

CREEDUCATION

How socially connected are we?

And why we should care

CREEDUCATION PUBLICATION
DECEMBER 2025

C R
E D





Photo credit: Fancy Boy Photography for CRED Consulting

CRED CONSULTING ACKNOWLEDGES THE TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS OF THE LANDS ON WHICH WE LIVE AND OPERATE.

We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians, Ancestors, and Elders past, present, and emerging. Our team is proud to live, learn and thrive in the place we now call Australia. We recognise that sovereignty was never ceded. Always was, Always Will Be Aboriginal Land. As embedded in our values, we are committed to building connected, healthy, and resilient communities and creating purposeful outcomes that reflect our deep appreciation for the peoples and cultures that make us who we are and shape where we are going - together as one.

Cover Photo Credit:
Fancy Boy Photography for CRED Consulting

This report is protected by copyright. All rights are reserved by CRED Community Pty Ltd T/A CRED Consulting. (ABN 57 620 957 815).

SOCIAL CONNECTION MATTERS.

Being connected to each other, our neighbourhoods, institutions and the decisions that impact us, is fundamental to our individual and collective wellbeing, safety, and quality of life.

In an era of rising social isolation, declining trust in government, increasing disasters, and polarisation between groups, understanding the strength of our social connections, and the kinds of places, spaces and services we value, has never been more critical. This report explores:

How connected are we to each other?



How connected are we to places, spaces, and services?



How connected are we to the decisions that impact us?

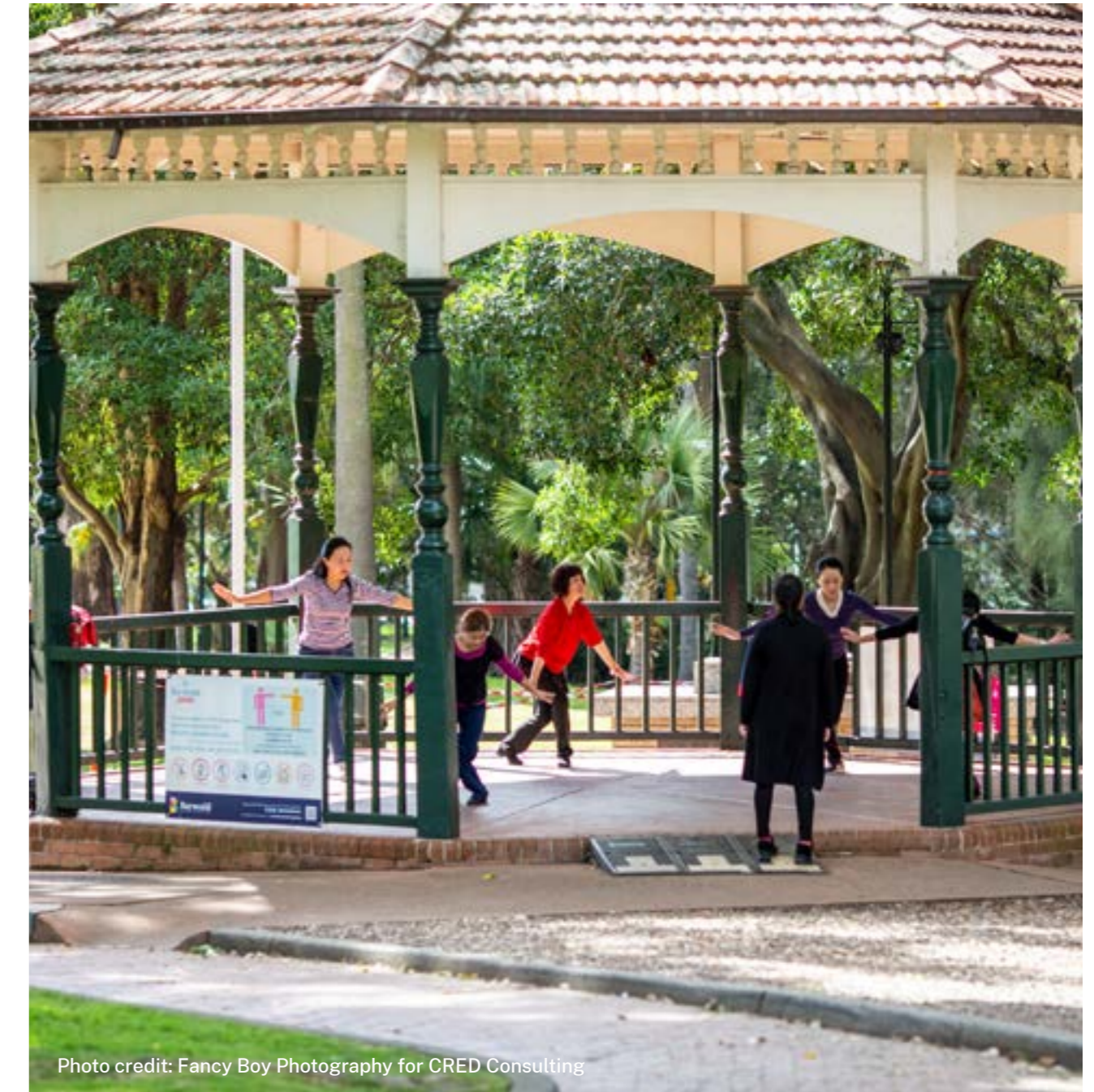


Photo credit: Fancy Boy Photography for CRED Consulting

SO, WE'VE BEEN RESEARCHING HOW CONNECTED WE ARE.


As industry leaders in social research, and community resilience planning, we know firsthand that social cohesion is foundational to strong, healthy and resilient communities.

In 2021, we surveyed (in partnership with our friends at Micromex Research) 1,000 people across NSW's diverse regions, backgrounds and housing typologies to see how connected people were feeling post COVID. [You can read that report here.](#)

In 2024, after a few more years of global shifts, we partnered with Micromex again and replicated the survey with 1,000 NSW residents, and added in 1,000 residents from Queensland and Victoria for comparison. (And yes, we found changes and differences.)


We know that people's sense of social cohesion is declining in many parts of the world. The Resilient Sydney Strategy 2025-2030 highlights that declining social cohesion can exacerbate inequities, increase conflict, and impact both physical and mental health outcomes across communities.

Read on to discover what our research found.



**BUILDING SOCIAL COHESION
A RESOURCE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT**
2022

CRED partnered with the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet and Resilient Sydney to create Building social cohesion: a resource for local government. A first-of-its-kind guide shaped through co-design with more than 100 councils across NSW and designed to support them to strengthen social cohesion in their local communities.



Scan the QR code to find out more!



HOW SOCIALLY CONNECTED ARE WE? WHAT DO WE NEED TO FEEL CONNECTED?
2021

CRED partnered with Micromex Research to survey 1,000 people across NSW to find out how connected people feel to their local areas – and what matters to them most.



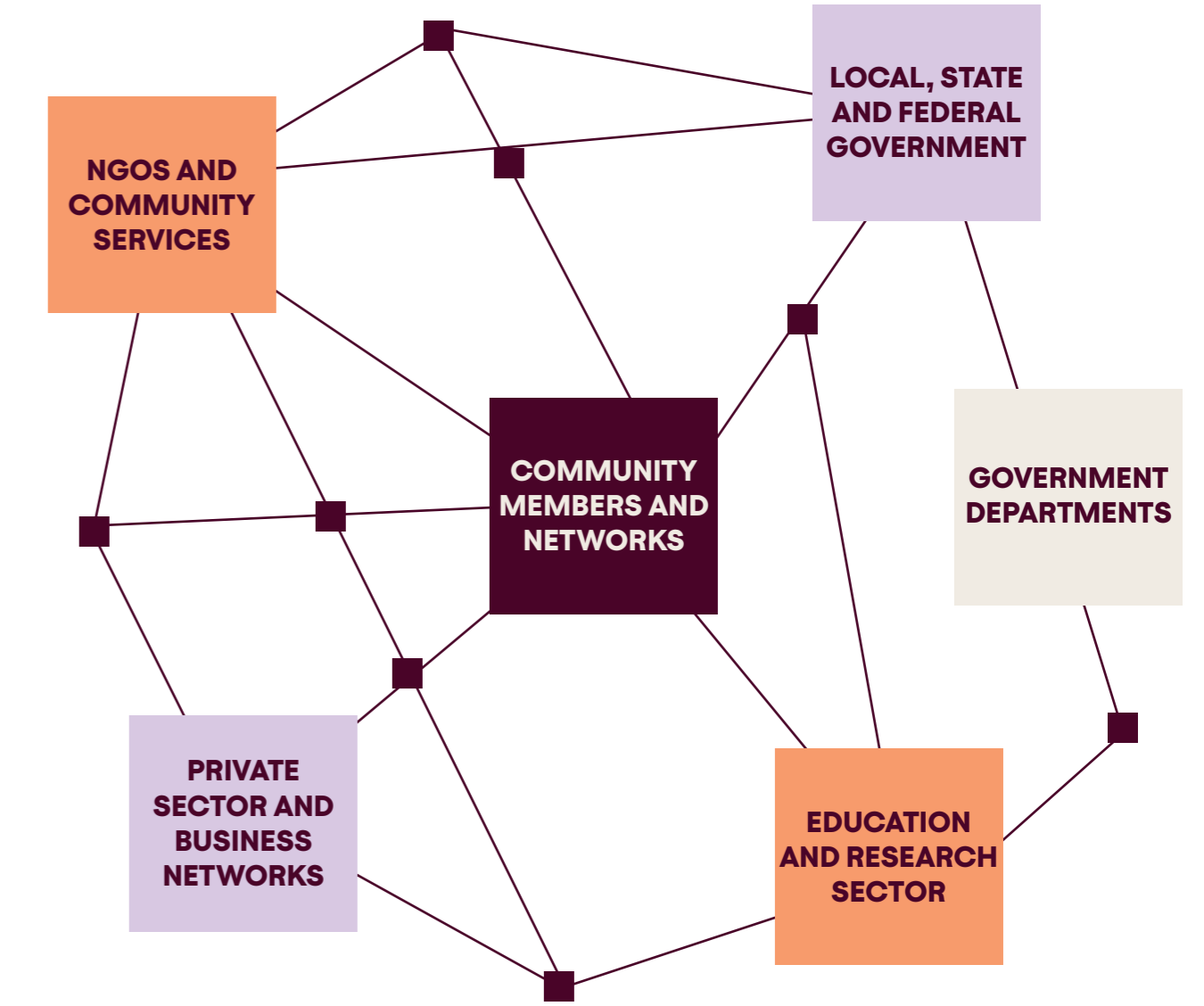
Scan the QR code to find out more!

WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN BUILDING SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS.

Creating cohesive, connected communities takes all of us - individuals and groups, community services, local businesses, and all levels of government. It requires collaboration to connect us and to create a sense of belonging, inclusion and equity for all.

Figure 1. Whole-of-society approach (Source: CRED adapted from QCOSS 2019)

WE ALL HAVE A ROLE



SOCIAL ASSETS SUPPORT CONNECTION AND CREATE SOCIAL CAPITAL.

Being connected to each other, our neighbourhoods, local services and government institutions is fundamental to our individual and collective wellbeing, safety, and quality of life.

Social assets - such as the spaces and places we meet, the groups we are members of and the methods we access to participate in decisions and civic life groups - create the spaces and systems where connection, participation, and belonging occur.

Investment in social assets builds social capital: the networks, trust, and norms that underpin cohesive and resilient communities.

BONDING US WITH EACH OTHER



BRIDGING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN DIFFERENT GROUPS



LINKING TO THE SERVICES AND OPPORTUNITIES WE NEED



“Higher levels of social cohesion and positive social interactions serve to strengthen the overall fabric of the city, allowing communities to bounce back faster and rebuild more efficiently after experiencing major shocks and stresses”

RESILIENT CITIES NETWORK



Photo credit: Fancy Boy Photography for CRED Consulting

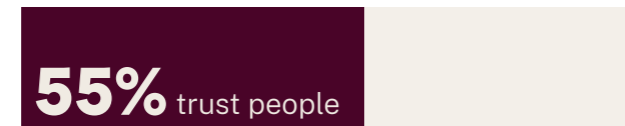
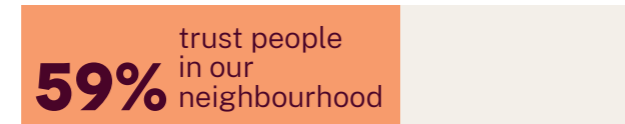
TRUST IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF SOCIAL COHESION.

It's the glue between groups of people and between people and governments.

SO, DO WE TRUST?

We trust people! (Yay!)

We asked people if they trusted people. We found that **more than 50%** of us trust people in general, or those in our neighbourhood, to do the right thing.



Trust in our neighbours by state



Trust in people overall by state



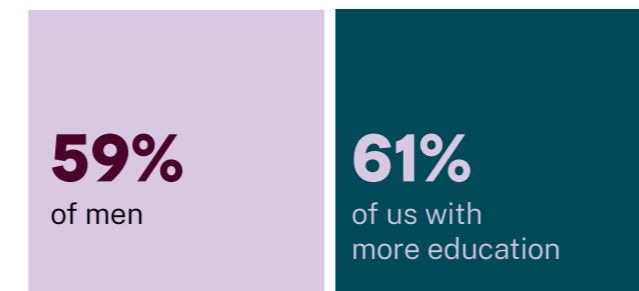
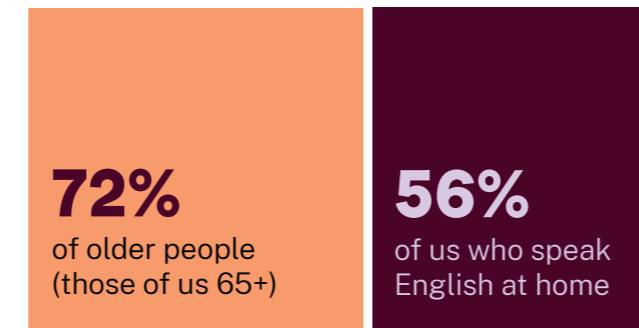
But trust is a fragile thing.

Worldwide trust is declining...

And it's also declining in NSW.

In 2024 the percentage of us that trusted people in general dropped by 4% since 2021. Trust in our neighbours dropped even more – a big 9% drop.

Some of us are more trusting that people in general will do the right thing.



TRUST IN GOVERNMENTS ALSO MATTERS.

We need to trust them to lead us through hard times.

DO WE TRUST THEM?

Probably, not enough.

Under 40% of us mostly, or always, trust any level of government.

We found that where we live determines how much we trust our governments.

Trust in the government

NSW



QLD

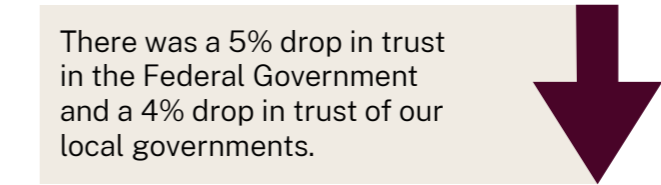


VIC



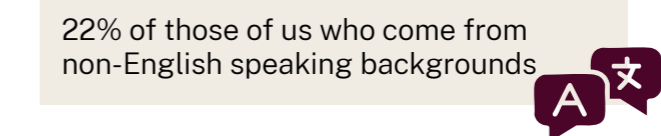
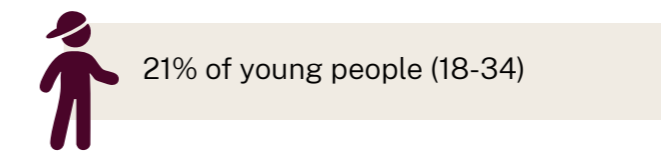
But our trust in governments is also declining in NSW.

In 2024 the percentage of us that trusted our State government dropped by 8% since 2021.



Interestingly, men, those of us who come from non-English speaking backgrounds, and those of us with more education, trust governments more than the rest of us.

So, who is unempowered?



don't feel able to influence decisions that affect us in our local areas.



Photo credit: Tom Payne

WE NEED TO BELONG.

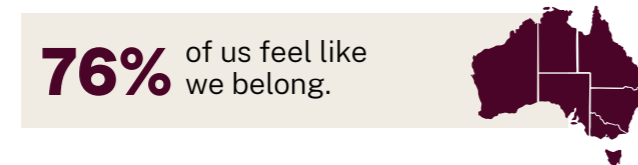
Feeling like we belong is another part of the glue that keeps us together as a society.

When we join organisations, feel like we belong in our local area, identify as an Australian, and we feel like we belong.

MOST OF US DO FEEL LIKE WE BELONG.

But this has also changed over time.

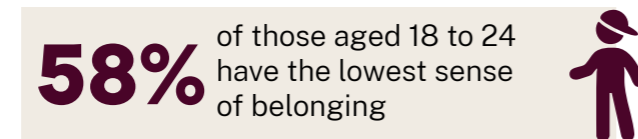
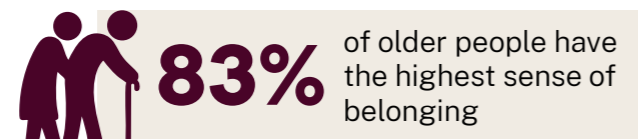
We mostly feel like we belong in Australia.



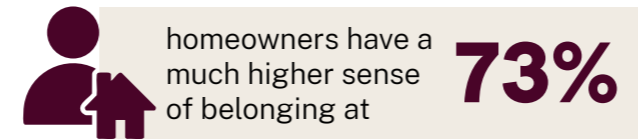
Feeling of belonging in our local area



And although its great many of us in NSW feel like we belong to our local area, when we researched this in 2021, 78% felt like we did.

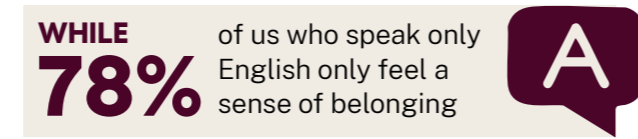


Unsurprisingly,



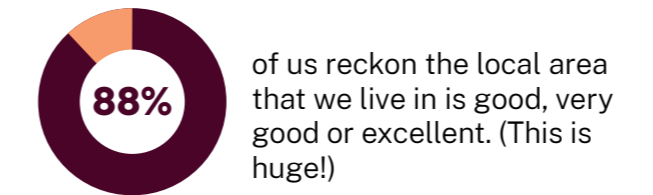
But the sort of rental we live in also impacts our sense of belonging to our local area. If we live in apartments over 7 stories or even villas or semis, we are less likely to feel a sense of belonging to the local area in which we live. (Are you listening social planners?)

Those of us who speak a language other than English at home, and those who speak only English, feel the same sense of belonging in our local area but not in our sense of belonging to Australia.



MOST OF US LOVE WHERE WE LIVE.

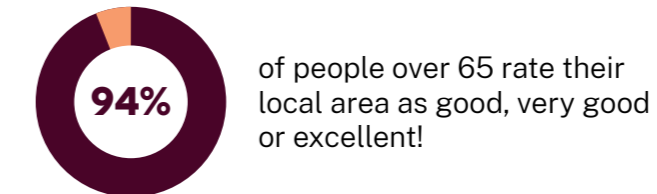
Loving where we live makes us want to protect it, and restore it if disaster falls on it.



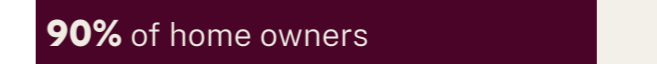
Over a quarter of us in NSW, in fact, rate our local area as an excellent place to live. (There isn't much difference between NSW, QLD and VIC). And it doesn't really matter if we only speak English at home or a language other than English to make us feel good about where we live.



Men though, and older people, and those with more education, are a bit more in love with their local area. Apparently the longer we live in a community, the more we like it,



And it doesn't matter the sort of dwelling we live in, although home owners seem to have more reason to love their local area than renters. (Attention Federal Government!).



Those of us who live with our parents love our local areas more than those of us who live in group or shared houses.

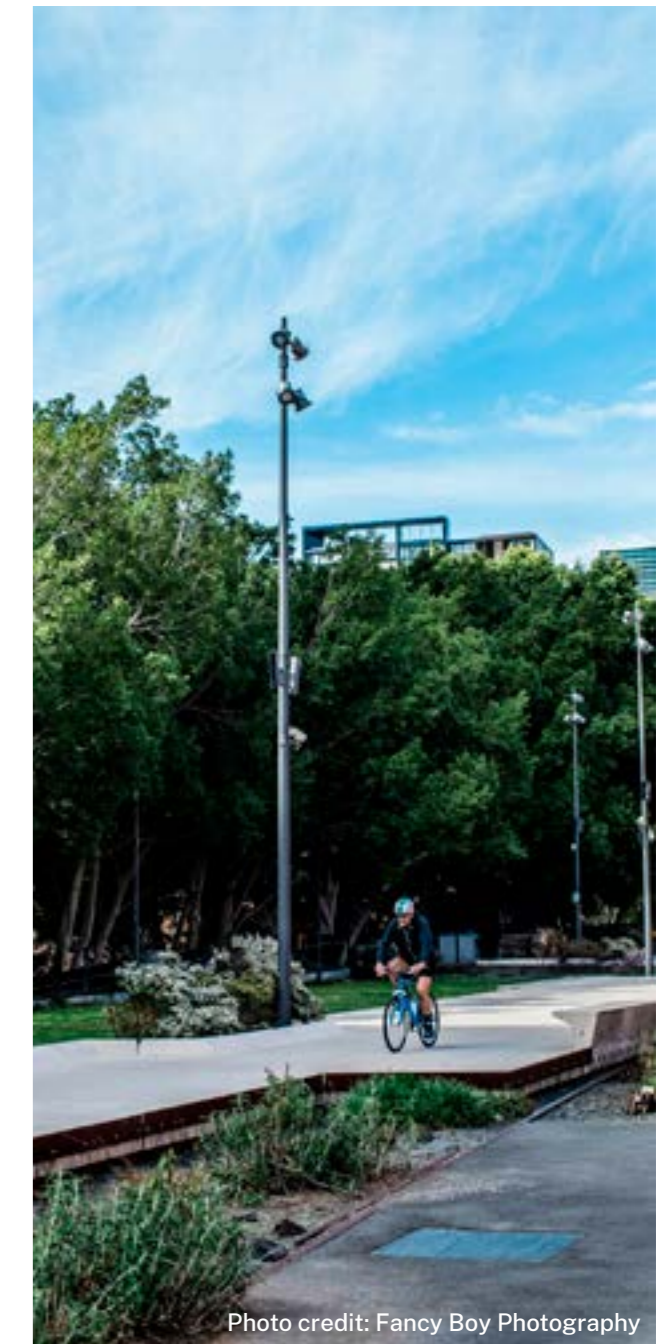
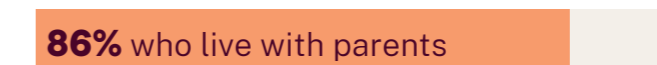


Photo credit: Fancy Boy Photography

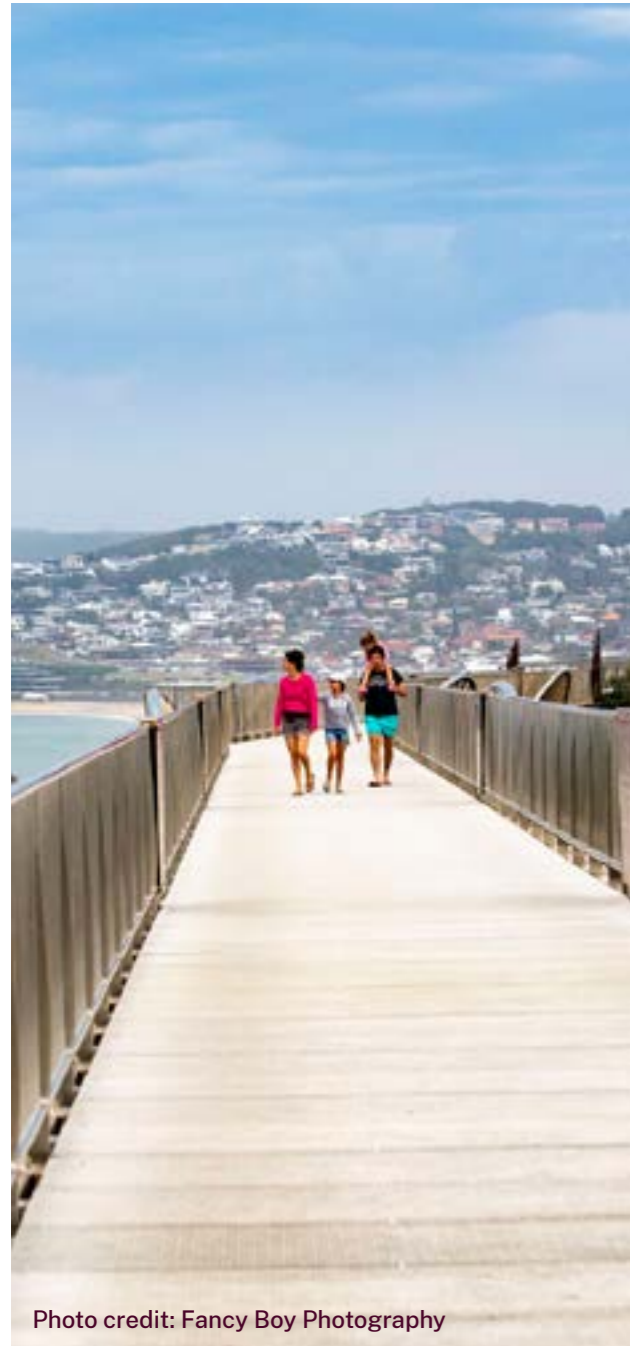


Photo credit: Fancy Boy Photography

WE RECKON OUR LIVES ARE OKAY!

This is important because social cohesion improves the quality of our lives – the more we think we have a better quality of life, the more social cohesion we probably already have.

IN NSW WE FEEL BETTER THAN PEOPLE IN OTHER STATES.

So, cheers!



said that their quality of life was good, very good or excellent.

In fact, **over half of us** in NSW said our quality of life was very good or excellent.

Once again, those of that are younger, live in share housing or who rent are slightly less likely to think the quality of our life is great. (Housing matters? Who knew?)

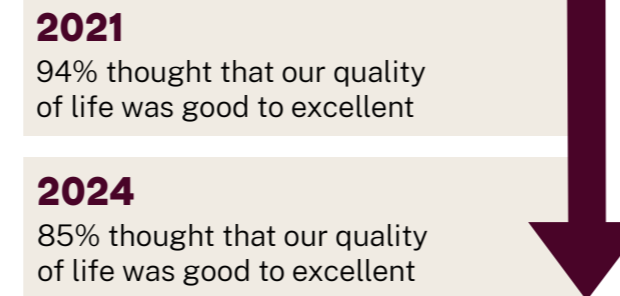
Renters told us that their quality of life has declined in the last 2 years. (Rent increases impact quality of life? Again, who would have thunk it?)

BUT THERE COULD BE RED FLAGS HERE.

Over the past 2 years, around **22% of us** think the quality of life in our local area has improved. Sounds good, eh?

But **27% of us** think it has declined. And there is more of us that think this in NSW. More people in Queensland told us that for them, it had improved.

And the biggest red flag? Less of us in NSW think our quality of life is good to excellent than did in 2021.



VALUING CULTURAL DIVERSITY IS AN IMPORTANT INDICATOR IN SOCIAL COHESION.

Because we are socially diverse; we need to like this fact!

Luckily **41% of us** think that social cohesion makes our local areas stronger.

WHO VALUES IT THE MOST?

That would be:

- those of us that are young (18 to 24) or slightly older between 35 to 49 at **46%**
- those of us from non-English speaking backgrounds at **47%**
- those of us with degrees **40%**
- those of us who live in apartments at **60%**

Queenslanders were less likely to value cultural diversity than those of us in NSW Victoria.

State	Percentage
QLD	37%
NSW	42%
VIC	43%



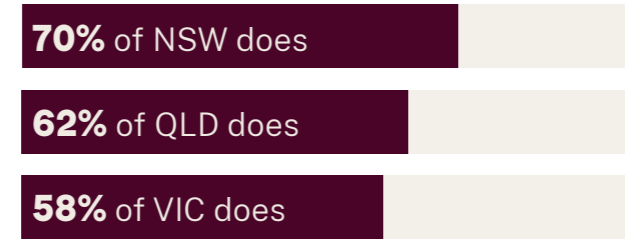
Photo credit: CRED consulting

ARE WE READY FOR WHEN THE SH*T HITS THE FAN?

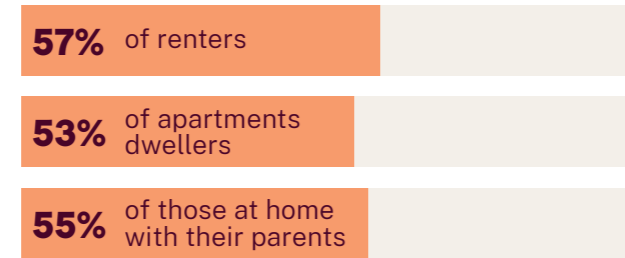
Social cohesion is one of the things that lets us respond to and recover from emergencies -it allows us to face challenges, together.

DO WE FEEL LIKE WE ARE PREPARED TO RESPOND IN AN EMERGENCY?

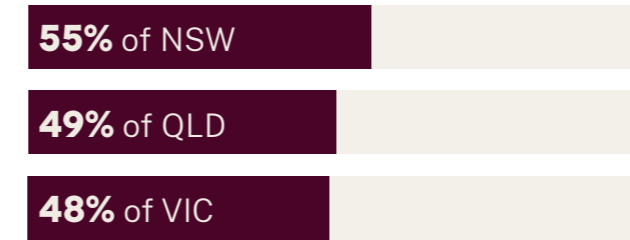
Yes! Well,



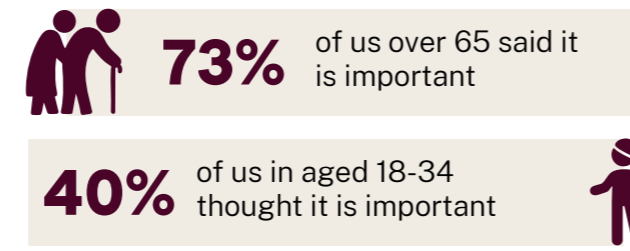
And renters, people living in apartments and people living at home with their parents feel less prepared to respond in an emergency than others.



And yet we think this is important.



Emergency preparedness becomes more important to us as we age.



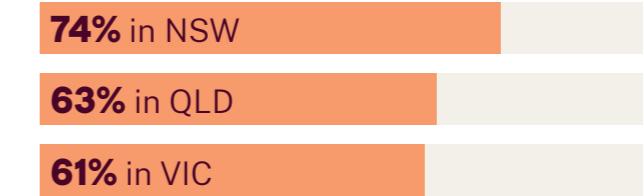
HOW CONNECTED DO WE FEEL?

Connection is both the aim of, and a key factor that creates, social cohesion.

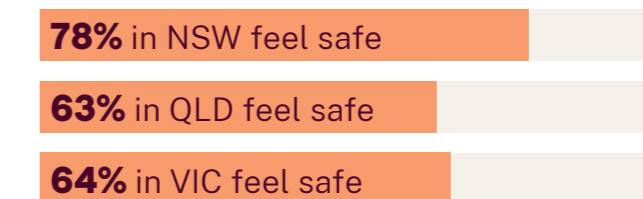
DO WE KNOW OUR NEIGHBOURS? DO WE FEEL SAFE?

The answer is yes.

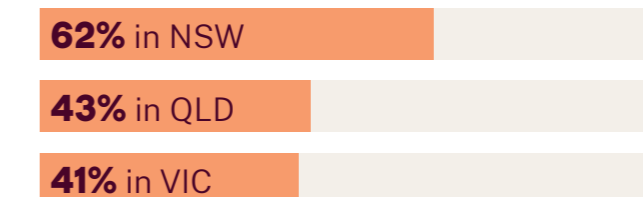
Many of us think that our neighbourhoods feel like home.



We mostly find our neighbourhoods safe.

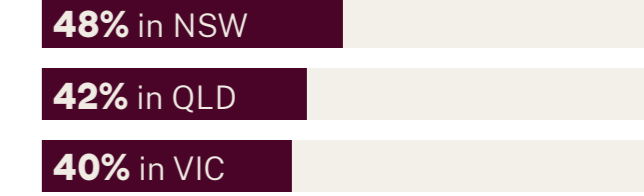


NSW has the highest sense of responsibility to contribute to our local areas.

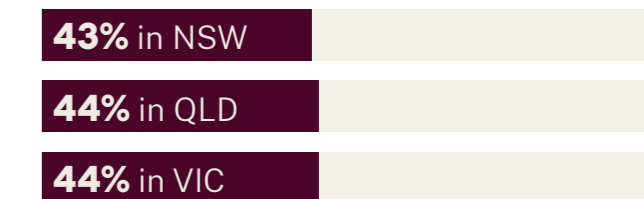


...and no

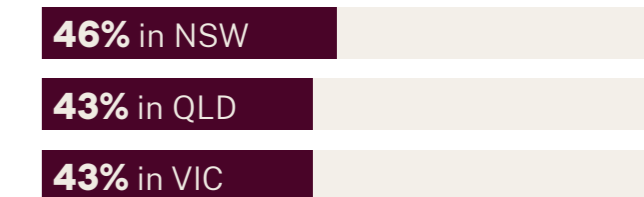
Fewer of us feel as though we know our neighbours well.



People in NSW are the least likely to feel their neighbours cares about each other.



People feel they need to leave their neighbourhood to connect with their friends.



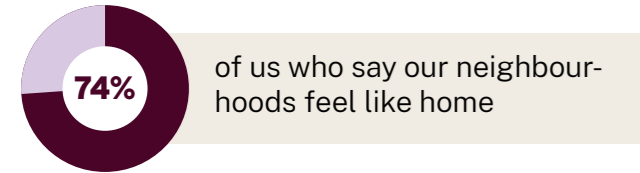
There has been a decline in how safe we feel and our perception of how much people care in our neighbourhood.

2021
83% feel safe in our neighbourhood
53% believe their neighbourhood is caring

2024
78% feel safe in our neighbourhood
43% believe their neighbourhood is caring



we don't all feel the same



Compared to other groups like renters and people from non-English speaking background, who are less likely to feel at home.

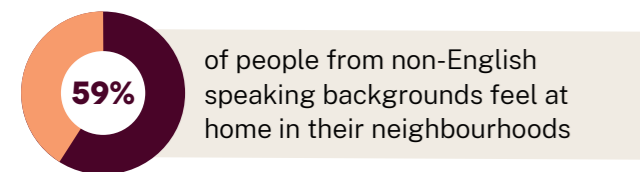
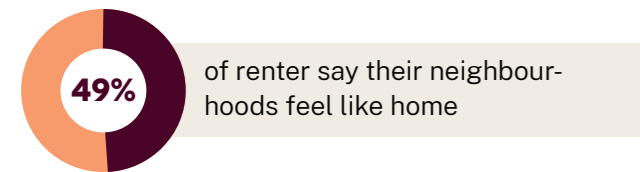


Photo credit: Fancy Boy Photography

HAVE WE GOT THE SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE THAT COHESION NEEDS?

Infrastructure can improve or hamper social cohesion by facilitating - or impeding social encounters.

SOME THINGS ARE MORE IMPORTANT TO CONNECTION THAN OTHERS

We asked what were the most important physical things for connection in an ideal neighbourhood.

It turns out to be:

- 91%** safe and clean streets and public spaces
- 82%** quality parks and public spaces
- 79%** a good mix of shops for daily needs
- 76%** public transport
- 74%** community facilities like libraries and schools
- 74%** places for children and young people to play
- 73%** access to nature

These things were much more important than alternatives, including:

- 68%** cafes and restaurants
- 59%** cool comfortable streets to walk along
- 57%** sports fields and courts
- 56%** affordable and diverse housing
- 52%** places to walk & play with pets
- 49%** jobs near our homes
- 39%** arts and cultural spaces
- 37%** night time spaces & places
- 37%** safe bicycle lane

BUT WHAT WE PRIORITISE DIFFERS ACCORDING TO OUR GENDER AND AGE,

Gender

There is a distinct difference between women and men's prioritisation of affordable and diverse housing.

57% of women

44% of men

Cafes and restaurants and shops are more important to women, as are jobs near home.

48% of women

37% of men

And not surprisingly, although perhaps sadly, women prioritise places for children and young people to play more than men do.

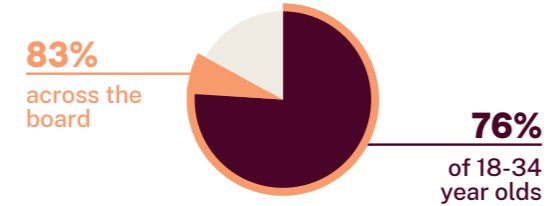
67% of women

61% of men

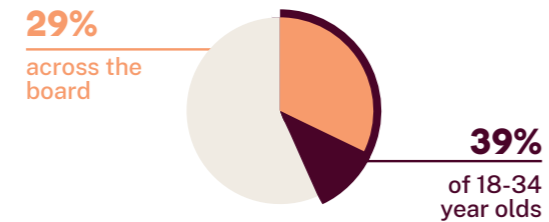
Women also want places to walk and play with pets... so who is doing the dog walking here, guys?

Age

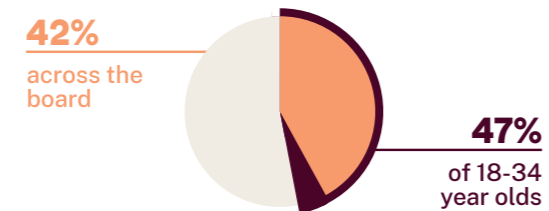
When we are young and think we are invincible we are less concerned about the safety of streets and public spaces.



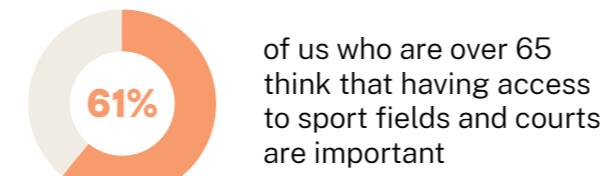
We want more night time spaces and places.



We want jobs near home.



But interestingly the desire for public transport is more important to us as we age as are sports fields.



Is team sport then, less important to us as a society than it once was?

And yet it doesn't change if we are culturally diverse or not.

Whether we speak English alone at home, or another language there was almost no difference in what we think are the most important physical things to create connection in our community. On this one, we are united.

BUT DO WE ALL GET EQUAL ACCESS TO THESE THINGS?

You guessed it – of course not!

Those of us in NSW don't feel like our neighbourhoods are as well maintained and cared for as we do if we live in Queensland or Victoria. (Is there work to do here NSW Councils?)

50% in NSW

63% in QLD

55% in VIC

In NSW we are also less likely to feel like everyone in our neighbourhood has equal opportunity to have a happy life and also less likely to feel like we can access quality parks and public spaces near to where we live. (Sad face).

And really sadly, those of us who live in apartments, shared houses or with our parents, are much less likely to think that everyone in our neighbourhood has equal opportunity to have a happy life.



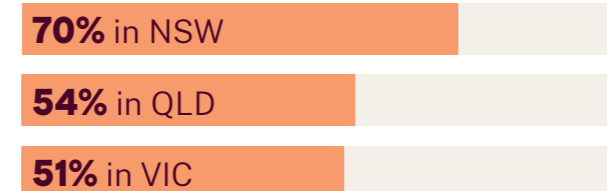
Photo credit: Fancy Boy Photography

BUT IT ISN'T JUST PHYSICAL THINGS THAT HELP US CONNECT. SOCIAL SERVICES, GROUPS AND PROGRAMS ALSO MATTER.

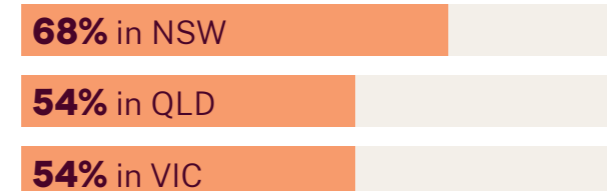
These things help us feel like we belong and are also part of the glue that sticks us together.

We rate these things highly but differently according to which State we live in:

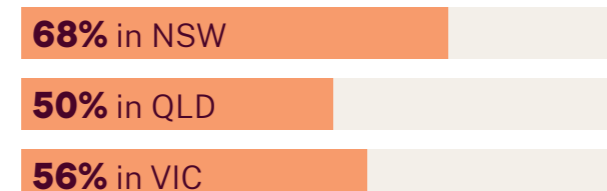
In NSW we rate social programs and events highly, even more than QLD and VIC.



We rate sports and recreational clubs and teams (apart from young people).



Access to local social and health services is fairly important to us.



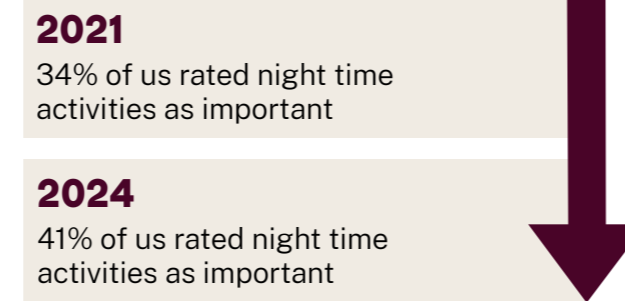
So are events and festivals as well as arts and cultural programs and events.

Women want social things even more than men... except for sports and recreational clubs which were slightly more desired by men.



Most of us, regardless of our age, want social programs and events. As we age the importance of having neighbours with similar interests increases. But as we age, we have less interest in arts and cultural programs.

And (in no surprises here) we have less interest in night time activities as we age. But those night time activities? They are becoming more important to us.



Despite our ageing population, this issue is becoming more important to us. Maybe we are changing!

BUT OVERALL, PEOPLE FEEL LIKE WHERE WE LIVE IS GREAT.

Around 88% of us, whether we live in NSW, Queensland or Victoria, feel like the place where we live is excellent, very good or good.

And that augers well for social cohesion. We fight to protect what we love!



Photo credit: Fancy Boy Photography

WANT TO MEASURE SOCIAL COHESION AND CONNECTION IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

If you want to find out how to measure social cohesion and levels of connection in your community, let's talk!

Our multidisciplinary team of social strategists, planners, economists and engagement and communications specialists draw on diverse information sources and lived experiences to understand community experiences, issues and service gaps to help inform decision making.

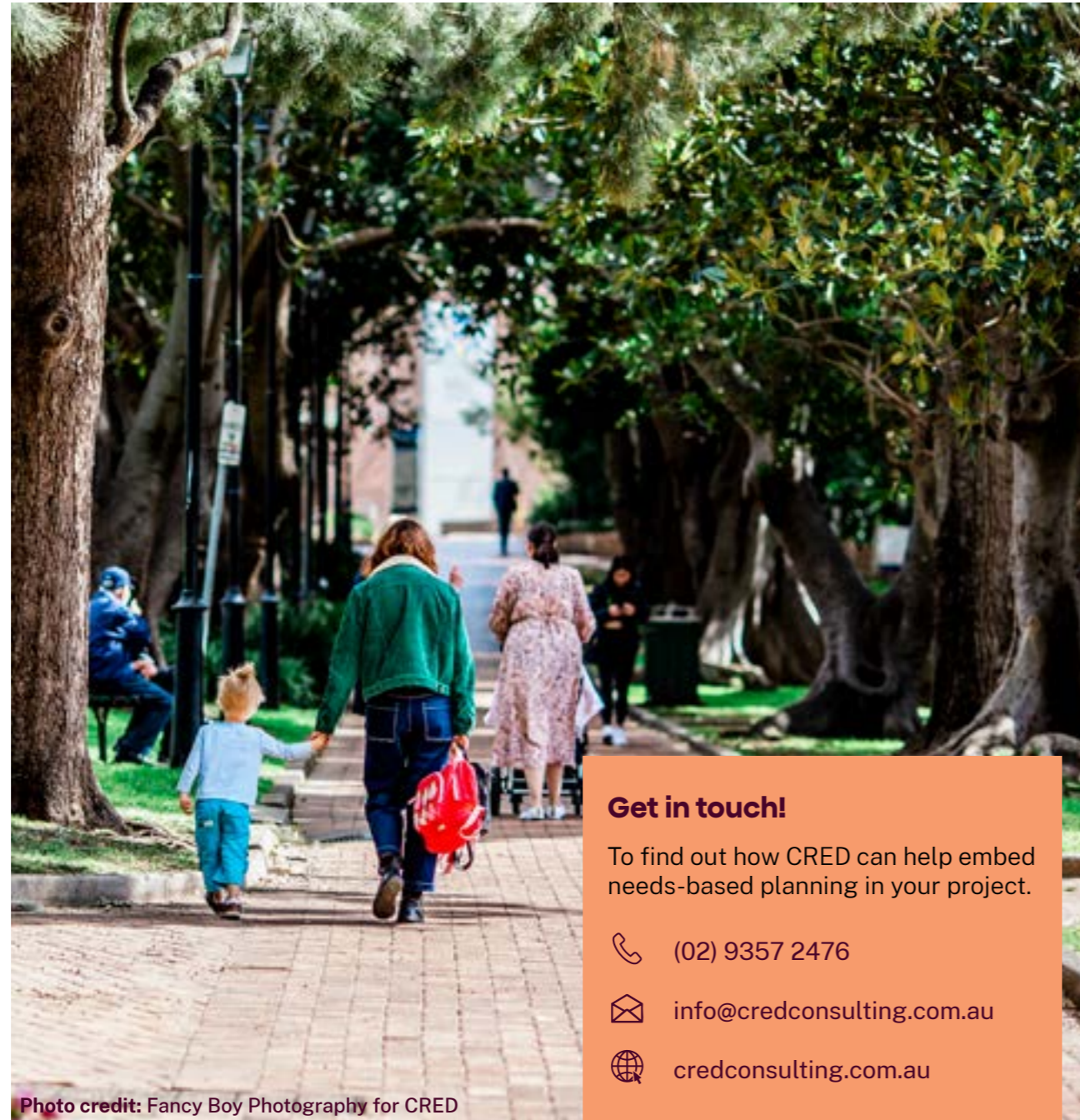





Photo credit: Fancy Boy Photography for CRED

Get in touch!

To find out how CRED can help embed needs-based planning in your project.

 (02) 9357 2476

 info@credconsulting.com.au

 credconsulting.com.au

DISCLAIMER

This Guide is part of CRED's CREducation series. It is informed by CRED Consulting's research and engagement with diverse communities across Australia and reflects the knowledge, perspectives and insights shared through this work. While it provides a general resource to support inclusive planning, it does not claim to represent all experiences or offer prescriptive solutions. The Guide should not be relied upon as a substitute for context-specific research, consultation, or professional advice.



02 9357 2476

info@credconsulting.com.au

ABN 57 620 957 815

CREDCONSULTING.COM.AU

SYDNEY HQ

Level 3, 63 Foveaux St
Surry Hills NSW 2010
Gadigal Land

BRISBANE

The Hub Anzac Square
Level 6, 200 Adelaide St
Brisbane City QLD 4000
Jagera and Turrbal Land

MELBOURNE

The Hub Church Street
Level 4, 459 Church St
Richmond VIC 3121
Wurundjeri Land