

Draft Community Capacity and Connection Strategy 2026-31

Plain English summary

This strategy was written by the City of Onkaparinga. When you see the word 'we' it means City of Onkaparinga.

Kaurna acknowledgement

We acknowledge the Kaurna people as the Traditional Owners of the land in the area now known as City of Onkaparinga. They are the first people of this place with a culture that is tens of thousands of years old. We think about Kaurna people's connection to Country when we make decisions about our region as this affects their wellbeing. We also recognise that Kaurna and other Aboriginal people are actively engaged in community life and bring their rich culture to the connected community and sustainable future to which we aspire.

Introduction

The City of Onkaparinga is a local government organisation in South Australia. We have the largest number of residents of all councils in South Australia with more than 182,000 people across urban and rural communities. Like all other councils in this state, we have to work within the requirements of the *Local Government Act 1999*. This Act says that we must make sure we deliver outcomes that can benefit everyone in our community.

The City of Onkaparinga provides lots of important services, programs, projects, activities and events to the community. This includes for youth services, aged care, sport and recreation, the arts and culture, information services and libraries. The provision of these community services is guided by our Community Vision 2034.



The Community Vision is at the top of our planning framework and ideas from a wide range of people in our community helped create this vision. It is a 10-year plan to help us make good decisions for a connected community and sustainable future. There are 4 main themes of the Community Vision, which are: Community, Environment, Liveability, and Leadership.

Our Community Capacity and Connection Strategy is guided by our Community Vision, with a particular focus on the 'Community' and 'Leadership' themes. It will enable our community to live well and set up the next generation for success. We are looking forward to working together on the challenges and opportunities of our times and supporting our city so that nobody is left out.

About this strategy

This strategy looks at what we aim to achieve to strengthen capacity and connection in our local community for improving wellbeing and quality of life. This means working with and for community members to support the wellbeing of individual people and the community as a whole to provide a safe, inclusive and thriving region.

To help us set aims for this work, we have looked at some of our other strategies, as well as national and state-wide plans and policies. These include topics about health, housing, libraries, sport, recreation, creative arts, First Nations reconciliation, youth, ageing, domestic violence, volunteering and climate change.

We will also do some of our work in partnership with a range of other organisations to share knowledge, skills and resources so we can help each other. This includes organisations such as schools, community groups, sporting clubs, religious groups and government agencies.

For the purposes of discussing how our services and programs meet community needs at different stages of life, we think about this in 4 age groups. These are children, young people, adults (and families) and older people.

Challenges and opportunities

The main current and expected challenges and opportunities regarding increasing community capacity and connection are listed as follows:

Valuing the contribution of community services

Community services provide vital support to residents by identifying community needs and supporting a healthy and functioning society. However, as other government and community organisations are finding, the rising costs of service provision and increasing community needs and expectations are challenges for meeting everyday service demands. To support these services we must increase efficiencies, use approaches that encourage collaboration and gain more resources.

Loneliness and social isolation

Loneliness affects mental health, general wellbeing and community resilience. High rates of loneliness is a particular problem for young people, older people, people with disability, those experiencing barriers socially and economically, and those living long distances from services. This is very important in our city because households with only one person living in them are expected to become the most common type of household in the future. We can help with loneliness by creating safe and inclusive places where people can connect socially and take part in community activities.



Ageing population

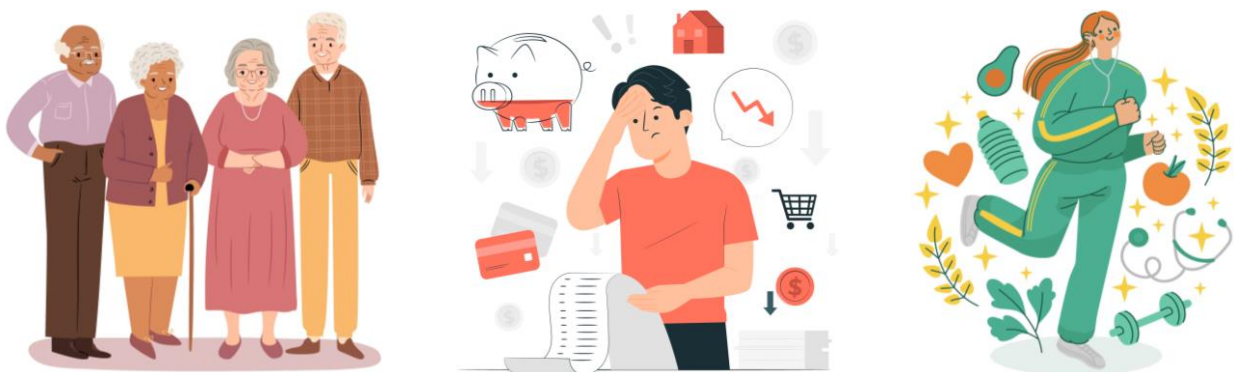
It is estimated that the group of people in our city who are 80 years of age and older will increase in number faster than all other age groups. This will increase the demand for aged care services, including for safety and accessibility, wellbeing and connection, independence and community transport. A lack of adequate aged care services is already becoming a challenge. We need to strengthen community-based services, recommend aged care reform and plan for an ageing population.

Cost of living

Ongoing increases in the cost of living are affecting a wide range of people across the community. Impacts include ability to buy fuel and food as well as afford housing and the risk of homelessness. These impacts also affect levels of community capacity, including the number of volunteers, as many people are placing more importance on paid work to cope with financial stress.

Health and wellbeing

Adults in our region have poorer long-term health outcomes compared with adults in metropolitan Adelaide and South Australia generally. This includes mental health, obesity, asthma, diabetes, arthritis and general health. However, some people have found it hard to use health services because of long waiting times and increased costs. Therefore, it is important that we can provide people in our city with support from services other than the traditional health system to improve health and wellbeing.



Safety, respect and non-violence

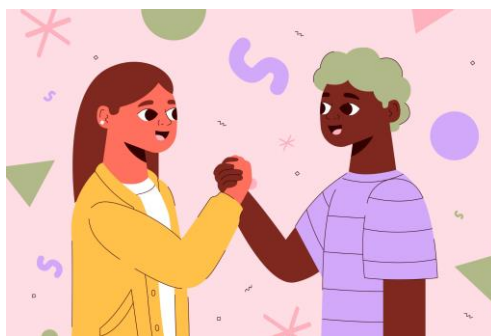
Levels of violence are increasing in South Australia, which is placing a lot of pressure on response systems. This shows that there is a need for better prevention and a whole-of-community response. As a council, we can provide various services to help build awareness and reduce the chances of this happening. This way, we contribute to a respectful and connected community.

Closing the Gap and other First Nations matters

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are continuing to have worse life outcomes than the rest of the Australian population. It is important that First Nations people and non-First Nations people enjoy the same opportunity in all parts of life. This includes health and wellbeing, culture, education, employment, housing, justice, safety, and access to information and services. To increase equity for First Nations communities, we are using our Reconciliation Action Plan to strengthen relationships, deepen understanding of culture and improve social and economic outcomes.

Cultural diversity

Although many people in our city feel safe about expressing their culture, there is room for improvement in supporting diverse communities to feel safe, welcomed and that they belong. We aim to support a more inclusive community by providing safe spaces for people to express their culture and encouraging respectful communication between people from different cultures.



Neurodivergence

Neurodivergent people are those who think, learn, communicate and experience the world differently from most others. South Australia has a high number of neurodivergent people, with Autism being the biggest disability group. Statistics show that these numbers are increasing. Neurodivergence is also increasing in our city, particularly in young people. As these numbers keep increasing, the need for inclusive spaces and carer support will also increase.

LGBTQIA+

LGBTQIA+ refers to a diversity of gender identities, romantic attractions and physical characteristics. There has been an increase in our community in the number of people identifying as LGBTQIA+, particularly in young people. This part of our community may face discrimination, social isolation, lower levels of wellbeing, and barriers to getting support. By raising awareness and creating services that welcome everyone, we can help people feel safe and participate more in community life. This growing diversity is also a chance to increase community richness and connection.

Individual and group community participation and leadership

Community participation and leadership in local groups and organisations are very important for strengthening community capacity and connection across our city. However, people's involvement in these activities has decreased, which presents challenges for council service delivery, and building capacity and connection. The Council must find ways to build capacity for leadership roles and encourage use of community spaces to meet needs of the local community.



Volunteerism

The value of volunteering includes benefits to the economy and people's wellbeing. In recent years, it has become harder to recruit and keep volunteers, both across the broader volunteering sector and within our local region. Reasons for this include increased administrative processes, requirements for training and complexity of roles.

Cost-of-living pressures are also reducing people's availability as many are having to choose paid work over unpaid. Councils are in a good position to make use of the potential for local volunteering. This can be done by checking patterns in volunteer participation, strengthening the management of volunteer programs and improving volunteer experiences.

Climate change and environmental concerns

There has been a decline in the number of residents who think that climate change has had an impact on our region. However, most people in our city still believe that it is important to take action to reduce risks. Councils can help address climate change through education, planning for reducing impacts, programs to increase community resilience, and helping vulnerable groups. This way we can help to protect our coastline, open spaces and townships for current and future generations.



Digitalisation, artificial intelligence and e-safety

The rapid rise of digital technology is changing how communities connect, access services and use information. This brings with it risks of less face-to-face interaction and a reduced sense of belonging. It is also of concern regarding those who are less likely to use this technology. This particularly relates to our ageing population and their access to community services, as well as people with socio-economic disadvantage regarding limited internet connectivity, access to technology and digital skills.

Councils face the challenge of having to provide digital systems while also making sure this technology does not reduce community capacity and connection. Safety risks regarding online platforms are also important. On the other hand, advances in digital technology open up opportunities for developing new skills and creation of new jobs.

Literacy

Early language development and ability to process thoughts has a strong influence on academic achievement later in life. Data shows that children in our city have a slightly higher risk of experiencing difficulty with language and learning compared with South Australia and Australia. Also, about 44 per cent of Australian adults find everyday reading and writing challenging, which is linked to lower educational achievement, reduced social and workforce participation, socio-economic disadvantage and poorer health outcomes.

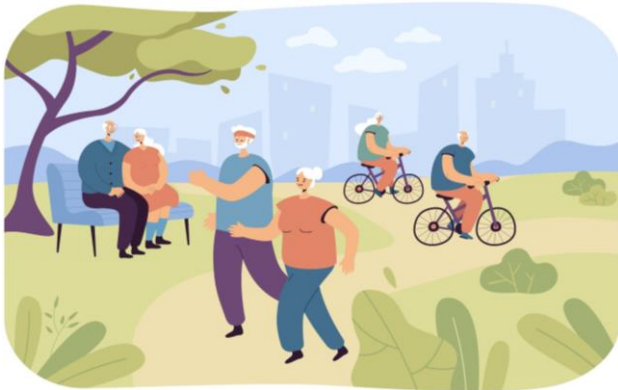
The Council can help literacy across the life stages through its community services and programs. This includes opportunities such as playgroups, libraries, child-friendly public spaces, parent education and community-based learning and literacy.



Participation in physical activity

Physical activity provides benefits for health, wellbeing and social connection. The number of adults in our city who do enough physical activity has decreased, but numbers have increased for older people and children. Overall, there is still plenty of room for improvement in people's levels of physical activity. Councils can play an important role in encouraging healthy, active lifestyles and addressing barriers to participation.

Locally, and across the state and country, more people do active recreation than sport, with walking, cycling, swimming and fitness being the most popular activities. However, children are more likely to do sport than other types of physical activity. The quality of our facilities and public spaces that support these preferences is important for encouraging participation in physical activity. Where cost is a barrier to participation (for example, club membership fees), this can be dealt with by promoting low-cost or free options.



Our 4 streams

The aims of our strategy relate to 4 streams that support an informed, active, creative and empowered community. Together our 4 streams will strengthen community capacity and connection as follows.

1. Informed Community

[Access to information, technology and learning through libraries and council communications](#). This helps with community engagement, building people's knowledge and supporting individual interests.

2. Active Community

[Active lifestyles through sport and active recreation](#). Regular physical activity can improve health and wellbeing, and offer social connection. These activities are supported by the Council through recreation centres and sporting facilities.

3. Creative Community

[Opportunities for creative and cultural expression](#). These aspects of community life are important for the wellbeing of individuals and the community. They can occur through the Council's services and programs, including at arts and cultural centres.

4. Empowered Community

[Community management of local matters](#). This means working with the community across all age groups to address challenges and increase opportunities. This is supported by the Council through youth centres, community centres, positive ageing centres, community groups and organisations, and grants.

Each stream will have an implementation plan that explains the main actions we will carry out to achieve the stream's objectives. We already have an implementation plan for the Empowered Community stream as a progression of our previous Community Capacity Strategic Plan 2021-24. Implementation plans for the other 3 streams will be developed. Progress on these plans will be reported to the Council every 2 years.

Focus areas and objectives

Guided by each theme from the Community Vision 2034, we have set 10 focus areas and 30 strategic objectives for addressing challenges and opportunities, as follows.

Community Vision theme — Community

Focus area 1 - Wellbeing

Strategic objectives:

- 1.1 Support First Nations people
- 1.2 Enhance physical and mental wellbeing
- 1.3 Respond to the needs and aspirations of key age cohorts

Focus area 2 - Social inclusion and cohesion

Strategic objectives:

- 2.1 Support under-represented community cohorts
- 2.2 Encourage connections between people

Focus area 3 - Community vibrancy and pride

Strategic objectives:

- 3.1 Inspire lifelong learning
- 3.2 Maximise opportunities for healthy, active lifestyles, and enjoyment
- 3.3 Maximise opportunities for cultural, creative and self-expression, and enjoyment
- 3.4 Deliver social projects and initiatives that address local matters and celebrate local values

Community Vision theme — Environment

Focus area 4 - Environmental care

Strategic objectives:

- 4.1 Care for the environment and respond to climate change
- 4.2 Enhance disaster resilience

Community Vision theme — Liveability

Focus area 5 - Food, shelter and safety

Strategic objectives:

- 5.1 Maximise opportunities for food security
- 5.2 Respond compassionately and effectively to people experiencing homelessness
- 5.3 Contribute to community safety

Focus area 6 - Social economics

Strategic objectives:

- 6.1 Support people and households on a low income and/or experiencing cost-of-living pressures
- 6.2 Support people to develop knowledge and skills
- 6.3 Enable community-led activity

Focus area 7 - Community places

Strategic objectives:

- 7.1 Recognise local strengths, assets, characteristics and identity
- 7.2 Provide and promote safe and welcoming facilities
- 7.3 Respond to district needs, aspirations and characteristics
- 7.4 Enhance people's access to places of importance to them

Focus area 8 - Active citizenship

Strategic objectives:

- 8.1 Develop leadership skills and support community leaders in their work
- 8.2 Empower people
- 8.3 Support strong community volunteerism

Focus area 9 - Access to information

Strategic objectives:

- 9.1 Cultivate high levels of awareness and participation
- 9.2 Strengthen public trust of council

Focus area 10 - Strategic approach

Strategic objectives:

- 10.1 Address identified community priorities and amplify community voices
- 10.2 Support the strength and independence of community networks, groups and organisations
- 10.3 Respond flexibly to evolving community needs and aspirations and social issues
- 10.4 Encourage broader understanding and adoption of community development principles and practice

This Plain English strategy is a summary of the main report. It only includes the most important ideas. The full Community Capacity and Connection Strategy can be found at: onkaparingacity.com/your say. To speak with someone about our Community Capacity and Connection Strategy 2026-31 you can call: 8384 0666.

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