

THE RURAL CITY OF MURRAY BRIDGE

COMMUNITY WELLBEING STRATEGY

2026 - 2030



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TRADITIONAL OWNERS

We acknowledge the Ngarrindjeri people as the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet and work. We respect and acknowledge their spiritual connection as the custodians of this land and recognise that their cultural heritage beliefs remain important to Ngarrindjeri people today.

This Strategy recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander understandings of wellbeing are holistic, grounded in strong connections to Country, culture, community and family. There is much for Council and the broader community to learn from Ngarrindjeri ways of knowing and being, particularly around connection to place and people.

We recognise the living culture and combined energies of the Ngarrindjeri people, our global pioneers and community members today for their unique contribution to the life of our region.



Community members and organisations walking across the Murray Bridge to support NAIDOC Week
Image credit: Rural City of Murray Bridge

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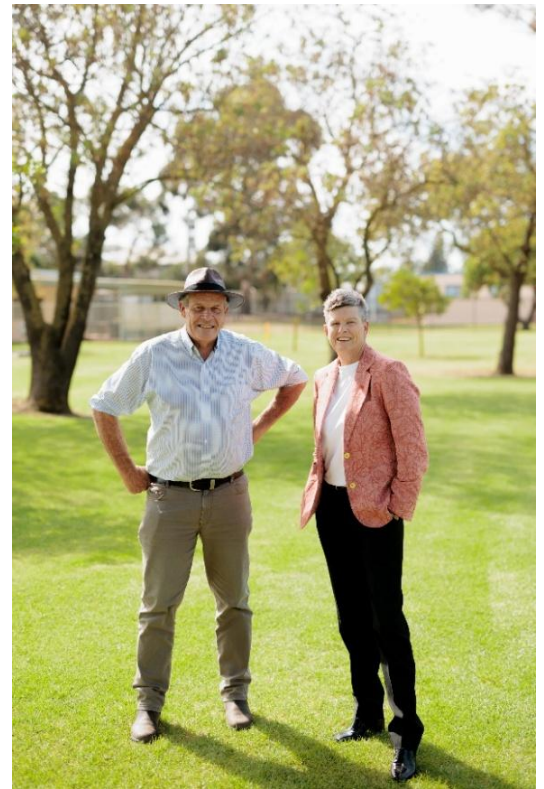
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MAYOR AND CEO MESSAGE

We are pleased to present the Rural City of Murray Bridge's first Community Wellbeing Strategy, a significant milestone that provides a clear roadmap for enhancing the wellbeing of our rural communities, townships and urban areas over the coming years.

Community wellbeing is at the heart of a thriving region. It influences how connected, safe and supported people feel, and shapes their ability to participate in community life, education, employment and recreation. By investing in wellbeing, we are investing in the long-term prosperity and resilience of our community.

The Community Wellbeing Strategy outlines a range of priority initiatives that will help create positive outcomes for current and future generations. These include embedding wellbeing principles into the urban design framework for growth areas, strengthening Council's financial and in-kind partnerships with key stakeholders such as the Murray Bridge Community Centre, reviewing the Community Grants Program to better align with wellbeing and sustainability objectives and improving the way information about support services is shared across our community.



Mayor Wayne Thorley and Chief Executive Officer Heather Barclay

There is a strong link between community wellbeing and economic prosperity. Communities that are connected, healthy and supported are better positioned to attract investment, create opportunities and achieve sustainable growth. This Strategy supports Council's vision of Thriving Communities by recognising that wellbeing is not only a social outcome but also a key driver of economic success.

As our region continues to grow, we must plan carefully to ensure that growth enhances quality of life while preserving the unique character and strengths of our communities. The decisions we make today will shape the experiences of future generations, making it essential that wellbeing remains a central consideration in our planning and decision-making.

This Strategy will guide how Council prioritises resources, works collaboratively with partners and fosters the relationships needed to deliver meaningful outcomes. It provides a framework for responding to immediate community needs while maintaining a long-term focus on creating a healthier, more connected and resilient region.

We look forward to working alongside community organisations, service providers, businesses and all levels of government to build on the strengths of our region and continue enhancing wellbeing across the Rural City of Murray Bridge.

WAYNE THORLEY
Mayor

HEATHER BARCLAY
Chief Executive Officer

Image credit: Jabba Photography



ABOUT THIS STRATEGY

The Community Wellbeing Strategy provides a roadmap for how we will help foster conditions that support the people who live, work and visit our communities to thrive. The Strategy builds on important work already done and currently underway. Over the past few years, we have:

- Worked with our partners to deliver the 2024 Wellbeing Summit
- Continued to support the Murray Bridge Wellbeing Hub and the Regional Preventive Health Partnership
- Adopted Council's first Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan 2026 – 2028
- Strengthened funding for community transport
- Enhanced our planning around Disability Access and Inclusion
- Commenced long term planning for growth as part of the Future City program.

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY WELLBEING

Community wellbeing is about how well people can live their lives in our communities, today and into the future.

It reflects whether people feel safe, healthy, connected and supported, and whether everyday conditions help or hinder that experience. Factors such as housing, income and work, education, social and cultural connections, neighbourhood design, and access to support during times of challenge all play a role.

Together, these shape people's physical and mental health, their sense of belonging, and their ability to participate in community life.

Additional definitions and frameworks on community wellbeing are provided in **Appendix A**.

OUR WELLBEING PRIORITIES

This Strategy focuses on where Council can make the greatest difference through our service delivery, policy, influence and partnerships.

Our Wellbeing Priorities for 2026 - 2030 are:

1. Places and spaces
2. Housing and basic needs
3. Resilient and capable communities
4. Connection and inclusion
5. Safety and support.



Bee Bygrave, Gabrielle Mackenzie and Nelly Rawcliffe from Genuine Support Services Australia (GSSA) taking part in the All in Afternoon event

Image credit: GSSA Fresh Perspective Photography

OUR WELLBEING PRINCIPLES

We apply a wellbeing lens across all of Council's roles, services and areas of influence. We do that with the following principles in mind:

1. Grounded in Country

We respect and learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives on wellbeing, recognising connection to Country, culture, community and truth-telling, and supporting self-determination.

2. People-centred and strengths-based

We put people at the centre of our wellbeing work, building on the strengths, assets and connections that already exist in and between our diverse urban and rural communities. We recognise that wellbeing looks different for different people and cultures, and value lived experience, identity and local knowledge as key community strengths.

3. Individual and community-led

We support people and communities to shape decisions that affect their wellbeing, ensuring space for many voices, cultures and lived experiences in decision-making. We enable choice, support access to information, and foster community-led solutions wherever possible.

4. Holistic and place-based

We consider wellbeing across social, economic, environmental, cultural factors, and recognise the impact that our built and natural environment has on our health.

5. Preventive and long-term

We focus on prevention and early action to improve long-term wellbeing and reduce the need for crisis responses over time.

6. Evidence-informed and accountable

We use data, research and local insight to understand what works, target effort where it can have the greatest impact, and track progress over time.

7. Practical and achievable

We focus on actions that are realistic and achievable, within Council's control and influence, and work in partnership with communities, organisations and other levels of government to support shared wellbeing outcomes.

OUR ROLES IN WELLBEING

Council influences wellbeing in many ways, from how we build infrastructure and plan new suburbs, to how we work directly with individuals and community groups and speak up for what our communities need. Council is uniquely placed to act early and at the ‘whole of community’ scale.

Role	What this looks like in practice
Service Provider and Asset Manager 	We deliver and look after services and facilities that support daily life in our rural and built-up communities. This includes parks and open spaces, community buildings like the Library, The Station (Youth Hub), and support for services like the Wellbeing Hub hosted by the Murray Bridge Community Centre, English classes at the Murraylands Migrant Resource Centre and Foodbank.
Planner and Regulator 	We plan and set rules to guide development in our existing and growing communities and make places safe, inclusive and easy to access. This includes planning for walking and cycling, protecting open space, and putting key plans in place like the Regional Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan, our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan and our commitment to the SA Multicultural Charter.
Enabler 	We help people and groups build their skills and confidence to sustainably improve wellbeing. This includes volunteering programs, community grants for youth and environmental projects, and seed funding - so local clubs and community members can grow ideas and represent the community.
Connector and Facilitator 	As the level of government closest to the community, we work to bring people, organisations and ideas together to improve wellbeing. This happens through our relationships with community, health and other service providers, schools, businesses and other levels of government. As well as engaging in local networks and forums, coordinating place-based responses and supporting shared projects.
Advocate 	We speak up for our community to influence decisions and investment from other levels of government and key agencies. We use local evidence and feedback to push for better housing, transport, health services and infrastructure where there are local service gaps and to improve community outcomes.

WHY THIS STRATEGY MATTERS

Our communities are experiencing real and ongoing change. Transport, housing, physical and mental health, and access to services all shape people's everyday lives and their sense of wellbeing. In recent years, our communities have also faced cost-of-living pressures, droughts and floods, and the ongoing effects of COVID-19 all while continuing to show strong local resilience, care and connection.

This Community Wellbeing Strategy matters because it provides a clear direction for how Council can strengthen what is already working well and respond more effectively to what matters most to our community.

It will help Council to:

- Target effort and investment where it can make the greatest positive difference to community wellbeing
- Enable and support community-led action, recognising the knowledge, skills and leadership that already exist locally
- Embed wellbeing as a shared responsibility across Council - guiding decisions, planning and service delivery
- Connect effectively with community leaders and partner organisations
- Help realise our ambitions for economic growth to translate to better quality of life, in line with our Economic Development and Growth Strategy 2026 - 2030
- Advocate more strongly and consistently to State and Federal Government and other decision-makers on community priorities.

The Strategy directly responds to the aspirations in our Community Plan and Strategic Plan. The priorities will inform Council's decision making through its Annual Business Plan and Budget, and Long-Term Financial Planning. These priorities will also inform plans and actions in several areas, including community services, economic development, open space and community safety.

Planning hierarchy



Planning influences



Appendix B provides further commentary on the economic case for investing in community wellbeing.

Image credit: Jacob Jennings Photography



COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

Current population
~23,000

Future population
~40,000 by 2040

>11,000 jobs

- we work in health care and social assistance, retail trade, manufacturing and agriculture, forestry and fishing

>24%
of community are volunteers
- well above the SA average of 20%

Between 2009 and 2024, there was a decline in childhood development across all Australian Early Development Census domains

Median Age
43 years old

Household type
Couples with children 22%
Couples without children 27%
One parent families 12%
Lone person households 30%

~23% of residents experience psychological distress, higher than the SA average (20%)

Higher rates of obesity (~44%) compared with SA averages of ~32%

70% of Murray Bridge residents rate their health as good or better, compared with 76% across SA

5.6% of our community are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people

13% of our community were born overseas
Top 5 birth places (other than Australia) are the UK, Philippines, China, New Zealand and Vietnam.



Image credit: Jacob Jennings Photography



OUR COMMUNITIES

FROM SUMMIT TO THE STRATEGY

The directions and priorities set out in this Strategy are grounded in extensive stakeholder engagement and a strong evidence and policy base.

Engagement undertaken through the December 2024 Wellbeing Summit, activities at the Murray Bridge Community Centre, and workshops with Council Members, the Community Advisory Committee and Council staff during the first half of 2026 has shaped this Strategy.

The 2024 Wellbeing Summit brought together over 50 local service providers, community members, and representatives from Local and State Government to collaborate on better understanding the wellbeing needs and opportunities faced by communities in the region.

This local insight has been considered alongside a wide range of national, state and regional policies, plans and evidence relating to community wellbeing and public health¹.

This engagement and policy context has been distilled into five key drivers for change. The full detail on these drivers, stakeholder engagement findings, policy alignment and supporting evidence is provided in **Appendix C**.



Image: Day 1 of the 2024 Wellbeing Summit at the Murraylands Skills Centre, Murray Bridge.

Image credit: Rural City of Murray Bridge

¹ Key references include: National Preventive Health Strategy 2021–2030, Australian Government (Department of Health and Aged Care); SA Health, *State Public Health Plan 2019–2024* and *Draft State Public Health Plan 2025*; Preventive Health SA & LGA SA, *Preventive Health and Community Wellbeing Resource Guide for Local Government* (2024); Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), *Social Determinants of Health*; *Determinants of Health for First Nations People*.

Image credit: Jacob Jennings Photography



OUR WELLBEING PRIORITIES

PRIORITY ONE – PLACES AND SPACES

Desired Outcome

People can access safe, welcoming and inclusive places and spaces that foster health, connection and everyday wellbeing.

Our Successes

Council already plays a central role in shaping, managing and promoting many of the places that support wellbeing across the region. This includes managing a wide range of parks, reserves, playgrounds, and open spaces, maintaining community facilities, and investing in trails, shared paths and sporting fields and buildings that support different types of sport, movement and social connection.

Through planning and policy work, we influence the quality, location and design of new development, including how neighbourhoods are built and connect to existing services, open spaces, trails and other movement networks.

We have made recent investments in key community spaces and placemaking initiatives that bring people together, alongside ongoing maintenance and upgrade programs that improve accessibility, safety and usability. As examples:

Sturt Reserve and Wharf Precinct – Council invested in key community spaces through the Sturt Reserve Masterplan, including delivery of the War Memorial in partnership with the RSL, the Wharf Precinct works and replacement of the Lower Timber Wharf, supported by a combination of Council and Federal Government funding.



Image credit: Mark Pearson

Pondi Playspace – A culturally-led playspace project designed in partnership with Ngarrindjeri Ruwe Empowered Communities (NREC), creating a play experience grounded in culture and connection to Country.

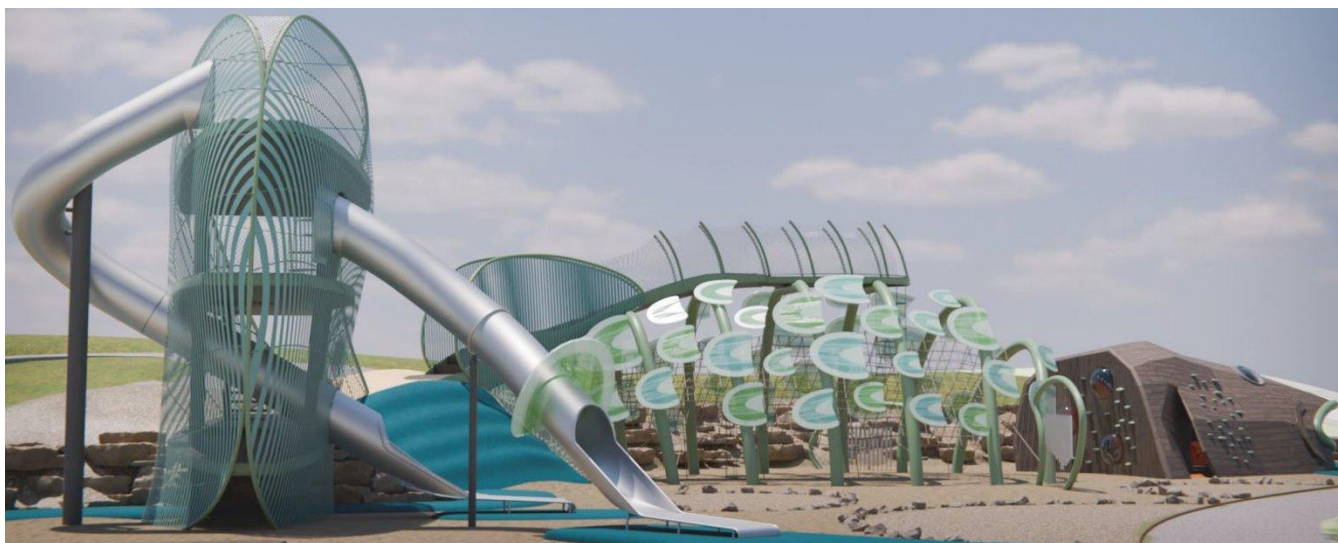


Image credit: Wax Design

Italian Monument – Council project-managed the delivery of a community-funded gift from the Murray Bridge and Districts Italian Association Inc., honouring the legacy and lasting contributions of Italian migrants to the Murraylands and the life of our region.



Image credit: Rural City of Murray Bridge

Our Future Opportunities

The next phase of work is about being more deliberate and consistent in how places and spaces are planned, delivered and managed to support wellbeing.

Through its roles in land-use planning, asset management, public realm design, maintenance and place activation, Council can influence the conditions that shape daily life for the whole community, and ensure that places are not only functional, but actively support health, connection, safety and pride.

While Council already invests significantly in public spaces and other infrastructure across all of its townships and communities, community feedback has highlighted that even small, everyday design and maintenance decisions can strongly influence how often places are used and who feels safe and welcome.

Population growth and change make this particularly important. Decisions made now will shape wellbeing outcomes for decades. Without an explicit focus on inclusion, accessibility and connection, growth can unintentionally reduce opportunities for social interaction, movement and everyday physical activity. This is why it is important that we carefully plan and think about these connections, the design of streets, parks and reserves, and how we sustainably care for these new neighbourhoods.

A changing climate presents unique challenges and opportunities. A hotter and drier climate will impact different groups of people in different ways. The way in which we design and maintain our built and natural environments will play an increasingly important role in people's wellbeing. At a practical level, Council will need to think differently around what types of trees and landscapes we plant and where we plant them, considering more cooler spaces people may need at different stages of life.



Image credit: Drone photo of the Murray Bridge and Railway Bridge.

Priority One focuses on where Council's effort can have the greatest long-term return: embedding wellbeing into routine decisions, guiding growth in a way that supports healthy everyday living, and progressively improving the quality and inclusiveness of the places people use most.

Our Commitment

We will plan, design, manage and maintain places that work for everyone by embedding a wellbeing lens into built and natural environment decisions, investing in accessible and connected spaces, and activating places to support participation and community pride.

Catalyst Projects

To demonstrate our commitment, over the next five years, we will invest in:

1. Urban Design Framework informed by Wellbeing Principles

We will ensure that the Urban Design Framework and associated guidelines for growth areas developed in 2026–27 are informed by the principles and commitments within this Wellbeing Strategy, alongside established best practice guidance such as the Heart Foundation's [Healthy Active by Design](#) and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles.

2. Open Space for Wellbeing

Through implementing our Open Space Strategy, we will seek increased greening and tree canopy cover and consideration of edible landscapes in public spaces, streets and townships to improve comfort, climate resilience and the everyday liveability of neighbourhoods.



The multi award winning Murray Bridge Wellbeing Hub - Walking Netball Program
Image credit: The Murray Bridge Wellbeing Hub

PRIORITY TWO – HOUSING AND BASIC NEEDS

Desired Outcome

People can meet their everyday needs locally - including housing, food, transport, energy, and access to essential support - fostering stability, dignity and wellbeing.

Our Successes

Council already contributes to meeting basic needs through a combination of planning, service delivery, partnerships and advocacy. Through land-use planning and development assessment, we influence the supply, diversity and location of housing, including how new neighbourhoods connect to transport, employment, education, medical support and other services.

We work closely with community organisations and service providers to support access to food relief, emergency support, financial counselling and other essential services, including through community facilities, grants, partnerships and information sharing. Council also plays a role in helping to promote essential services (particularly for people sourcing services for the first time).

We recognise the impact of the rising cost-of-living and we support people experiencing financial stress through hardship and concession arrangements, including the Companion Card affiliation. These measures aim to assist those who need it most, while maintaining the revenue needed to deliver Council services that benefit the whole community.

The ability to confidently, safely, and independently use digital technologies are a necessity for modern life, and a key driver of wellbeing.

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index measures digital inclusion across three core areas: access, affordability and digital ability.

The latest index score for the Rural City of Murray Bridge is 65.8, representing a gap of -5.5 when compared with the rest of SA.

Source: RCMB Australian Digital Inclusion Index, ADII Score Comparison, SA by LGA (2025), Available: <https://dashboard.digitalinclusionindex.org.au/National.aspx#>



Spring Garden Competition Winners, the Murray Bridge Community Centre with their raised garden beds

Image credit: Murray Bridge Community Centre

Our Future Opportunities

Meeting basic needs is foundational to wellbeing, yet increasing cost-of-living pressures, housing stress and access challenges mean this area remains a priority for action.

Engagement clearly showed that when people struggle to meet everyday needs, such as having a roof over their head, paying energy bills or knowing where to turn for help, the impacts are felt quickly across physical and mental health, family stability and participation in community life.

Our region needs to increase its supply of affordable housing, as well as crisis and transitional accommodation. On transport, there is a need for improved public transport that connects people from all parts our district to services and opportunities in larger townships, and Adelaide. Access to reliable and affordable transport is often a key determinant as to whether people can age in place.

While we cannot resolve these challenges alone, we know that Council has an important role in shaping the conditions that either ease or compound pressure.

We consider that our greatest opportunity lies in being more deliberate and coordinated in how we use our influence. Through planning and advocacy, we can “speak up” on behalf of the region and help to shape housing and transport outcomes by consistently elevating wellbeing considerations in discussions with State and Commonwealth Governments and other partners.

Through partnerships, place-based projects and making it easier for the community to find the information to access the support they need, we can help improve the visibility, accessibility and coordination of essential supports.

There is also an opportunity to ensure Council’s own systems, including hardship policies, fees, concessions and access arrangements, are fair, transparent and easy to navigate. This is particularly important for people experiencing stress or who are otherwise marginalised (for example, people with low levels of literacy). Small improvements in clarity and accessibility can make a meaningful difference for people at the point they need support most.

This priority recognises that Council’s role is not to replace service systems, but to help reduce barriers, strengthen coordination and advocate for outcomes that support stability and dignity across the community.

Our Commitment

We will use our planning, coordination and advocacy roles to support improved access to housing, transport and everyday necessities, reduce barriers where possible, and work with partners to improve stability, visibility and access to essential supports for people experiencing life’s pressures.

Catalyst Projects

To demonstrate our commitment, over the next five years, we will invest in:

3. Advocacy for housing and transport

We will ensure Council's advocacy agenda with State and Commonwealth Government and key partners consistently includes major wellbeing issues facing the community, including housing supply, crisis accommodation, homelessness services, public transport within/across our communities (including to outer townships), and connections to Adelaide.

4. Food access and security

We will facilitate the development of an investment case exploring options, costs, benefits and delivery models for food access initiatives, in collaboration with local and regional partners.

5. Fair and accessible hardship support

We will review and strengthen Council's hardship policies and access processes to ensure support is easy to understand, accessible to those who need it most, and aligned with the principles of the Wellbeing Strategy.



The Rotary Club of Mobilong cooking breakfast at an Australia Day event

Image credit: McMahon Images

PRIORITY THREE – RESILIENT AND CAPABLE COMMUNITIES

Desired Outcome

People are supported to live active and fulfilling lives, and to build the skills, confidence and resilience needed to adapt and thrive over time.

Our Successes

We support resilience and capability across our existing rural and urban communities through our community services, community development and engagement functions. Through programs, events, grants, volunteering initiatives and partnerships, we create opportunities for participation, learning, connection and personal development.

Council delivers and supports a range of community activities that promote physical activity, mental health and wellbeing and social participation, including targeted initiatives for young people, older people, people living with disability, children and families, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and people experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence. These efforts help people stay connected, build confidence and maintain wellbeing through different stages of life. As examples:

Partnership with Murray Bridge Community Centre – the Centre plays a central role in delivering wellbeing-focused programs and services. Following the establishment of the Wellbeing Hub in 2023, which was a joint partnership between Council, the Murray Bridge Community Centre Inc. and Preventive Health SA, Council's financial and in-kind support helps enable a wide range of place-based initiatives that strengthen community connection and provide support close to where people live.

Quarterly Wellbeing Hub Calendar – this calendar keeps the community informed about free or cost-effective programs available through the Wellbeing Hub and regional partners. This resource continues to be an effective communication tool, helping to increase community awareness and participation in a range of wellbeing activities. This is distributed electronically and in print.

Easy Moves for Active Ageing Group – a program that is all about keeping older adults moving, strong, and balanced while having fun along the way. Participants not only boost their fitness and mobility but also enjoy a friendly space to meet new people, share a laugh, and stay connected with the community.

Walking Netball - members increase their fitness and mobility through modified rules, whilst enjoying a friendly space to meet new people, share a laugh, and stay connected with the community (Image - Page 18).



headspace Murray Bridge, iREACH, Murraylands Community Men's Shed, Murray Bridge Community Centre, Wellbeing Hub, and Council celebrating the installation of a Chatty Bench in 2025.

Image credit: headspace Murray Bridge

Our Future Opportunities

Building resilient and capable communities requires ongoing and deliberate investment, particularly as our existing communities change, and our population and grows.

At the 2021 Census, 24% of the Rural City of Murray Bridge's population reported to being a volunteer – well above statewide averages of 20%.

Source: Public Health Information Development Unit, "Social Health Atlas of Australia, South Australia, Data by Local Government Area (2021 ASGS)," Available: <https://phidu.torrens.edu.au/social-health-atlases/data#social-health-atlases-of-australia-local-go...>

Our engagement to date has highlighted strong demand for programs and activities that support physical activity, mental health and wellbeing, skill development and social participation. At the same time, people spoke about increasing pressures related to stress, mental health and life transitions, reinforcing the importance of early, preventive and community-based approaches that support people before challenges escalate.

We are well placed to strengthen our impact and effectiveness in this area by focusing on sustained capability rather than one-off initiatives. This includes investing in evidence-based wellbeing, resilience and leadership programs, using these programs to foster skill development and workforce participation, and providing practical support to volunteers and community leaders (including with volunteer attraction, retention and succession planning).

There is also an opportunity to strengthening existing relationships with Council's partners, and forming new alliances to improve coordination, long-term planning and sustainability of leadership and resilience initiatives. Stronger collaboration can help reduce duplication, scale and improve visibility of successful opportunities, and ensure community effort is supported in the most effective way.

Our Commitment

We will help to foster resilient and capable communities by delivering and supporting community programs and events, building wellbeing leadership and enabling participation in community life through grants and volunteering opportunities and pathways. We will work with local and key partners to support people to live active, connected and fulfilling lives.

Catalyst Projects

To demonstrate our commitment, over the next five years, we will invest in:

6. Partnerships to drive community resilience

Strengthen and evolve Council's existing financial and in-kind partnership with the Murray Bridge Community Centre Inc. to explore how increased and more coordinated support could improve the efficiency, sustainability and long-term impact of wellbeing outcomes.

7. Leadership and resilience programs

Repeat, expand and/or scale up evidence-based programs that build community leadership and resilience (such as Spark and Tall Trees), with a focus on sustained skill development and capability rather than one-off engagement.

PRIORITY FOUR – CONNECTION AND INCLUSION

Desired Outcome

People feel connected, included and able to participate in community life, with a strong sense of belonging to our towns and rural communities.

Our Successes

We play a role in fostering connection and inclusion through both policy commitments and everyday practice. Plans and frameworks such as the Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan 2026 -2028, Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2025 - 2029, Volunteer Strategy 2025 -2026 and Youth Action Plan 2022 - 2027 provide a strong foundation for inclusive decision-making and action across Council.

We also actively engage with committees and networks such as our Community Advisory Committee, the Ability Action Group and the Murraylands Disability Alliance to support effective coordination with others doing valuable work that builds connection and inclusion.

Through community development, events, grants, volunteering opportunities and engagement activities, we help create regular opportunities for people to connect, participate and contribute to community life. Council-supported events and place-based activities bring people together across different ages, cultures and interests, while volunteering programs help build connection, purpose and local leadership.

We also support inclusion by enabling participation in the local economy through economic development initiatives (like the Murraylands Skills Centre and Study Hub), place-based activation and partnerships with local businesses and organisations. Support for community-led organisations including sporting clubs, cultural groups, neighbourhood groups and volunteer-run organisations helps strengthen connection at the grassroots level and builds social fabric across the community.

Residents of the Rural City of Murray Bridge most frequently reported age (18.0%), disability or health issues (14.6%) as the reason for experiencing discrimination or unfair treatment. These responses broadly reflected the experiences of South Australians overall.

Source: Social and Community Wellbeing in the Rural City of Murray Bridge, Preventive Health SA 2019 - 2025 p.9 This is captured via Population Health Survey Module System Survey & has been prepared for us by PHSA epidemiology team upon request.

Our Future Opportunities

As our communities grow and diversify, there is a need to be more intentional about how opportunities for participation are designed, communicated and supported.

Consultation to date highlighted that while many activities and opportunities exist, barriers related to confidence, accessibility, culture, language, transport, cost and digital access can still limit participation for some people. Overcoming these barriers means not only providing activities but also making spaces inviting and participation easier.

We have an opportunity to invest in the capability and sustainability of our community organisations, clubs and volunteer groups, and make it easier for residents to initiate local, informal activities that build trust and familiarity at a neighbourhood level. Doing so can increase and improve opportunities for our community to connect without Council delivering more services.

The lands and waters of the River Murray, or *Murrundi*², presents a unique wellbeing asset for our communities, and one that can deepen connection to place. Supporting safe access to the river has the potential to contribute to a range of positive physical health, mental wellbeing, social and cultural connection and volunteer participation outcomes.

There is also an opportunity to ensure Council's systems, including grants, approvals and engagement processes, actively support inclusion by being clear, proportionate and accessible. Small changes can have a significant impact on participation, particularly for groups with limited capacity.

Our Commitment

We will strengthen connection and inclusion by creating opportunities for people to lead, connect and participate, reducing barriers to involvement, celebrating diversity, and working with communities and partners to build a welcoming, inclusive and cohesive region.

Catalyst Projects

To demonstrate our commitment, over the next five years, we will invest in:

8. Community organisations and clubs

Expand the current governance, leadership and sustainability support provided to a broader range of community-led organisations, cultural groups and sporting clubs.

9. Reshape community grants for connection

Review Council's community grants program to align more closely with Wellbeing Strategy principles and priorities; and explore mechanisms that provide greater funding certainty for activities that support inclusion and connection.

10. Making local connection easier

Identify and remove unnecessary barriers to resident-led, place-based activities (such as street parties, street libraries and township/neighbourhood events) to support informal local connection.

11. What matters to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

Facilitate genuine engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through encouraging representation on the Wellbeing Alliance (Item 15 on page 30). This will provide a strengthened voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the community, and with service providers, contributing to culturally safe and inclusive community planning and practices.

This aligns with Priority Reform One of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making - which promotes genuine engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

² [Department for Environment and Water - Traditional Owners of the SA](#)

12. Connecting with our River Murray (*Murrundi*)

Exploring opportunities for place-based community and cultural connection initiatives associated with the River Murray (*Murrundi*).



River Murray (*Murrundi*) at sunset

Image credit: Rural City of Murray Bridge

PRIORITY FIVE – SAFETY AND SUPPORT

Desired Outcome

People feel safe and supported in their everyday lives, with access to early help that reduces harm and supports wellbeing.

Our Successes

We contribute to safety and wellbeing through a range of place-based, preventive and enabling actions that focus on respect, inclusion and early support.

Through policies and frameworks that promote inclusive and respectful environments, we set expectations for cultural safety, dignity and fair treatment across Council services and facilities.

Our partnerships with community organisations, service providers, response organisations like South Australia Police (SAPOL) and other government agencies help support coordinated responses to local wellbeing and safety issues, particularly where early support can prevent escalation. Council also plays a role in increasing access to trusted, non-clinical community settings where people can seek information, connection and support without stigma.

Our Future Opportunities

Feeling safe is not only about physical environments, it is also about feeling recognised, respected and able to seek help without fear or judgement. Consultation highlighted the importance of cultural safety, trust and belonging, as well as concern about accessing support early when people are experiencing stress, distress or vulnerability.

Many of the factors that affect wellbeing and safety, such as domestic, family and sexual violence, racism and discrimination, mental health distress, substance misuse, gambling, and social isolation, are complex and sit across multiple systems. While we do not deliver crisis or specialist services, Council plays a critical role in shaping the local conditions that influence whether people seek help early or delay seeking help until challenges escalate.

We have an opportunity to strengthen preventive, place-based approaches that focus on early support, visibility of services and trusted points of access. Improving how information about supports is shared, and ensuring it is culturally appropriate, easy to navigate, can help remove stigma and reduce barriers to help-seeking.

There is also an opportunity to further strengthen local partnerships focused on prevention, cultural safety and early intervention. By working closely with service providers, SAPOL and community organisations, we can help foster coordinated, respectful responses that prioritise wellbeing and reduce reliance on crisis-driven systems. CCTV plays a role in improving perceived and actual safety outcomes.

A vast majority of respondents from the Rural City of Murray Bridge felt that their neighbourhood is a safe place at least most of the time (83.2%), including 37.6% of residents who felt this way all of the time.

A small number of Rural City of Murray Bridge residents (4.6%) reported feeling their neighbourhood was safe none of the time, which was higher than South Australia overall (2.1%).

Source: Social and Community Wellbeing in the Rural City of Murray Bridge, Preventive Health SA 2019 - 2025 p.8. This is captured via Population Health Survey Module System Survey & has been prepared for us by PHSA epidemiology team upon request.

Finally, Council has an important role to play in strengthening its advocacy to support improved support services, including in the areas of domestic, family and sexual violence, and provision of mental health services in our area.

Our Commitment

We will support safety and wellbeing by strengthening place-based prevention and early support approaches, improving access to information and culturally safe supports, and working in partnership with SAPOL, service providers and community organisations to reduce harm and support people early.

Catalyst Projects

To demonstrate our commitment, over the next five years, we will invest in:

13. Safety and wellbeing partnerships

Strengthen place-based coordination with SAPOL, service providers and community organisations to support respectful, preventive and early intervention responses to local wellbeing and safety issues, including targeted provision of CCTV.

14. Improve visibility of services

Improve awareness of, and access to information about support services shared through Council sites, facilities, programs and partners. This could happen through tools such as a service directory, the [Here if You Need Card](#), the [SA Community website](#), the [Murray Mallee Services Directory](#) and other accessible formats, to help people access help earlier and with greater confidence.



The Blue Tree Project Team (Murray Bridge Wellbeing Hub, Silent Ripples, Council and Murray Bridge Suicide Prevention Network) celebrating the installation of the second blue tree for the region at Sturt Reserve, Murray Bridge.

Image credit: Murray Bridge Wellbeing Hub

Image credit: GSSA Fresh Perspective Photography



CROSS CUTTING PRIORITIES

Achieving the Principles, Outcomes and Commitments in this Strategy requires more than individual projects or service responses. It also depends on the systems, partnerships and capabilities that enable Council and the community to work together effectively over time.

Council will invest in the following cross-cutting activities and projects to enable action across the Strategy:

15. Establish a Murray Bridge Wellbeing Alliance

Establish and coordinate a Wellbeing Alliance, with Council as the backbone organisation, to support information sharing, coordination and collective action among key safety, health and wellbeing partners across the region.

16. Leverage commercial and event partnerships

Explore opportunities to leverage Council's commercial relationships and event sponsorships to support priority wellbeing outcomes, amplify impact and contribute to longer-term, systemic change. Local businesses already sponsor Council events, but Council could do more to create opportunities for investment in community programs and other activities that contribute to wellbeing.

17. Community wellbeing advocacy priorities

Prepare and maintain a concise, evidence-based set of Community Wellbeing Advocacy Priorities to guide consistent and coordinated engagement with State and Commonwealth Government, other decision-makers and key service providers.

18. Build organisational capability for inclusion

Identify and deliver targeted training for staff and Council Members to strengthen cultural safety and competence, inclusive practice and effective engagement with diverse communities. This includes considering the benefits of formal accreditation through initiatives such as [Welcoming Cities](#) and [Racism Stops With Me](#).

19. Strengthen regional wellbeing collaboration

Continue active participation in regional wellbeing initiatives, including working with the Murraylands Riverland Local Government Association on the Regional Public Health & Wellbeing Plan, the Regional Preventive Health Partnership and, where possible, neighbouring Councils to address shared challenges and opportunities that extend beyond Council boundaries.

Advocacy Priorities

Our communities' advocacy priorities are always evolving. At the time of writing, Council is actively advocating for:

- *Housing that supports a diverse demographic*
- *Homelessness and emergency housing support*
- *Equitable public transport within the Rural City of Murray Bridge, and to Adelaide*
- *Trade and technical learning opportunities, aligned with the secondary school system*
- *Planning for the hospital and health services needs of growing communities*

Source: Rural City of Murray Bridge 2025-



Image credit: GSSA Fresh Perspective Photography

DELIVERING THIS STRATEGY

Our progress will be captured and promoted in the Council's Annual Report, along with regular updates to our Community Advisory Committee and the Wellbeing Alliance.

We will deliver the Strategy through a combination of regular resourcing and once-off project funding, allocated through Council's Long Term Financial Plan and Annual Business Plan and Budget processes.

We will continue to seek external funding to support wellbeing initiatives and support our partners with their funding advocacy efforts.

The Strategy will be evaluated throughout its final year (2029/2030 FY) to determine Council's future direction thereafter.



David Scrimshaw and Mayor Thorley at the All In Afternoon event in 2025
Image credit: GSSA Fresh Perspective Photography

Image credit: University of Newcastle



APPENDICIES

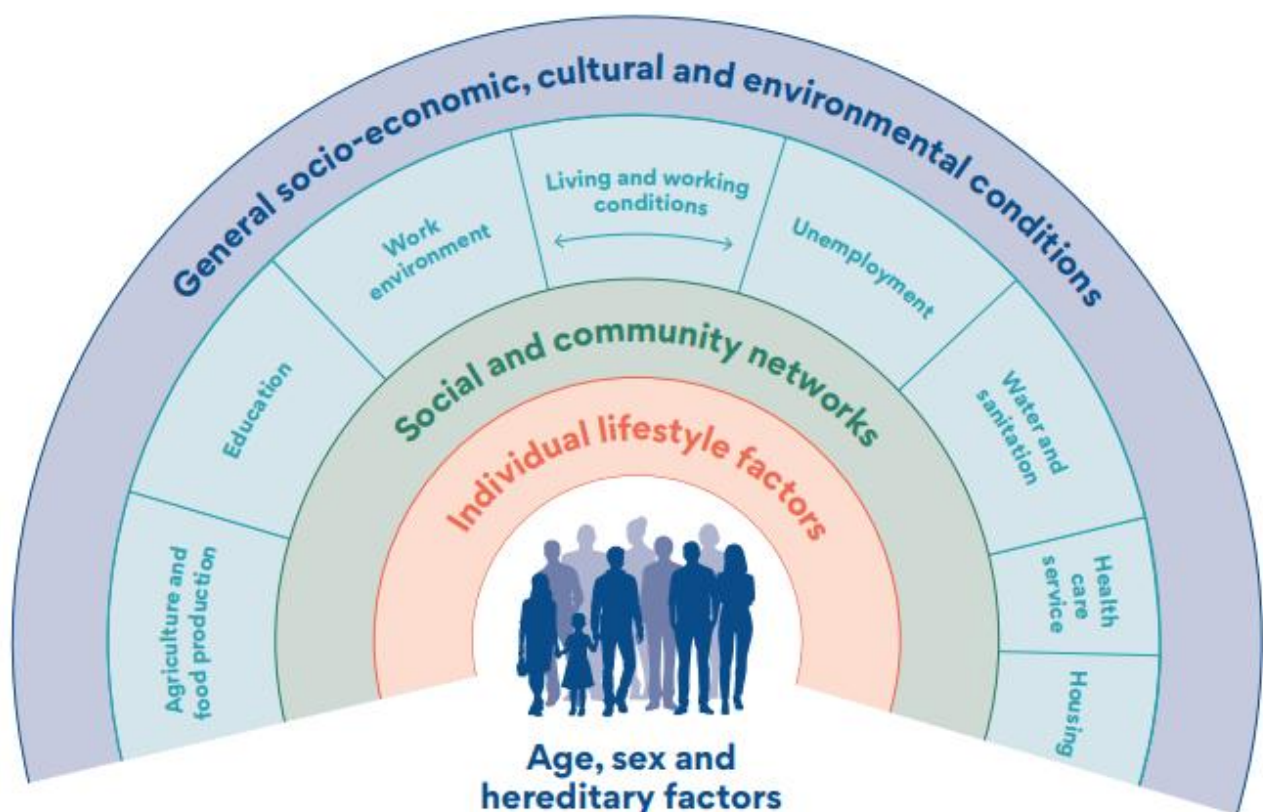
APPENDIX A: DEFINING COMMUNITY WELLBEING

Community wellbeing is about the conditions that help people in our communities live well, now and into the future. It reflects how people experience their lives day-to-day, whether they feel supported and connected, and whether our town is a place where individuals, families and communities can thrive.

Wellbeing isn't shaped by a single factor. It is influenced by social, economic, environmental and cultural conditions, as well as people's physical, mental and emotional health. It is closely linked to people's sense of belonging, their connection to place and nature, and their ability to participate in community life, education and work.

Everyone plays a role in community wellbeing. It is shaped by the actions of individuals and families, community organisations, businesses, service providers and all levels of government. This Strategy recognises wellbeing as a shared responsibility and focuses on where Council can make the most difference through its services, decisions and partnerships.

The Strategy also recognises the strong connection between wellbeing and health. In particular, it highlights the importance of the social and cultural factors that influence health and wellbeing outcomes for our community, such as access to suitable housing, employment, education, income, social connection and the places where people live, work and spend time.



Social Determinants of Health.

Adapted from the Dahlgren - Whitehead model of the social determinants of health (1991), developed for the World Health Organization.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, wellbeing is shaped by strong connections to Country, culture, family, community and spirituality, alongside social, historical and political factors.



Cultural Determinants of Health.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives on Social and Emotional Wellbeing, adapted from Gee et al.,(2014)

APPENDIX B: THE ECONOMIC CASE FOR INVESTING IN WELLBEING

Investing in community wellbeing is not only a social imperative, but also a sound economic strategy.

Good health and wellbeing are closely linked to economic participation and income security, while poor wellbeing contributes to avoidable healthcare costs, reduced productivity and increased demand on public services.

National and international studies consistently show that preventive, population-wide investments, particularly those that address social and environmental determinants of health, deliver strong returns over time by reducing downstream costs and supporting long-term economic participation³.



This approach is increasingly reflected in economic policy frameworks. The Australian Government's Measuring What Matters Wellbeing Framework⁴ explicitly recognises that a prosperous economy depends on healthy, cohesive and inclusive communities, and that wellbeing outcomes such as health, housing security, social connection and access to opportunity are foundational to long-term economic performance.

Similarly, evidence supporting the National Preventive Health Strategy demonstrates that every dollar invested in prevention can return multiple dollars in economic and social benefit through avoided health costs and increased productivity⁵.

"Every \$1 invested in health promotion and illness prevention delivers \$14.30 in benefits"

CSIRO 2022, Our Future World: Global megatrends impacting the way we live over coming decades.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, improving wellbeing and economic participation is also central to Closing the Gap commitments, where secure employment and connection to community are recognised as key drivers of health, dignity and economic independence⁶.

³ Australian Prevention Partnership Centre, *What are the economic benefits of prevention?*; Productivity Commission estimates on productivity gains from improved health. <https://preventioncentre.org.au/about-prevention/what-are-the-economic-benefits-of-prevention/>

⁴ Australian Government (Treasury), *Measuring What Matters – Australia's Wellbeing Framework*. <https://treasury.gov.au/policy-topics/measuring-what-matters>

⁵ Australian Government, *National Preventive Health Strategy 2021–2030*. <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-preventive-health-strategy-2021-2030?language=en>

⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Closing the Gap targets: Economic participation* <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/indigenous-australians/closing-the-gap-targets-key-findings-implications/contents/economic-participation>

APPENDIX C: ENGAGEMENT AND POLICY DRIVERS

The directions and priorities set out in this Strategy are grounded in extensive stakeholder engagement and a strong evidence and policy base.

Engagement undertaken through the December 2024 Wellbeing Summit, activities at the Murray Bridge Community Centre, the establishment of the Murray Bridge Wellbeing Hub with Preventive Health SA and workshops with Council Members, the Community Advisory Committee and Council staff during the first half of 2026 has shaped this Strategy.

This local insight has been considered alongside a wide range of national, state and regional policies, plans and evidence relating to community wellbeing and public health.

This engagement and policy context has been distilled into five key drivers for change.

Driver 1: Strong connections are foundational to wellbeing

Across different engagement activities, people consistently spoke about the importance of connection - to other people, to place and to community life. Feeling welcome, having opportunities to come together, and being able to participate locally were seen as central to wellbeing at all ages, particularly for people experiencing isolation or major life transitions.

This strong emphasis on connection aligns with clear evidence that social connection, belonging and participation are critical protective factors for health and wellbeing across the life course and are central to both state and national public health strategies focused on prevention and equity.

Driver 2: Places and environments strongly shape wellbeing outcomes

Many of our community members highlighted the role of safe, accessible, green and welcoming places in our urban and rural communities in supporting wellbeing. Public spaces, community facilities, halls, ovals, neighbourhoods and movement networks were consistently linked to people's sense of safety, connection, physical activity and quality of life.

This reflects a strong policy and evidence focus on the role of the built and natural environment in shaping population health, particularly through place-based planning, active transport, access to green space and inclusive design. Put simply, governments widely recognise that when the community has access to places that are safe, tree-filled, pleasant and easy to move in, communities walk, ride and play more. Councils are widely recognised as having a key influence in these areas.

Driver 3: Wellbeing depends on getting the basics right

Participants spoke clearly about the importance of everyday essentials, including secure housing, transport, access to services, food and support during times of pressure. Cost-of-living stress, particularly energy and fuel costs, housing security and access to timely help, were seen as factors that can quickly undermine wellbeing, especially for people already experiencing disadvantage.

We know from research that social and economic conditions are among the strongest drivers of health and wellbeing outcomes. Put simply, if people can't afford the basics in life like safe housing, good quality food and to travel for work or medical support, they can't improve their wellbeing. Evidence shows that if we can address these broader "causes of the causes" then we can effectively prevent poor wellbeing outcomes.

Driver 4: Councils play an important role, but cannot do it all

Across engagement activities there was a strong expectation that Council should focus on what it does best. People recognised that Council cannot and should not deliver everything directly, but highlighted Council's influence in shaping places, coordinating effort, reducing barriers and supporting community-led initiatives, while continuing to deliver everyday Council services that make a tangible difference to quality of life.

There was also clear support for Council's advocacy role by working with other levels of government and organisations to "speak up" on behalf of the region, attract services, funding and investment where gaps exist. This aligns with well-established public health approaches that emphasise local government's role in enabling "systems-level" or whole-of-community change rather than delivering individual services.

Driver 5: Prevention and population-wide levers deliver the greatest impact

Participants acknowledged the constraints Council operates within, including limited resources, growing demand and the need to balance immediate pressures with longer-term wellbeing outcomes.

There was broad support for Council focusing on prevention, early action and population-wide levers that can shift wellbeing outcomes over time, while recognising that other organisations and levels of government are better placed to provide intensive or specialist support for people with more complex needs.

This approach is strongly supported by national and state prevention strategies, which consistently emphasise acting early, addressing root causes and investing where the greatest long-term impact can be achieved.

PROJECT TEAM ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This Community Wellbeing Strategy was delivered through a strategic partnership between, the Rural City of Murray Bridge, BRM Advisory - Strategic Management Consultants and the Murraylands Preventive Health Partnership.

This unique partnership approach has enabled:

1. The co-design of both the Project Management methodology and the co-delivery of the Strategy between all project partners,
2. Meaningful internal capacity building - ensuring knowledge, skills and ownership were developed throughout the project and through the development of the Strategy- upskilling and embedding the learning within the organisation, and
3. An ongoing conversation with the community - by working closely together with all project partners, the Strategy has been shaped by the voices of our communities over multiple years. It is ground on local data and insights aligns with organisational priorities.

The Rural City of Murray Bridge acknowledges and sincerely thanks all staff and leaders and all project partners who contributed their time, expertise and commitment to the development of this Strategy.



Image credit: Commshake



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