



BELLINGEN
SHIRE COUNCIL

Ageing Well Strategy

2024 - 2028





Acknowledgement of Country

Council acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land, the Gumbaynggirr people, who have cared for this land since time immemorial. We pay our respects to their elders, past, present and emerging, and commit ourselves to a future with reconciliation and renewal at its heart.

The Gumbaynggirr Community Vision

A place where there is genuine respect for the land and the original people of this country. A place where the ancestors' way of holding country is recognised. A place where there is respect for custodial people who carry this tradition today and for Elders and the children of the future. A place where we all walk together, where we can all be here in harmony with the land and all life. The land around here has a great capacity to do that, to heal... in a way that's not separating.







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About this strategy

This strategy has been informed through research into State and Federal Government policies on ageing, national and international best practice, and consultation with the Bellingen Shire community.

Our vision

Our vision is a community where ageing members can lead active rewarding lives – as valued members of the community – and are able to make decisions that support their independence and wellbeing later in life.

Who are our older residents?

Older people living in the Bellingen Shire have contributed for many decades – through their workplaces, their families and more broadly through their communities and networks. Their contribution often continues well into their retirement as they may work as much needed casuals or part-time workers or volunteer to run committees and clubs, mind grandchildren or work as unpaid carers.

Definitions of *senior* differ, ranging from 60 to 65 and 50 for First Nations people, but despite these definitions, which seek to standardise, there is no “standard” older person.¹ Ageing is a unique and individual experience. Ageing is influenced by many factors from genetics to family upbringing, social experiences, past and current financial situations, housing, educational opportunities, culture, gender, and geography.

Depending on where a person is in their life course and the various factors that influence ageing, different aspects of ageing will be more prominent. What constitutes quality of life for an individual and gives them meaning will change in one’s 60s, 70s, 80s and over. The choice to participate as fully as one chooses, and is functionally able, in seeking to live a happy life, will change over the life course of an individual. The provision of opportunity in remaining engaged and connected is one that Councils can influence.

Policy and legislative context

Commonwealth, State and Local Government all have a role to play in supporting healthy ageing as we continue to experience a huge demographic shift towards ageing in Australia and worldwide. Between 2015 and 2050, the proportion of the world's population over 60 years will nearly double from 12% to 22%.² The pace of population ageing is much faster than in the past and it is acknowledged that the extent to which ageing individuals can benefit from their extra years depends heavily on one key factor: health.

¹ ABS defines senior as 65, the NSW Government Seniors Card as 60 and the Australian Institute of Health refers to older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as age 50 and over. *As of April 2024*

² **World Health Organization** (2022) 'Ageing and Health': <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/10-facts-on-ageing-and-health>. Accessed April 2024



International

- Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021-31

Australia has committed to a World Health Organization collaboration for a Decade of Healthy Aging (2021-2031), aiming to combat ageism, empower older individuals, improve healthcare, and ensure quality long-term care through the Healthy Ageing Collaborative.

National

- National Health Reform Agreement 2020 – 2025 (NHRA)

The NHRA is an agreement between the Australian Government and all state and territory governments committing to improving health outcomes for Australians and specifically highlights aged care as a priority. To enhance and streamline health services, 31 independent Primary Health Networks (PHNs) have been established nationwide. These PHNs customise services to community needs, with the goal of improving the coordination of health services and increasing access and quality support for people.

- Healthy North Coast

In our region, the PHN Healthy North Coast was established and appointed in 2015 to deliver the North Coast Primary Health Care Network program in collaboration with Mid North Coast and Northern NSW Local Health Districts to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of health services. Healthy North Coast have developed the Healthy Ageing Strategy 2023-27 with the vision: “People on the North Coast live well, age well, and have ongoing opportunities to contribute and stay connected to communities and Country”. The purpose of the Strategy is to improve population health outcomes and direct investment towards evidence-informed healthy ageing initiatives, as new funding, research or partnership opportunities arise.

New South Wales

- Ageing Well in NSW: Seniors Strategy 2021-2031

The NSW Government publishes action plans every two years to implement their Ageing Well in NSW: Seniors Strategy 2021-2031. It identifies which departments have carriage of actions. NSW Health has carriage of programs such as the Healthy Eating Active Living, the Get Healthy Information and Coaching Service (of whom over 45% of participants are over 45), the Active and Healthy Website, and the Stepping on Program for people aged 65 years and over (a falls prevention program).

- Ageing Well in NSW Action Plan 2023-24

The Ageing well in NSW Action Plan 2023-24 is the second Action Plan developed to support the Ageing Well in NSW: Seniors Strategy 2021-2031. Action 2 in Focus Area 1 of the Plan is to “Facilitate ongoing access and use by councils of the Integrated Age-Friendly Toolkit.” This kit was referred to in the development of the Bellingen Shire Ageing Well strategy.



Local Government

The Bellingen Shire Community Vision 2035 affirms that this community is one that values inclusivity. The vision calls for increased mobility and accessibility – for improving how we get around our Shire and gain access to quality services, vibrant places and inclusive events that contribute to our connectedness and sense of wellbeing. This Ageing Well Strategy supports the Community Vision 2035, highlighting the specific needs of the Shire’s dominant population cohort – the over 65s.

Definitions

Older Age: In this document, older age refers to those aged 65 years and over. For First Nations peoples, older age refers to 55 years and over. A baby boy born in Australia today is expected to live to 81.2 years and a girl to 85.3 years³, while for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males it is 71.9 years and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females 75.6 years⁴.

Ageing Well: The World Health Organization (WHO) defines “ageing well” as the health that comes from “a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”⁵, whilst acknowledging that some variations in older people’s health are a result of their genetic makeup. Healthy ageing is “the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables wellbeing (physical, social and mental) in older age.”⁶ This includes a person’s ability to:

- meet their basic needs
- learn, grow, and make decisions
- be mobile
- build and maintain relationships
- contribute to society

There is much diversity in older groups. Health comes from factors including genetics, culture, access to good food and nutrition, safe and affordable housing, safe neighbourhoods, reliable transport, as well as opportunities for knowledge attainment, social activities, and employment. A person’s past experiences of these together with their current situation regarding financial security, access to nutrition, physical capacity, quality of

³ ABS (2021) <https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/life-expectancy-hits-new-high>. Accessed April 2024

⁴ ABS (2020-2022) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-life-expectancy/latest-release>. Accessed April 2024

⁵ World Health Organization (2024) Frequently asked questions: <https://www.who.int/about/frequently-asked-questions>. Accessed April 2024

⁶ World Health Organization (2020) Healthy ageing and functional ability: <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/healthy-ageing-and-functional-ability>. Accessed April 2024



housing, social connectedness and how they think about their future will shape their ageing experience.⁷

Age-friendly: An age-friendly community is one that has an inclusive and accessible environment that “optimises opportunities for health, participation and security for all people, in order that quality of life and dignity are ensured as people age”⁸. An important aim of an Ageing Well Strategy is to take reasonable action to assist community members in maintaining independence (physical and social) and in preventing injury. The chart below depicts how in older age, a decline in functional capacity can shift into disability requiring rehabilitation.

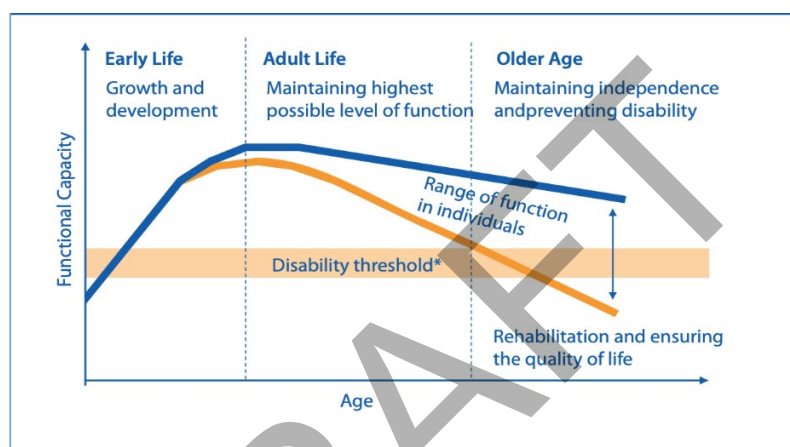


Figure 1 Age-friendly communities assisting individuals maintain independence and preventing injury⁹

Ageism: is defined by the Council of the Ageing (COTA)¹⁰ as discrimination based on age, without any evidence base, which is especially prejudicial and detrimental to the very old (often called “the elderly”). COTA maintains that ageist attitudes are operating wherever and whenever “No” is the answer to the following questions:

1. Are older people able to access and receive the services they need?
2. How appropriate are these services, and do they provide flexibility to meet individual differences?

⁷ World Health Organization (2022) Ageing and health: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ageing-and-health>. Accessed April 2024

⁸ World Health Organization (2015) Measuring the age-friendliness of cities: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241509695> p.3. Accessed April 2024

⁹ World Health Organization (2007) Global age-friendly cities: a guide. Part 2: Active Ageing: A Framework for Age-friendly Cities: <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/43755> p. 6. Accessed April 2024

¹⁰ COTA for Older Australians, Ageism and Discrimination: <https://www.cota.org.au/policy/ageism-and-discrimination/> Accessed April 2024



Purpose of the Strategy

The purpose of this Ageing Well Strategy is to respond to the unique challenges presented by Bellingen Shire’s population as it ages. Most pertinent is acknowledging the demographic urgency that the Shire is facing as its community ages, and the implications for policy and service responses this raises.

According to the 2021 Census data, 36% of the Bellingen Shire population was over 60 years of age compared to 29% regionally. The age group that grew the fastest in the Bellingen Shire between the 2016 and the 2021 census was the 70 – 84-year-old group (+339 people). Bellingen Shire has a larger proportion of its population aged over 85 years than regionally.

The chart below shows the service age group breakdown in the Bellingen Shire Local Government Area (LGA) compared to regional NSW. Service age group categories assist governments in planning the types of support services required for each group.

Bellingen Shire - Total persons (Usual residence)	2021			2016			Change 2016 to 2021
	Number	%	Regional NSW %	Number	%	Regional NSW %	
*Service age group (years)							
Babies and pre-schoolers (0 to 4)	542	4.1	5.5	605	4.8	5.8	-63
Primary schoolers (5 to 11)	1,119	8.4	8.6	1,126	8.9	8.9	-7
Secondary schoolers (12 to 17)	1,045	7.9	7.4	970	7.7	7.3	+75
Tertiary education and independence (18 to 24)	610	4.6	7.6	616	4.9	7.9	-6
Young workforce (25 to 34)	1,044	7.9	11.6	953	7.5	11.0	+91
Parents and homebuilders (35 to 49)	2,153	16.3	17.5	2,174	17.2	18.0	-21
Older workers and pre-retirees (50 to 59)	1,977	14.9	12.8	2,117	16.7	13.8	-140
Empty nesters and retirees (60 to 69)	2,358	17.8	13.3	2,075	16.4	13.1	+283
Seniors (70 to 84)	2,005	15.1	13.0	1,666	13.1	11.4	+339
Elderly aged (85 and over)	395	3.0	2.8	368	2.9	2.7	+27
Total	13,248	100.0	100.0	12,670	100.0	100.0	+578

Table 1 Age structure – service age groups¹¹ from <https://profile.id.com.au/bellingen/service-age-groups>

¹¹ *Service age groups divide the population into age categories that reflect typical life-stages. They indicate the level of demand for services that are required by people at different stages in life and how that demand is changing. With the Bellingen community now reflecting an increase in the oldest service categories an Ageing Well Strategy is vital. ABS data (2021) Bellingen Shire Total Persons by service groups



36% of the
Bellingen Shire
population is over
60 years of age
compared to 29%
regionally



On the
Seaboard 30.5%
of the
population are
aged 65 and
over

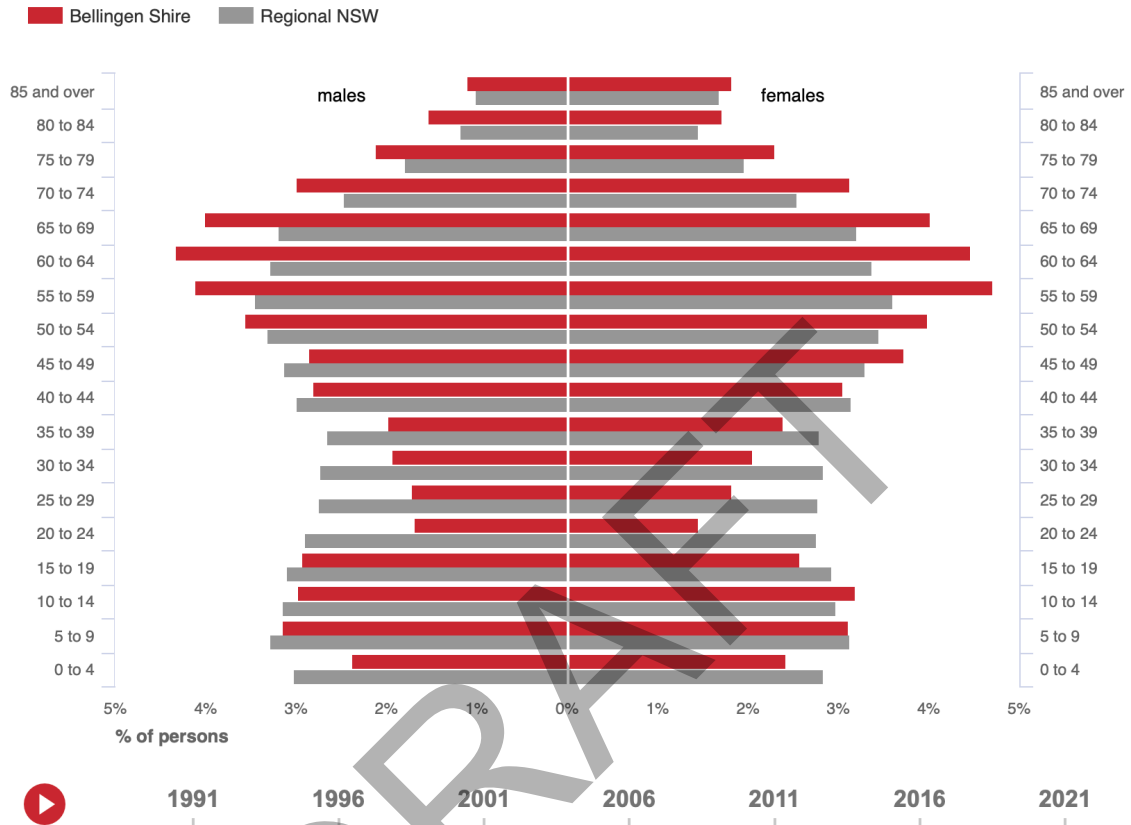
In the Bellingen
Valley 21.9% of
the population
are aged 65
years and over

On the Plateau
32.6 % of the
population are
aged 65 years
and over





The age-sex pyramid below graphically demonstrates how the age distribution by gender is presenting in the Bellingen Shire with the bulk of the population now 55 years of age and over. The 70 and over group is predominantly female.



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, selected years between 1991-2021 (Enumerated data). Compiled and presented in profile.id by .id (informed decisions).

Graph 1 Age-sex Pyramid from <https://profile.id.com.au/bellingen/age-sex-pyramid>

There are two reasons to support healthy ageing in the Bellingen Shire¹:

1. We are enjoying **longer lives**
2. We are seeking **quality of life**

Longer lives

Advances in health and in social and economic development are contributing to longer life expectancy. Between 2015 and 2050, the proportion of the world's population over 60 years will nearly double from 12% to 22%.¹² Similarly in the Bellingen LGA the size of ageing cohorts continues to rise with the bulk of the population now 55 years of age and over.

¹² World Health Organization (2022) Ageing and health: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ageing-and-health> Accessed April 2024



Quality of life

Good health adds life to years: “If people can experience these extra years of life in good health and if they live in a supportive environment, their ability to do the things they value will be of little different from that of a younger person. If these added years are dominated by declines in physical and mental capacity, the implications for older people and for society are more negative”¹³.

Consultation Results

Community consultation for the Ageing Well Strategy took place between June 2022 and February 2024 using surveys and focus groups with people aged 65 years and over, and with carers and professionals assisting older people living in the community. In total, 137 people aged over 65 years responded to a Quality of Life Survey; 14 carers and professionals responded to an Ageing Well Survey; 31 people attended three focus groups; and 10 people attended 3 feedback sessions held in Urunga, Bellingen and Dorrigo.

The consultation revealed community concern for three areas:

1. Liveability in an age-friendly community
2. Participating and connecting is important for older people’s wellbeing
3. Staying active is important for physical health as people age

¹³ World Health Organization (2002) Ageing and health: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ageing-and-health>. Accessed April 2024



What you told us about the three focus areas

Liveability in an age-friendly community

- **Dissatisfaction** with access to health services was revealed by 26% of older respondents
- **Difficulty** in accessing health services was reported by 19%
- Transport impacts way of life to a very difficult or fair degree for 29% of aged residents
- According to carers and professionals who support older people, the top issues are adequate transport to shops, services and facilities including health facilities, and improved footpaths and pathways to prevent falls and resultant injury
- Age-friendly housing solutions for ageing in place are needed
- Individual emergency management plans are required so that the needs of vulnerable older people are met before, during and after a disaster event

Participating and connecting

- Coordinated communication and information sharing about activities, events and services that are available to enrich and enhance quality of life is a top priority for seniors
- Activities and upcoming events would be more accessible if published in print (via newspaper inserts) and online (via council webpage) e.g., a regular newsletter
- Bus timetables and other transport options across the Shire should be better advertised
- Information sessions covering services and agencies available to assist mature age people could be sourced by a centralised officer within Council. This person could be responsible for compiling, updating, and promoting relevant information across the Shire
- Specialists could be invited to provide presentations on services available to assist people to continue living in their homes, and on other relevant topics.
- Centralised community notice boards could be positioned in prime locations in each major centre where information can be displayed by event organisers and community members

Staying active

- Conduct a program of ongoing focussed exercise and activities to assist seniors in maintaining their physical and social functionality and to prevent injuries and falls
- Intergenerational activities and partnering with clubs and other groups could be an avenue to encourage physical activity in older people
- Exercise providers who are funded for short periods are unable to offer the continuity and consistency of offerings that people require and respond to
- There was strong support from the focus groups for the role of the individual in taking an active role in the management of their health and wellbeing, and in prevention of injury reflecting the need for programs to be flexible.
- Access to local pools for exercise is difficult – ramps are needed in Dorrig and the side rails are not age-friendly
- Year-round heated pools would offer a strong preventative health activity for all age groups



Focus Area 1: Liveability in an Age-friendly Environment

Access was identified as a major concern for older people in the Bellingden Shire. Carers and professionals listed top priorities as adequate transport to shops, services and facilities including health facilities, and improved footpaths and pathways. Seniors, who completed the Quality-of-Life Survey, revealed that 26% are NOT satisfied with access to health services, and 19% found it difficult to very difficult to access health services.



What Council is doing

Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2022-2026

While ageing is not always accompanied by disability, there are often mobility and access concerns for older people that can be addressed in similar ways. Bellingden Council's Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2022-2026 (DIAP) was adopted by Council in June 2022 and two of the Plan's actions apply to needs raised by older community members.

These are:

- to improve footpaths and pathways so that they link key services and destinations, and
- to improve overall access to facilities as well as to the natural environment.



The following relevant actions are from the Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2022-2026¹⁴:

Improve footpaths that link key locations

- Incorporate access as a key feature of our infrastructure projects
- Review and progressively document accessibility of footpaths with available technology
- Investigate the possibility of new crossings that link key destinations in the Shire.

Improve access to Council facilities as well as the natural environment

- Conduct an accessibility audit on key Council facilities.
- Use universally accessible street furniture in open spaces and consider accessibility when designing
- Ensure disability is incorporated and considered in any works and maintenance schedules
- Investigate beach access mat at North Beach, Mylestom and advocate for accessibility improvements at Urunga Lido
- Continue to improve accessibility and inclusion refurbishment works and maintenance of nominated halls and reserves as funding becomes available
- Monitor adequacy of disability parking spaces at key destinations in the Shire

Dorrigo Support Centre

The Dorrigo Support Centre (the Centre) is located in Hickory House, a Council owned facility. The Service is funded by the Commonwealth Government to provide support generally to seniors over 65 years of age, and frail aged people and their carers. It aims to help people to remain living in their own home and living a lifestyle of their choice. It provides information, referral, advocacy, assistance with respite, and support for volunteers and carers.

The Centre offers social support and friendship, and centre-based activities (usually at Hickory House) such as bingo and other games, and fortnightly lunches. It also offers regular bus trips, short overnight stays and an annual seniors supported holiday. The Dorrigo Community Bus is used for transporting seniors to and from activities. The Dorrigo Community can rent the bus for activities e.g., school outings, football club games, youth group outings, etc.

Inclusive Tourism Strategy 2020 – 2025

Council's Inclusive Tourism Strategy embraces Universal Design which involves the design of buildings, outdoor places, information, and service delivery so everyone can have access and participate. The benefits are for everyone including people with a disability, older people, parents with young children and workers who deliver goods and services.

¹⁴ Bellingen Shire Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2022-2026 p. 19:
<https://www.bellingen.nsw.gov.au/Community/Community-Support/People-with-Disability/Disability-Inclusion-Action-Planning>



In the Inclusive Tourism Strategy, Council concentrates on the experience of people with a disability, the challenges of ageing and the people they travel with. Making the tourism experience inclusive for this group means the whole community, locals and visitors, benefit.

Bellingden Shire Local Housing Strategy 2020-2040

Ageing in place is supported by Council’s Local Housing Strategy, adopted in 2020. It commits to aiming for at least 50% of new homes built between 2020 and 2040 to be of diverse housing types and sees a Shire which includes homes that “cater for a wide range of people and households, including for all incomes, people with a disability, and for our ageing population”.¹⁵

Development proposed within Bellingden Shire must be consistent with the goals and objectives of the North Coast Regional Plan’s Growth Management Strategy (GMS). Action 23.1 of the North Coast Regional Plan has set a target for Council to approve a minimum of 40% of new housing to be diverse – including granny flats, dual occupancy (attached and detached), multi dwelling (townhouses, villas, and terraces) and residential blocks of flats. Council aims to **exceed** this with a commitment to aim for 50%.



Figure 2 The types of diverse housing that Bellingden Council aims to approve that will support Ageing in Place. Source: Bellingden Shire Local Housing Strategy 2020-2040 p.15

¹⁵ Bellingden Shire Local Housing Strategy 2020-2040: <https://www.bellingden.nsw.gov.au/files/sharedassets/public/v/1/files/planning/housing/bellingden-shire-local-housing-strategy-2020-2040.pdf>



Emergency preparation, response, and recovery for vulnerable older people

An age-friendly Shire considers the needs of the most vulnerable during times of disaster and emergency, which includes its older community members. Council was awarded the Resilient Australia Local Government Award in 2022 for leading the drive to bring together a local group of community members to focus efforts in areas of clinical support, community preparedness and resilience, information, and business support through the formation of the Pandemic Response Group. This group successfully campaigned for a COVID-19 testing centre and implemented initiatives across the community to ensure vulnerable people were supported.

Another example of council's work to support at risk individuals in times of emergency is the establishment of the Neighbourhood Care Network (NCN) in March 2020. The NCN, comprised of volunteers, coordinates, maintains communication, and passes on accurate information facilitating connections with and between people needing support during emergency events across the Shire. It is based around volunteer coordinators living in localities and precincts across the Shire and connects them by mapping the location of members using interactive mapping. Text messages are sent to the whole membership or to an identified selection depending on the nature and location of the emergency event. It was active during the COVID-19 pandemic and during the 2021 and 2022 extreme weather events. It is also set up to react and mobilise when local emergency events occur.

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Case Study – caring for vulnerable community members

During the COVID-19 pandemic across 2020 and 2021, the Neighbourhood Care Network (NCN) was aware of the need for support to isolated older people across the region. This is an example of one way the NCN activated assistance to older and vulnerable people. The NCN partnered with local businesses to ensure delivery of food and medical items to those who were isolated or anxious about being in public.

FREE NEXT DAY DELIVERIES DORRIGO PLATEAU

For self isolating older and COVID vulnerable people

Customer orders and pays business direct

Volunteers make no contact deliveries

Dorrigo Butcher - 6657 2033
Dorrigo Plateau Pharmacy - 6657 2005
Dorrigo Bakery - 6657 2159
Sunshine on Hickory - 0429 547 738
Plus other Dorrigo businesses who are
delivering themselves

Shop local. Stay connected



What can older people, their families and the community do?

- Plan early for ageing in place, and maintaining health and wellness into senior years
- Seek information on available services and agencies to assist with ageing in place
- Join local community groups who assist in times of disaster such as Red Cross, Rotary, Lion's Club, County Women's Association, or Landcare
- Connect with neighbours to carpool and share the travel burden
- Check in with your neighbours on a regular basis
- Participate in Council consultations and requests for feedback



Focus Area 2: Participating and connecting

Social participation is enormously important for older people's health and wellbeing with benefits for the community more broadly. Results from the three Shire wide focus groups indicated the importance of encouraging and supporting social participation, if the Bellingen Shire is to be age-friendly. This can take many forms such as participating in social, physical, and educational activities; volunteering; unpaid family caring; and paid employment. Several studies have shown that social participation by older adults promotes feelings of connectedness and improves mental and physical health.¹⁶ One study showed that people who are lonely and with reduced levels of contact with social networks have an increased risk of cognitive decline and dementia.¹⁷

Relevant statistics relating to the increase in dementia cases because we are living longer reveal that:¹⁸

- By the year 2036 almost 78% of persons with dementia in Australia will be aged 75 years and above increasing to 80% by 2056
- Dementia has been identified as one of the major reasons why older people enter residential aged care or seek assistance from community care programmes within Australia

Social engagement is a proven protective measure against dementia, as is physical activity.



¹⁶ Department of Health and Human Services (2016) Healthy ageing literature review. p.113: <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/publications/healthy-ageing-literature-review> Accessed April 2024

¹⁷ Department of Health and Human Services (2016) Healthy ageing literature review. p.113: <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/publications/healthy-ageing-literature-review> Accessed April 2024

¹⁸ Australian Institute for Intergenerational Practice: <https://aiip.net.au/resources/facts-figures/> Accessed April 2024



What Council is doing

- Council libraries regularly offer assistance to seniors for improving capability in using digital resources. For example, between 2022 to 2024 Council libraries offered, in conjunction with TAFE, a course entitled: “Bring your own Device”. In 2021 the libraries hosted Youngster.Co where young people assisted older library users to improve their digital expertise.
- The three Council libraries host a Vintage Film Club for seniors, to encourage connection and socialising in the recovery period following COVID-19 and beyond.
- The Dorrigo Support Centre distributes a monthly newsletter to older residents on the Dorrigo Plateau outlining what activities are happening for seniors throughout the month.
- Council’s Community Partnerships Team runs events and activities as part of its annual Seniors Festival programming.

What can older people, their families and the community do?

- Seek out ways to remain connected and to socialise
- Improve digital skills to increase ease of access to online information
- Volunteer to support local clubs and committees - this also helps develop community connections
- Seek out ways to “give back” to increase a sense of purpose in life
- Understand six lifestyle risk factors contribute extensively to dementia:
 - being overweight including obesity, physical inactivity,
 - tobacco smoking,
 - high blood
 - pressure in midlife,
 - high blood plasma glucose levels, and
 - impaired kidney function¹⁹

¹⁹ Dementia in Australia (2024): <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/dementia/dementia-in-aus/contents/summary#Treatment> Accessed April 2024



Focus Area 3: Staying Active

As the Shire's population is ageing, with the over 70-years age group the most rapidly increasing cohort, physical activity is an area requiring significant intervention. It has been found that people can receive health benefits even if they become physically active later in life. That physical activity can also maintain or improve brain health, lowering the risk of cognitive decline and the onset of dementia²⁰. However, while regular physical activity is essential for healthy ageing, older adults are the least physically active of any age group²¹.

A 2014, longitudinal study on ageing stated that "across the developed regions of the world, inactivity ranks alongside tobacco, alcohol and obesity as a leading cause of reduced healthy life expectancy". Furthermore, inactivity has significant effects on strength, flexibility, aerobic capacity, walking capacity, balance, and mental and cognitive decline. Maintaining one's physical functioning into older age is a most important factor underpinning the option of ageing in place.

²⁰ Hamer, M., Lavoie, K. L. and Bacon, S. L. (2014) 'Taking up physical activity in later life and healthy ageing: the English longitudinal study of ageing', *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 48(3), 239-243.

²¹ Department of Health and Human Services (2016) Healthy ageing literature review. Final report to the Department of Health, and Human Services © State of Victoria October 2016 p. 40



What Council is doing

- Twice yearly, Council promotes its Community Support Fund, a small grant program that aims to support local community activities that achieve broad community benefit. Open to not-for-profit organisations and registered charities, eligible projects and activities might include programs for seniors or youth or small infrastructure projects or equipment to support community activities. Council also administers other community funding at times from other levels of government. See the example in the case study below.
- Council promotes recreational activity using its parks, playgrounds, and sports fields, swimming pools, museums, beaches, and waterways. Increasingly, Council is working towards creating accessible facilities.
- Council produces the [Bellinghen Shire Mobility Map](#) for each of the townships which provides valuable information on disabled parking, the location of toilets, how to acquire MLAK keys for accessible toilets at any time, and the locations of other services such as accessible pathways, curb ramps and public seating.
- Council produced the Inclusive Tourism Guide which features significant tourist locations across the Shire and describes the accessibility arrangements at each.
- Council promotes services offered by Bellinghen Shire Libraries - large print, dyslexic print, e-books, e-audio books, e-magazines, iPads, and Plextor Daisy Players for loan. A hearing loop is available at the Urunga branch.
- Council has a Community Information Centre in Bellinghen.



Case Study – Keeping physically and socially active in Dorrigo

The Dorrigo Community Centre Hall committee was awarded a grant in 2021 through the Bushfire Disaster Recovery Fund administered by the Council. Two indoor bowls mats and equipment were purchased so that the committee could offer indoor bowls as an ongoing physical activity at the hall. As well as offering physical activity it promotes social connection among a group of 8 – 10 people who participate in the indoor bowls session each week. It is an age-friendly activity that promotes balance, coordination, strength, and movement.



Figure 3 Indoor bowls at the Dorrigo Community Centre Hall

What can older people, their families and the community do?

- Increase individual responsibility for the management of their own health and wellbeing
- Research the connection between dementia and physical exercise
- Participate in online nutritional and activity programs
- Join a group that is active: e.g., walking group, bird watching, indoor bowls, ballroom dancing, bush regeneration, Latin dance, bush biking, aqua aerobics
- Embark on a quit smoking program
- Groups such as U3A run information sessions on topics relevant to maintaining healthy, active ageing²²

²² *The University of the Third Age (U3A) is one of the most popular educational models for older people across the world. An evaluation of the U3As in the Australian context came from a study with 627 members of two U3As in Melbourne (Box Hill and Frankston U3As) and 55 presidents of U3As in Victoria. The survey with the U3A members found that most respondents reported intellectual, mental, social, and physical improvement because of U3A participation.

Hebestreit, L. K. (2006) *An evaluation of the role of the University of the Third Age in the provision of lifelong learning*. Unpublished thesis. University of South Africa.



Actions

The following Actions outline what Bellingen Shire Council is committed to achieving over the next four years across the three key focus areas. These are actions that Bellingen Shire Council has control or influence over, and which look to be achievable with available resources and within the timeframe of the Strategy being 2024-2028.

Some of the actions are about continuing what we already do, and some are about implementing new ideas. Some actions will not require additional budget, while others will need additional funding with moneys allocated through Council’s annual budget where possible. However, sometimes it will be necessary to apply for external funding, which is not guaranteed.

Focus Area 1: Liveability in an Age-friendly Environment	
Objectives	<i>Strengthen the age-friendliness of our Shire</i>
	<i>Improve accessibility – toilets, footpaths, public buildings, signage</i>
	<i>Provide staff training that enhances knowledge and creates positive attitudes towards older residents</i>
Actions	Establish a reference group of older members of the community to assist with consultation on topics such as transport needs, footpath maintenance, bike paths, in home care needs, impact of dementia in the Shire, parking, information and communication sharing, and their aspirations for an age-friendly Shire
	Advocate for and support initiatives for sustainable health care and aged care facilities that will evolve and grow to meet the changing needs of the Bellingen community
	Undertake an audit of street signage indicating accessible features and services
	Investigate replacing current signs were practical with larger signage using universal symbols that are easier to read
	Increase visibility of ageing in Council's communications
	Council will remain committed to providing flexibility for employees ageing in the workplace through flexible work arrangements, transition to retirement and continue to review policies
	Investigate challenges experienced by ageing residents during disaster events and ensure their needs are included in Council Disaster management plans and are aligned with local emergency responses
	Aspire to introduce and progressively implement dementia friendly infrastructure - such as contrasting colours on steps and walkways, clear and adequate signage, sufficient lighting
	Continue to advocate to State and Federal agencies to support affordable and diverse housing options that are suitable for ageing residents.



	Use universally accessible street furniture in open spaces and consider accessibility when designing all open spaces, including providing seating, shade covers and shade trees
	Progressively improve town gardens to provide pleasant, attractive places for older residents to enjoy walking, sitting, and meeting by maintaining and clearing vegetation
	Continue to identify opportunities to undertake accessible amenity upgrades in the various townships
	Continue to include access as a key requirement of our infrastructure projects.
	Review and progressively document accessibility of footpaths regarding removing trip hazards, actioning maintenance requests as required
	Investigate the possibility of new crossings that link key destinations in the townships
	Keep signs to accessible features clean and clear of debris to ensure visibility and incorporate this work into the annual works schedule.
	Review, update and maintain information about accessible toilets on the National Public Toilet Map
	Improve signage that shows the location of accessible toilets in the Shire
	Continue to update and review the Council mobility map as features and changes occur
	Promote and develop brochures that inform the broader community about accessibility including for example: availability of disability parking spaces that some older residents elect not to drive or are medically assessed as no longer able to drive
	Given the overlap between frailty and disability, include reference to the issues of older people when delivering disability awareness training for all staff (e.g., older people's mobility and access, risk of serious injury from falls)
	Provide staff training on the impact of unconscious bias when interacting with older residents or when interviewing mature age people for jobs on Council
	Provide dementia training for staff especially in customer service positions

Focus Area 2: Participating and Connecting

Objectives	<i>Promote the availability of accessible features in our Shire</i> <i>Facilitate and Support Connection</i>
Actions	Promote the Master Locksmiths Access Key (MLAK) system for toilets in National Parks, the beach wheelchair, pool hoists, hearing loops, Daisy Player, Sensory Friendly kits. Ensure a flexible, respectful, and sensitive approach underpins how these features are offered to users
	Promote and support community transport services delivered to our community
	Develop a seniors directory that lists what activities, organisations, programs are available to seniors



	Interact with local groups and clubs to facilitate programs and campaigns that focus on information, support, and activities for ageing residents
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Focus Area 3: Staying Active

Objectives	Encourage community use of accessible features in our Shire Facilitate activities that appeal to older residents
Actions	Continue to promote and improve “accessible tourism” featuring places and spaces that are accessible for example: Griffiths Lookout, Dangar Falls, Urunga wetlands
	Advocate to Crown Land for accessibility improvements at Urunga Lido
	Improve swimming pool access rails at Dorrigo Pool so that entering and exiting the water is made easier for older residents
	Continue to monitor the adequacy of disability parking spaces especially near frequently used facilities such as pools, libraries, banks, parks and gardens, shopping centres and chemists
	Improve mobility accessibility on refurbishment works and maintenance of nominated halls and reserves as funding becomes available
	Continue supporting ongoing events and activities for older residents

Delivering the Strategy

The actions in this Strategy will be integrated into Council’s four-year Delivery Program and one-year Operational Plan. This means that the Ageing Well Strategy will be positioned as a part of the organisation’s core business by being embedded into Council’s four-year Planning and Reporting cycle (see figure 1 below). This positioning of the Strategy will ensure that elected members and Council staff, at every level, consider inclusion of the needs of ageing residents in their daily delivery of services.



Figure 1 Planning and reporting framework.
Source: Bellingen Shire Council Our Community Vision 2035. p 17.

Document Governance Information

Document Management Information

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Strategic Alignment

Community Vision 2035 Objective	2 Community Wellbeing 2.4 We are connected, safe and healthy with a strong sense of community
Community Vision 2035 Objective	3 Places For People 3.4 We have the facilities and services needed to be a healthy and active community
Strategy	3.4.4 Healthy lifestyles and practices are enhanced
Community Vision 2035 Objective	3 Places For People 3.4 We have the facilities and services needed to be a healthy and active community
Strategy	3.4.2 There is a holistic approach to health
Community Vision 2035 Objective	3 Places For People 3.4 We have the facilities and services needed to be a healthy and active community
Strategy	3.4.1 Health care options and facilities are enhances across the Shire including birthing, palliative and aged care support