

Cairns Social Resilience Strategy 2026-2030

Cairns Regional Council
June 2026



Acknowledgement of country

Cairns Regional Council acknowledges and pays our respects to the Traditional Custodians of our region, the Djabugay; Yirrganydji; Buluwai; Gimuy Walubara Yidinji; Mandingalbay Yidinji; Gunggandji; Dulabed and Malanbarra Yidinji; Bundabarra and Wadjanbarra Yidinji; Madjandji; Mamu and Ngadjon Jii peoples. We extend this respect to all elders past, present and future, and other First Peoples within our region.

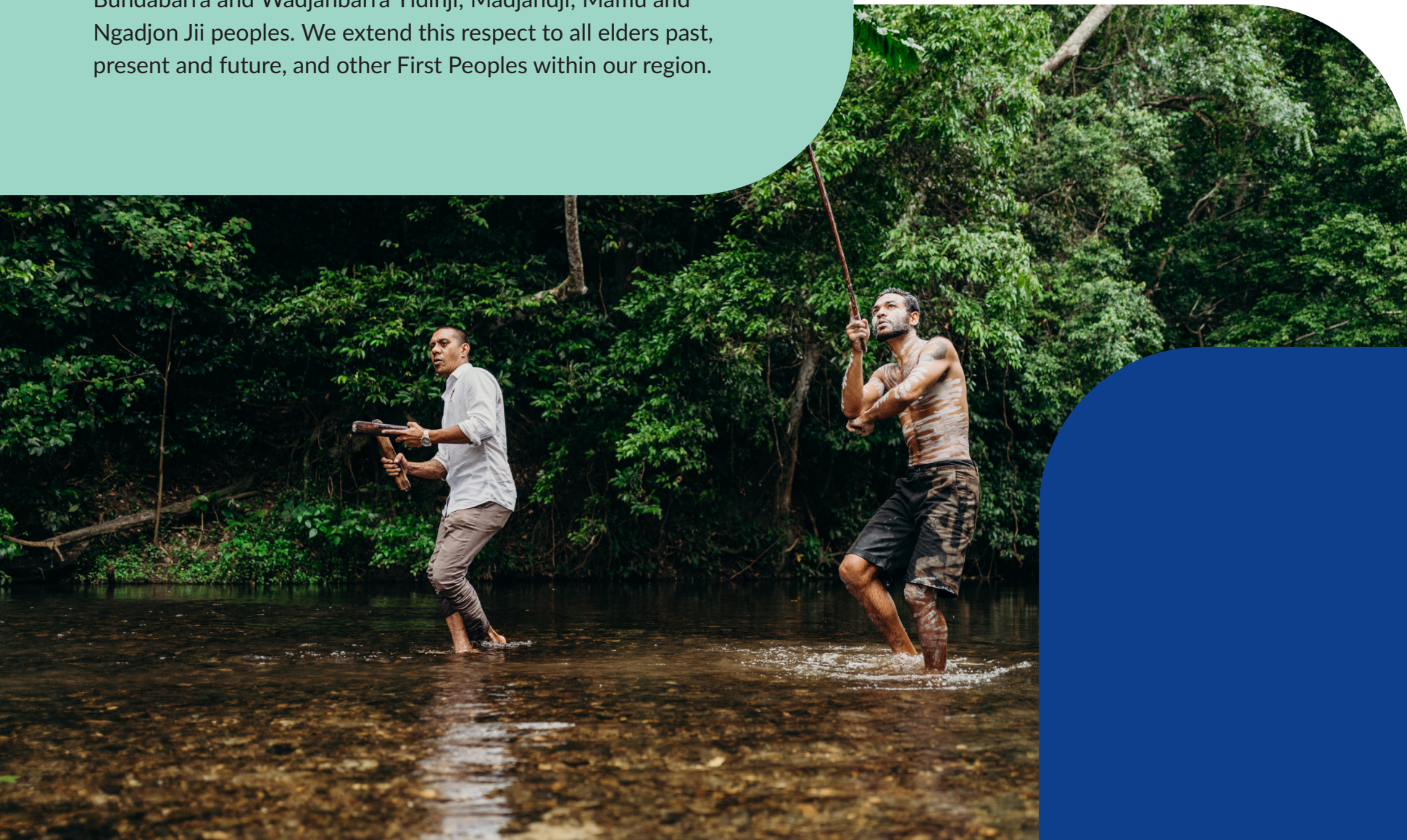




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Message from the Mayor

A resilient city is about more than roads, buildings and infrastructure. It is about people.

It is about whether people feel connected to their community, supported through difficult times and confident about the future.

Cairns is growing. By 2050, our population is expected to increase from more than 179,000 people to around 241,000. Growth brings opportunity, but it also brings responsibility. We must ensure that as our city grows, we remain a place where people feel they belong.

One of the things I love most about Cairns is what I often describe as our “Cairnsness”. It is the willingness to lend a hand, the pride people have in their neighbourhoods, the diversity of cultures and experiences that shape our city, and the strong sense of community that exists across our region.

Those qualities cannot be taken for granted.

Like communities across Australia, Cairns is experiencing pressures associated with housing affordability, cost of living, social isolation, mental health challenges and family violence. We also face the realities of living in a region increasingly impacted by severe weather events.

The Cairns Social Resilience Strategy 2026–2030 recognises that strong communities do not happen by accident. They are built through connection, participation and partnership.

The Strategy focuses Council’s efforts on four key areas: supporting local housing solutions, empowering young people, fostering inclusive and welcoming communities, and promoting safe and respectful relationships.

Importantly, this work is not something Council can deliver alone. It requires collaboration between all levels of government, community organisations, businesses, volunteers and residents themselves.

The good news is that Cairns already has strong foundations. We are home to dedicated community organisations, passionate volunteers, diverse cultural groups and more than 1,400 social assets that help bring people together and strengthen community life.

Our task now is to build on those strengths.

As Mayor, my vision is that as Cairns grows, we become not only a larger city, but a stronger one. A city where people know their neighbours. A city where young people can see a future for themselves. A city where people feel safe, supported and connected. A city that continues to reflect the welcoming spirit that makes Cairns such a special place to call home.

Because ultimately, the success of our city will not be measured by how many people live here. It will be measured by how well we live together.



Cr Amy Eden
Mayor





Key definitions

Community resilience is the collective ability of the Cairns population to survive, adapt and grow in the face of adverse events.

Social assets are the building blocks for social cohesion. They are our community places and space, services and programs, information and communications to connect people with each other, groups, services and institutions.

Social cohesion is the extent of shared values, mutual respect and acceptance of difference, as well as trust between people and trust in institutions.

Social resilience encompasses the importance of having a socially connected, cohesive and informed social system including social groups and networks, social and health services, community facilities and trusted institutions.

Shocks are disaster events with an immediate damaging impact, such as cyber-attacks, extreme storms or flooding. Shocks can have long-lasting, cascading impacts on communities, sometimes affecting people even more so than the initial event itself.

Stresses are longer-term issues that make it harder for people to cope during emergencies and day-to-day life, like financial or housing stress, lack of transport options and social isolation.

Strategy on a page

Social resilience is central to both our individual and community health and wellbeing and our ability to prepare for, respond to and recover from ongoing shocks (such as flood, fires, heat and pandemics) and stresses (such as access to secure housing, cost of living and personal health).

The evidence is clear that how we plan and manage our places and communities has a direct impact on how socially connected we feel to our neighbours, our local services and agencies.

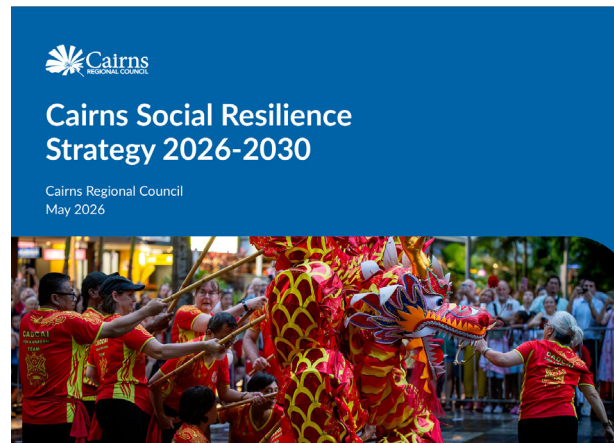
Why this matters for Cairns

Cairns is home to a growing and diverse community built on more than 65,000 years of First Peoples history and heritage. This diversity gives Cairns a unique identity and strengthens our sense of belonging, connection and cohesion.

Research shows that communities with high social resilience and social cohesion recover more quickly and effectively from challenges. As we continue to grow, we will face challenges like social isolation, natural disasters, rising cost of living, declining trust in institutions¹ and social inequity. As such, we need to continue to build social resilience to ensure Cairns continues to be a place where people feel connected, healthy and supported.

What will this Strategy do

The *Cairns Social Resilience Strategy* (the Strategy) provides a roadmap for Council to facilitate a coordinated and collective approach to social resilience for people and places.



Our vision

Our vision is for a socially resilient Cairns that is a place where communities are connected, inclusive, healthy and equipped to adapt to shocks and stresses.

Our focus areas

This Strategy has four key focus areas for Council to collaboratively work towards. Each focus area has a number of opportunities that will guide action planning over the next four years.



Local housing solutions: Local responses to housing and homelessness that support everyone having access to adequate, safe and secure housing.



Engaged and empowered young people: Making sure our young people are healthy, engaged and empowered to contribute to a socially resilient community.



Inclusive and welcoming communities: Creating a place where people feel connected to each other, to their neighbourhoods and have the opportunity to contribute to decisions that affect them.



Safe and respectful relationships: Supporting healthy relationships and access to networks and services that keep people safe.

¹ Scanlon Foundation Research Institute (2023), Australian Cohesion Index

1. Introduction

Cairns is already home to 179,330 people and is expected to grow to 241,000 by 2050. Our future community will include people of all ages, backgrounds, cultures, abilities and genders. Research shows that communities with high social resilience and social cohesion recover more quickly and effectively from shocks and stresses. This Strategy seeks to guide, coordinate and align planning and investment in social resilience, social cohesion and connectedness to ensure our community is better equipped to respond to the ongoing change and impacts facing our community.



1.1 Background and purpose

Social resilience is central to our health and wellbeing and our ability to prepare for ongoing shocks (such as flood, fires, heat and pandemics) and stresses (such as personal health, cost of living and lack of services). With increasing social isolation, declining trust in government², and growing threats to social cohesion, it's never been more important to build a socially resilient community.

Social resilience is about having strong connections between individuals, groups (like neighbourhood groups or local services) and institutions (including Council and other government agencies). These bonds are built on principles of equality, justice, respect and care for one another. For communities like Cairns which undergoing change and growth, it's imperative that we deliberately plan for social cohesion.

We know that Cairns faces challenges to social resilience, including financial and rental stress, an increasing number of natural disasters, rapid population growth and growing social inequity while also playing the role as a regional service centre for more remote communities. As our population continues to grow and change, it is essential to facilitate social connections and deliver social infrastructure to build and strengthen social resilience.

Council has already taken steps to strengthen our social resilience, including through the *Towards 2050: Shaping Cairns Growth Strategy*. This *Strategy* builds on these efforts by identifying our social assets, strengths and vulnerabilities and providing a model for a coordinated whole of Council approach to social resilience. It also guides Council's work, in partnership with local organisations, businesses and residents, to:

- build social connections and trust
- improve access to services, particularly for vulnerable groups, and
- foster inclusivity and cohesion across diverse communities.

“Building resilience is about creating stronger, more connected communities. With focused investment in social cohesion, communities can be better prepared for future challenges, supporting their long-term wellbeing”

Australian Public Policy Institute (APPI)

² Ibid.

1.2 How we developed this Strategy

This Strategy was developed and informed by:



Strategic review

Aligning with national, state and local government priorities.



Social asset review

Mapping social assets that connect our communities.



Demographic analysis

Analysing social equity, health and wellbeing data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census 2021 to understand community strengths and vulnerabilities.



Stakeholder engagement

Engaging with local service providers and Council staff to identify key challenges and opportunities to inform the focus areas.



1.3 Strategic alignment

Governments at all levels are prioritising social resilience as a driver of community and economic wellbeing, emergency preparedness, social cohesion and trust.

Global

- United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
- 100 Resilient Cities Network

Australian Government

- Measuring What Matters National Wellbeing Framework
- Australian Infrastructure Plan 2021

Queensland Government

- Communities 2032 Strategy
- Human and Social Recovery and Resilience Plan 2025-28
- Queensland Strategy for Disaster Resilience 2022-2027

Regional

- Wet Tropics Regional Resilience Strategy
- Far North Queensland Regional Plan (under review)

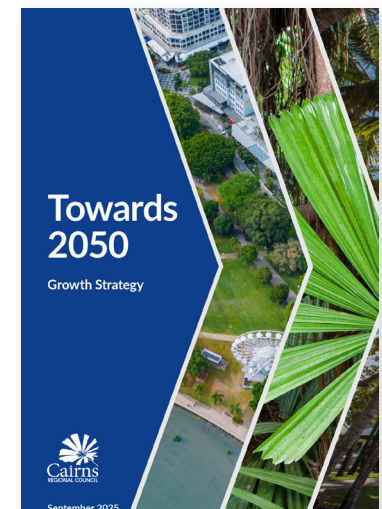
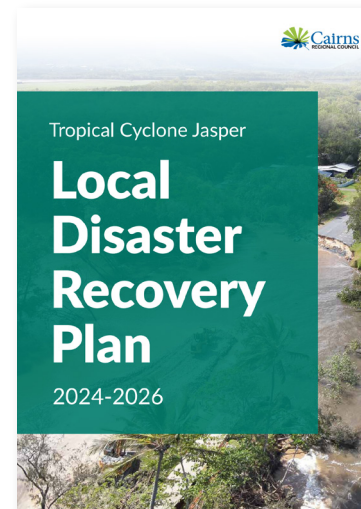
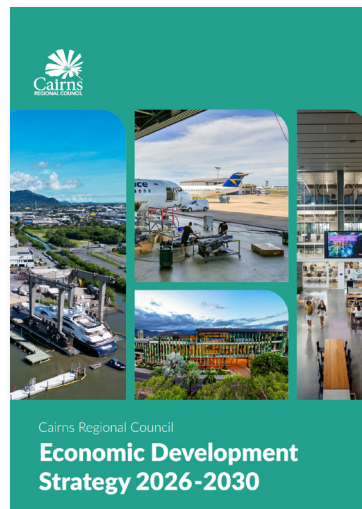
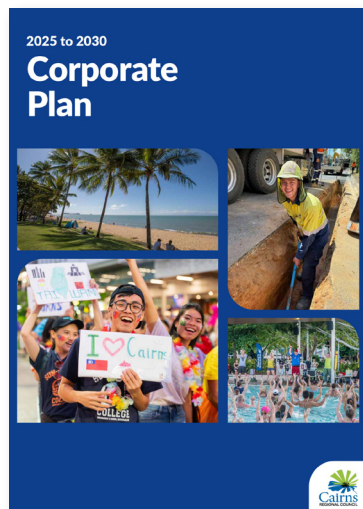
Cairns Regional Council

- Cairns Regional Council Corporate Plan 2025-2030
- Cairns 2050 Growth Strategy
- Cairns Regional Council Local Housing Action Plan
- Cairns Integrated Resilience Plan (under development)

Local strategic alignment

This Strategy is embedded within Council's broader long-term planning framework. It builds on the Operational Plan and Corporate Plan, which provide the foundation for future policies and actions and envision Cairns as "a great place to live and visit and Australia's premier wet tropical city."

The Strategy is also aligned with other key plans and strategies responding to social resilience challenges in the community including Climate Change Strategy 2030, Cairns Local Recovery Plan, Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2024-2026, and the Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026.



2. Social resilience in Cairns

Social resilience is at the heart of a strong and connected community. This section explores what social resilience means and why it is important for our city.

2.1 What is social resilience?

A socially resilient community is one where people support each other, have access to the resources they need and feel a sense of belonging. It is about having strong connections between individuals, groups (like neighbourhood groups, sporting clubs or local services) and institutions (including Council and other government agencies). By creating a socially resilient Cairns, our community will be able to prepare for, respond to and recover from ongoing shocks and stresses.

Social resilience doesn't operate in isolation. It is a core pillar of community resilience alongside economy, infrastructure, roads and transport and environment. Each of these areas contributes to overall community resilience by strengthening the capacity of individuals and social systems to adapt to changes, recover from disruptions and support one another.

"A resilient community is a connected community, in which everyone knows where to access information and help and is confident that help will be provided when needed. Social resilience might therefore be understood as a collective ability to "bounce forward," rather than bounce back to a previous position."

Australian Public Policy Institute (APPI)

2.2 Why we need a Social Resilience Strategy

With growing cultural diversity and over 1,400 social assets like community groups and services, we have the building blocks to become a socially resilient city. Grassroots initiatives, a wide network of service providers, the local economy driven by small businesses and strong social networks further help to support our community through challenges.

A strengths-based approach to social resilience means recognising and building on these assets, however, as our community grows and changes, new and ongoing challenges are putting pressure on our communities, including:

- **Social inequity** – Growing disparities across social groups³, particularly for First Peoples, young people and new arrivals.
- **Housing and rental stress** – Rising housing costs, low rental vacancy rates and limited housing stock are creating challenges for people to find secure, affordable housing, with many households experiencing rental or mortgage stress, prolonged wait times for support and increased risk of homelessness.
- **Mental health challenges** – Natural disasters, financial strain and social stresses can place

increased stress on mental health and wellbeing, but many struggle to access affordable mental health services.

- **Domestic and family violence** – Incidents of domestic and family violence are increasing, placing additional pressure on already strained support services.
- **Social disharmony** – Rapid population growth and demographic shifts can result in increased tensions and disharmony within the community.
- **Social isolation** – Growing numbers of people, including those living alone, older people, disengaged young people, recent arrivals and those with disability, are at risk of social isolation.
- **Lack of public transport** – Limited public transport options can restrict access to health, education, employment and social opportunities.
- **Centralised services** – As a regional service centre, residents from surrounding areas rely on accessing centralised services within Cairns, which can contribute to service system strain, housing issues and temporary displacement.

By strengthening social resilience, we can ensure that Cairns remains a connected, healthy and inclusive community that is ready to face these and any future challenges together.

³ Queensland Reconstruction Authority (2020), Resilient Queensland in Action

Some of the things Council is already doing to build social resilience



Community grants that provide funding to community groups and organisations to deliver events and activities that enhance the lives of local communities, celebrate important community occasions and provide opportunities to grow social cohesion and connection across the Cairns region.



Facilitating a First Peoples Advisory Consultants group to advise Council on relevant issues pertaining to First Peoples, including contributing to the development and implementation of Council's reconciliation agenda.



Development and implementation of Council's Disability Access and Inclusion Plan which guides Council's commitment to creating an inclusive community by removing barriers and improving access to services, spaces, and participation for people with disability.



Libraries provide safe, inclusive community spaces that support lifelong learning, digital access and social connection across the region.



Establishment and facilitation of the democratically elected Cairns Youth Council in partnership with the Foundation for Young Australians.



Engaging community members in various volunteer opportunities across the region, including environmental conservation through the Green Space Our Place initiative, cultural and arts support at galleries and events, animal care assistance via the ACE program, and educational outreach through programs like Little Taccas and guided tours, all aimed at strengthening community bonds and promoting active civic participation.



Capacity building for local community organisations and sporting clubs through partnerships with the community sector and peak bodies.



Partnerships with Centacare and TAFE QLD to support newly arrived residents through the delivery of capacity building and education sessions on libraries, disaster preparedness, animal management and waste and recycling.



Delivery of Council's Active Living Program, which provides free physical activity classes across a wide range of public spaces to enhance community wellbeing and connectedness.



Green Space, Our Place community volunteer program with over 400 active volunteers who help contribute to the improvement and upkeep of green spaces, providing a meaningful avenue for skills development and social connection.



Maintaining and activating high-quality public spaces, including parks and the Cairns Esplanade, to provide inclusive, accessible areas for recreation, social connection, community events and active living.



Development and implementation of Council's Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) supports equitable outcomes for First Peoples by embedding organisational cultural competency, engagement, procurement and employment pathways.



Go Clubs program which strengthens the capacity of local sporting and recreation organisations through tailored training, resources, grant funding and support to foster active, connected communities.



Offering Council grants up to \$5,000 for community-led initiatives that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, restore ecosystem health, or strengthen resilience to climate change impacts.

3. Where are we now?

Building social resilience starts with understanding the unique characteristics of our community. This chapter provides a snapshot of our community today and our strengths and challenges for social resilience.

3.1 Our community

Our community is diverse and growing. Outside South-East Queensland, we have the third-largest regional population. Key characteristics of our community:

- **We are growing** – Cairns is home to 179,330 people and will grow to 241,000 (+35%) by 2051.
- **We have a young, but ageing population** – Our median age is 39 and 23% of our population is aged under 18. However, the number of people aged 65 and over is also increasing, requiring more accessible services, housing and social connections to maintain community wellbeing and reduce isolation.
- **We have a large First Peoples population** – 10% of our population identify as First Peoples, whose heritage continues to shape and enrich our resilience.
- **We are culturally diverse** – 22% of our residents were born overseas and 14% speak a language other than English at home. Languages spoken by our growing community include Nepali, Punjabi, Mandarin and Malayalam.
- **We are experiencing financial and rental stress** – 33% of renters are in rental stress, struggling to afford housing costs. At the same time, 21% of households are low-income, making it harder to keep up with rising living costs.
- **We live in diverse households** – 25% of our households are couples with children and 25% are lone-person households. 12% are single parents with children.
- **Our young people need support** – 11% of young people are disengaged from work and education, highlighting the need for stronger social connections and pathways into employment.
- **We are connected** – 14% of residents volunteer or participate in local groups, creating a strong sense of belonging and support. 10% of our residents undertake unpaid care.



3.2 Our social assets

Cairns has a strong network of social assets that support social resilience. However, access is not equitable across all areas, and some facilities and services are under strain due to rising demand.



Community spaces and places

We have a diverse range of community facilities, including libraries, cultural venues, recreation centres and parks. While these are well located, some facilities are ageing, not fit-for-purpose or do not meet accessibility and floorspace standards.



Community programs and events

There is a broad program of local activities and major events such as Cairns Festival, Ecofiesta and the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair. Council provides grant funding for community, sport and cultural groups and organisations to deliver community programs and events. These strengthen community identity and provide opportunities for social connection.



Institutions

Cairns Regional Council, Queensland Government agencies and higher education institutions such as James Cook University and TAFE play a key role in supporting the community and economy.



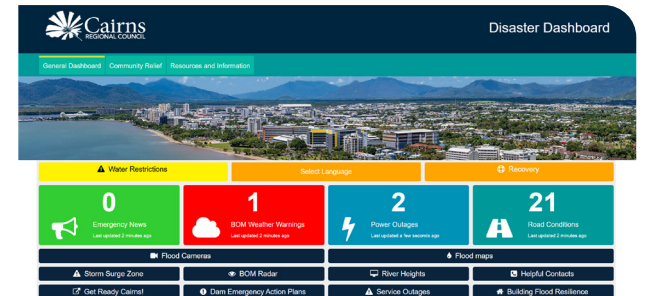
Community groups and networks

There is a strong presence of a wide range of sporting clubs, multicultural groups and volunteer networks.



Social and health services

As a regional service centre, we have extensive social and health services, but demand is rising due to population growth and increasing social and economic inequity. Access to some services, such as neighbourhood centres, varies significantly across Cairns. Limited access to public transportation across the region can also contribute to inequality of service access.



Information and communication

Access to local news, emergency updates and community information is critical to resilience. While we have a range of media and digital platforms, digital equity and inclusion remains a challenge.

3.3 Our social resilience strengths and challenges

Through background research to inform this Strategy, we identified the following strengths and challenges for our social resilience:

Strengths



- Over 1,400 social assets, including, facilities, community groups, events, and programs.
- A significant First Peoples community with over 65,000 years of cultural strength and resilience.
- A diverse and welcoming community that embraces new arrivals.
- A strong network of grassroots initiatives and service providers supporting those in need.
- A thriving local economy, 97% of businesses being small businesses that build strong community ties.
- Established communication networks, including local radio and social media platforms, helping people stay informed and connected.
- Key regional institutions such as Cairns Hospital, James Cook University, and CQUniversity.



Weaknesses

- There is growing social inequity across population cohorts.
- Cost-of-living pressure is increasing financial and housing stress.
- Mental health is becoming a key challenge.
- Incidents of domestic and family violence are increasing.
- There is inequity in health outcomes across population cohorts.
- Social isolation is increasing.
- Population growth can lead to disharmony and discrimination.
- There is a lack of access to public transport.
- Accessing information can be a challenge due to digital exclusion and low levels of digital literacy.
- Some community facilities are ageing and many are located in the central and northern parts of Cairns, with high growth forecast in the south.
- Cairns is a regional service centre that provides services for a broader geographic region (i.e. Cape York and surrounding regions).
- We are experiencing increasing natural disasters, with different catchments experiencing different hazards including bushfire, flooding and coastal hazards.

4. Our Strategy

Cairns has the building blocks for a resilient community, but as our community grows and changes, we need a coordinated whole of Council approach to strengthening social resilience. This section identifies our four focus areas to achieve our vision.

4.1 Our vision

Our vision is for a socially resilient Cairns that is a place where communities are connected, inclusive, healthy and equipped to adapt to shocks and stresses.

4.2 Council's role

Building social resilience is a shared responsibility. A collaborative approach across Council will be key in delivering social resilience action planning in Cairns. We will also need to facilitate strong partnerships with community, service providers, businesses and other levels of government.

Council's roles outlined in this Strategy include:



ADVOCATE

Championing the needs of the community to state and federal governments, advocating for funding, policy change and investment in social infrastructure, services and programs.



PARTNER

Working with other government agencies, businesses and non-profit organisations to co-deliver programs and services that build social cohesion and support vulnerable communities.



FACILITATOR

Bringing stakeholders together to collaborate on solutions, supporting local networks and providing platforms for community voices to be heard.



PROVIDER

Delivering essential social infrastructure and services, such as libraries, community centres, public spaces, and local programs that foster connection, learning and wellbeing.



FUNDER

Providing grants and funding programs to support local initiatives, community groups and social services that enhance community connection and resilience.



REGULATOR

Ensuring planning and policies support safe, inclusive and accessible communities, from social housing advocacy to disaster preparedness and public health regulations.



4.3 Our focus areas

Our four focus areas were developed in collaboration with Council staff and are informed by stakeholder engagement and research and align with work Council is already doing to support social resilience.

Delivering on our focus areas will involve a whole of Council approach, alongside partnerships with external agencies and other levels of government. Under each focus area we have outlined why it is important to our community, what we are already doing and where we want to be including future opportunity areas to guide future action planning:



Focus area 1
Local housing solutions



Focus area 2
Engaged and empowered young people



Focus area 3
Inclusive and welcoming communities



Focus area 4
Safe and respectful relationships





4.4 Focus area 1: Local housing solutions

Why this matters

Access to inclusive, affordable and accessible housing is a basic human right, essential to quality of life and social resilience. Without it, people face increased health risks, financial insecurity, social isolation and homelessness. Housing also enables our community to access education, employment and information during emergencies.

Cairns faces significant housing challenges, including rising costs, rental stress, homelessness and a lack of affordable and accessible housing. Over one in three renters (33%) in Cairns are experiencing rental stress. Key cohorts such as First Peoples, older women, people with disability and young people are particularly affected:

- First Peoples are six times more likely to experience homelessness than other Queenslanders⁴.
- Older women are one of the fastest-growing groups experiencing homelessness in Australia, often due to a combination of high housing costs, lower rates of home ownership and reduced incomes⁵.
- People with disability face significant challenges accessing affordable, appropriate housing, with around 5.4% of Cairns, a figure that is growing, living with disability⁶.
- Young people aged 12–24 are overrepresented in homelessness statistics across Queensland⁷.

While Council does not directly provide housing, we play role in advocating, planning and facilitating partnerships to improve access to housing and homelessness support services. State and national policies on housing, employment and infrastructure provide opportunities for Council to advocate for the investment we need to ensure housing supply meets the needs of our growing city.

What we are already doing

- **Towards 2050 Growth Strategy:** This long-term strategy guides sustainable urban growth, focusing on creating diverse housing options, enhancing public transport, and ensuring access to employment and essential services to meet the needs of a growing population.
- **Cairns City Precincts Urban Regeneration Project:** Provides a framework for Central Cairns to deliver the growth expectation under the Towards 2050 Strategy. It sets out targeted planning and incentives to stimulate infill housing.
- **Local Housing Action Plan:** In collaboration with the Queensland Government, this plan was developed by Council to address immediate and long-term housing challenges, incorporating actions from existing strategies and engaging with stakeholders to improve housing outcomes.
- **Advocacy for Infrastructure Investment:** Council is actively engaging with state and federal governments to secure funding for critical infrastructure projects that support housing development, economic growth, and improved access to essential services.
- **Amendments to CairnsPlan:** Amendments to the planning scheme to remove regulatory barriers to streamline approval processes for housing and to facilitate well designed housing outcomes in the right locations.

Where we want to be

Cairns is a place where everyone has access to secure, affordable and accessible housing that meets their needs. There are diverse housing options available across Cairns, supported by infrastructure, transport and employment opportunities.

Future action planning should consider the following opportunities:

Opportunities	Council's role
Collaborate with the housing and homelessness service sectors and other levels of government to facilitate access to information and referrals for people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.	Partner
Share information and data with key agencies to build awareness of the trends and impacts of homelessness and support the mapping of localised, accurate data	Facilitator Advocate
Work with State Government agencies to advocate for a coordinated and supported exit process for people transitioning from care (including health departments, corrections, institutional living and out-of-home care).	Advocate
Advocate for improved access to affordable housing, transport, employment opportunities and access to essential services such as healthcare.	Advocate
Explore opportunities to build on the outcomes of the Local Housing Action Plan, including regular reporting and updating of the Plan to ensure it remains responsive to opportunities and challenges.	Facilitator
Advocate for policy and planning that addresses economic, transport and housing insecurity for vulnerable populations through partnerships and collaboration.	Advocate

⁴ Queensland Government (2025), Our Place: A First Nations Housing and Homelessness Roadmap 2031

⁵ Queensland Government (2025), Housing and support for older women, housing.qld.gov.au/initiatives/housing-older-women

⁶ Queensland Government (2024), Partnering for inclusive housing with Queenslanders with disability 2024-2027

⁷ Queensland Government (2022), Towards ending homelessness for young Queenslanders 2022-2027



4.5 Focus area 2: Engaged and empowered young people

Why this matters

Young people play an important role in cohesive and resilient communities, bringing fresh perspectives and energy. Research shows that young people are highly connected to their communities. Adolescence is an important time for young people. It is often when they find their early independence through experiences like travelling to high school independently, getting their first job and moving out of home for the first time. However, it is also a time of significant change and many young people face challenges that have the potential to negatively impact their future opportunities and long-term wellbeing.

One in ten (11%) of our young people aged between 15 and 24 are disengaged from both work and study, with growing concerns around youth homelessness, unemployment and social exclusion. There can also be negative community perceptions of young people linked to experience and discourse around crime and anti-social behaviour. We know that young people often feel judged or excluded from public spaces and services, while financial stress, housing insecurity, poor public transport connections and a lack of safe, diverse, and youth-friendly activities after-hours, exacerbate disengagement and overall vulnerability.

Young people need access to safe, welcoming and accessible spaces and services where they can connect and express themselves, including youth-friendly spaces, sports facilities and cultural venues. We also need to provide accessible and inclusive programs that promote skill building and opportunities for employment and it is also important to explore ways to improve intergenerational relationships and community attitudes towards young people.

What we are already doing

- **Cairns Youth Council:** Facilitation of the Cairns Youth Council, in partnership with the Foundation for Young Australians, including supporting the young people to have input in Council projects, develop their priority agenda in response to the needs and aspirations of the young people of Cairns and facilitating partnerships with key stakeholders to achieve outcomes.
- **Youth Urban Art Program:** Delivery of annual youth public art program in partnership with local artists, secondary schools and users of youth activity spaces (such as skateparks).
- **Youth Arts and Cultural Programs:** Council offers a range of youth arts and cultural programs for young people, including the Flame.Arts program for emerging artists and the Cairns Children's Festival.
- **Employment Pathways and Workforce Initiatives:** Council's employment pathways projects support workforce development through student placements, internships, traineeships and apprenticeships, and graduate programs to create inclusive opportunities for skill-building and career pathways.

Where we want to be

Young people in Cairns are healthy, engaged and empowered to contribute to a socially resilient community. They have access to safe spaces, affordable housing, education and employment opportunities and public transport that connects them to these essential services and opportunities.

Council's community programs and initiatives are tailored to the unique social and economic needs of young people and promoted in a youth friendly manner, ensuring all young people in our community have equitable access to opportunities and support.

Future action planning should consider the following opportunities:

Opportunities	Council's role
Create safe, accessible and inclusive spaces for young people across Cairns. Ensure young people have a say in the planning and delivery of community infrastructure.	Provider Partner Advocate
Partner with industry, government and non-profits to support education and employment pathways that meet the needs of young people.	Partner
Develop campaigns and foster opportunities for positive storytelling that challenge negative stereotypes about young people in our community.	Facilitator
Explore avenues to elevate the voices of young people on issues and priorities that are important to them, including through the development of the Cairns Youth Council priority agenda, and by connecting young people with opportunities to provide input into planning, processes and policies which impact them.	Facilitator Advocate
Deliver events, activities and programs that support young people to connect with, and contribute to, community life.	Provider Facilitator Partner Funder
Advocate for continued investment in transport solutions that cater to the needs of young people, including public and active transportation.	Advocate Provider



4.6 Focus area 3: Inclusive and welcoming communities

Why this matters

Rapid population growth and change can result in disharmony between new and established groups and lead to social tensions. When people feel welcome and included, and can access the services and facilities they need, they are more likely to engage in community life, contribute their skills and connect to their neighbourhoods, services and institutions. This connection and sense of belonging is essential for building social cohesion and resilience.

Our growing community is also socially and economically diverse. We have First Peoples, culturally diverse communities, including new arrivals and people on temporary visas, people with disability, older people and young people who call Cairns home. While this diversity strengthens our community and creates a rich cultural fabric with opportunities for learning and celebration, it can also present challenges to inclusion and social cohesion, including digital exclusion, language barriers, unaffordability, and transport disadvantage. By seeking to address these challenges, we can ensure our community remains strong, connected and able to bounce back from tough times.

As our community continues to grow and change, we need to provide spaces, services and opportunities where people from all backgrounds and experiences can connect, learn and actively contribute. That includes celebrating our diversity through events and programs that support cultural exchange, improving digital and language access and fostering opportunities for civic participation.

What we are already doing

- **Support for Diverse Community Events:** Recent funding has supported events like the Cairns Indian Festival, Cairns NAIDOC in the Park, and the Babinda Harvest Festival, fostering community connection and celebration.
- **Library Programs and Digital Inclusion:** Cairns Libraries provide a wide range of inclusive programs that foster lifelong learning, connection and inclusion and reduce inequity by supporting early literacy, digital access and skills development.
- **Creative Life Programming:** Delivery of inclusive arts and cultural initiatives and community markets foster community connection, celebrate local identity and diversity, and support participation in creative expression and local enterprise across all ages and backgrounds.
- **Partnerships with Centacare and TAFE QLD:** Council delivers education and capacity-building sessions for newly arrived residents to support their settlement journey, covering key topics such as disaster readiness, waste and recycling practices and access to library services.
- **Disability Access and Inclusion Plan:** Council is committed to a wide range of actions to create a more accessible, inclusive community by reducing barriers to participation and ensuring people with disability can participate in civic, social, and economic life.

Where we want to be

Cairns is a place where people feel they belong, can contribute and have a say in the decisions that affect them. Social bonds and connections are built through inclusive public spaces, programs and events, strong support networks and opportunities for learning, celebration, civic participation and leadership.

Future action planning should consider the following opportunities:

Opportunities	Council's role
Deliver and support local events, programs and campaigns that celebrate culture and diversity and promote social cohesion by providing opportunities for learning, sharing and connecting.	Provider Funder Facilitator Partner
Improve access to public spaces, facilities and services for people with disability, older people, young people and people who speak languages other than English.	Provider Advocate Partner Funder
Support increased digital access and literacy, particularly for older people, people who speak languages other than English and people at risk of social isolation.	Provider Advocate Facilitator
Support and encourage underrepresented groups to engage with leadership, consultation and participation opportunities.	Facilitator
Provide opportunities for people from a wide range of backgrounds to connect and participate in community activities, such as volunteering programs.	Facilitator Partner
Advocate for investment in services, policy and innovative responses which increase social cohesion.	Advocate



4.7 Focus area 4: Safe and respectful relationships

Why this matters

Being safe and having strong relationships are the foundation of social resilience and wellbeing. When people feel secure and supported, they are more able to face life's challenges, work, learn, and participate community life.

Just like the rest of Queensland, incidents of domestic and family violence (DFV) are increasing across Cairns. For example, between the 2020-21 and 2024-25 Cairns Magistrates Court reporting periods, there was a 157% increase in the number of flagged DFV offences resulting in charges lodged. The Cairns Magistrates Court has recorded the highest number of flagged DFV offences resulting in charges lodged in Queensland for the last 5 consecutive years. It is acknowledged that this is just one measure of DFV violence in our community, and that occurrences are generally under-reported.

DFV doesn't just hurt individuals, it ripples through families, disrupts communities and impacts our collective wellbeing:

- **For individuals and families** - DFV causes deep trauma, mental and physical health issues, housing instability, financial insecurity, and can disrupt children's development, education, and sense of safety. The effects can last for generations.
- **For communities** - When people don't feel safe at home or in their relationship, they are less likely to participate fully in community life - in school, work, sport, and social settings. DFV places pressure on local services, like police, health, housing and weakens social cohesion.

- **For society** - DFV contributes to gender inequality, economic disadvantage, homelessness, and intergenerational cycles of violence. It also costs billions in lost productivity, healthcare, legal costs, and support services.

While Council does not deliver specialist domestic and family violence response or intervention services, we play a key role in advocacy and fostering collaboration. We can also support domestic and family violence prevention, to address its underlying causes, change attitudes and work towards creating safer and more respectful communities.

What we are already doing

- **Workforce DFV Awareness:** Partnering with DFV organisations to deliver prevention and awareness raising activities within the Council workforce.
- **Local Government DFV Prevention Champions Network:** Participation in local government collective as a key initiative of the Queensland Government's Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Council, providing opportunities to collaborate with, and learn from, other Councils.

Where we want to be

Cairns is a place where everyone feels safe, respected and is connected. People have access to the information, support, services and networks they need to build healthy relationships and to seek help when experiencing domestic and family violence. Council plays a leadership role in prevention, working in partnership with the community and service sector to drive collaboration, advocacy and long-term change.

Future action planning should consider the following opportunities:

Opportunities	Council's role
Collaborate with the Queensland Police and service and community sector representatives to understand local data, challenges and needs to inform advocacy efforts and raise awareness with decision-makers.	Partner Advocate
Advocate for improved crisis housing/ accommodation	Advocate
Support awareness raising and education opportunities to promote respectful relationships.	Facilitator Partner Funder
Leverage opportunities to advocate for increased funding to support local domestic and family violence services	Advocate
Advocate to other levels of government for policy reform to address the complex nature of DFV and the ways in which systems and institutions respond, for example courts and policing.	Advocate
Support Council staff to undertake DFV training	Facilitator

5. Implementation and reporting

This Strategy provides a roadmap for improving social resilience in Cairns across four focus areas over the next four years. Under each focus area we have identified opportunities for Council and our partners to work towards over the next four years. To translate these opportunities into actions, Council will embed social resilience across Council business to ensure a whole-of-Council approach. This includes incorporating social resilience considerations into planning, infrastructure, community development, and service delivery, and capturing social resilience outcomes of a broad section of aligned Council strategies and plans.

Council will produce an annual scorecard detailing progress and outcomes against each of the four focus areas. To track progress and ensure the Strategy delivers meaningful change, Council will monitor a range of social resilience indicators over time. Where possible, data will be drawn from existing sources such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), partner organisations, and Council's Our Cairns Survey.



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