taken at the WHO European Healthy Cities Network Conference June 2025, Bursa, Türkiye.

“Cities that centre health in all policies, invest in co-design with communities, and treat urban planning as health planning are seeing real results.”



What stood out were the powerful examples of municipal leadership, cross-sector collaboration, and systems thinking – exactly the kind of approaches we are advancing here in Australia.

The key lesson? Cities that centre health in all policies, invest in co-design with communities, and treat urban planning as health planning are seeing real results. We can – and must – adapt these approaches locally, with Australian solutions shaped by Australian communities.

Looking ahead to 2025–26, our priorities are clear. We will focus on scaling the Healthy Cities network nationally, working closely with local governments to embed health in integrated planning and reporting frameworks. We will continue to strengthen partnerships and secure sustainable funding models that

allow our programs to flourish for decades to come. And importantly, we will build momentum towards 2026 – the 40th anniversary of the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion – a milestone that reaffirms the global principles of equity, participation, and intersectoral collaboration that underpin everything we do.

To our Board, staff, volunteers, funders, partners, and most importantly, our communities – thank you. Your commitment powers this movement. Together, we are transforming the way health is understood, created, and sustained.

As we step forward as Healthy Cities Australia, we carry our legacy with pride, while looking boldly to the future. Our movement is growing. The time is now.



Become a Member

Support Healthy Cities Australia's
work to build healthier, more
liveable communities.

By becoming a member, you'll join a transformational
social policy movement that drives improvements in
health, equity and community wellbeing.

