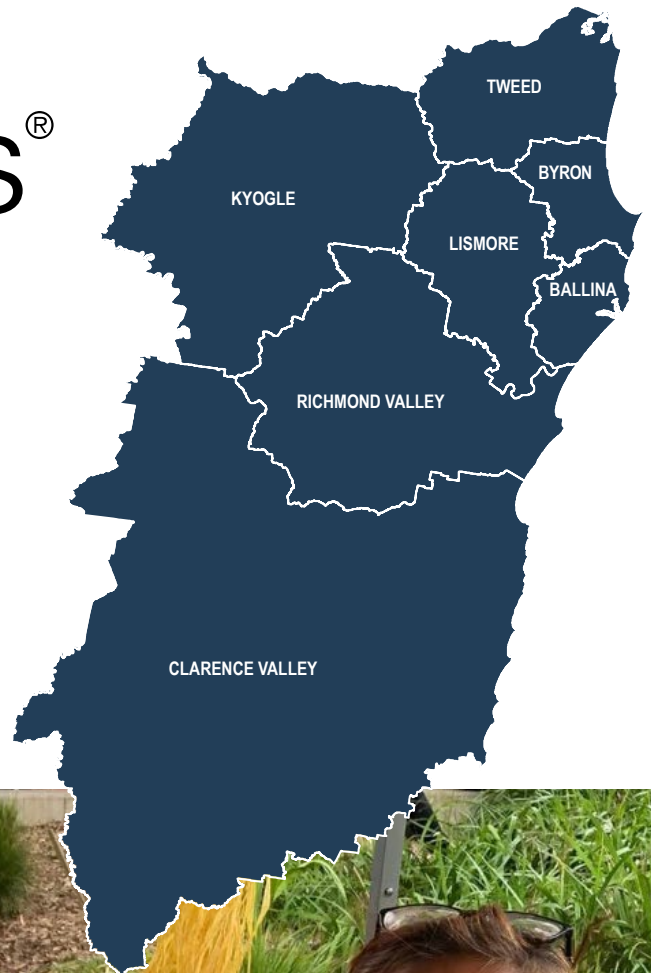


NORTHERN RIVERS NSW

VitalSigns[®] 2023

The Vital Signs report is a snapshot of the Northern Rivers community vitality and resilience. It outlines the strengths, challenges and opportunities across the seven Local Government Areas that span the region in the following indicators:

- Education and Employment
- Housing and Homelessness
- Environment and Sustainability
- Healthy and Resilient Communities



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

NRCF acknowledges the Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr and Yaegl people as the Traditional Owners of the land on which we live and work, across the region of the Northern Rivers. We recognise the continuing connection to land, water and community, and the generosity of First Nations sharing when we walk alongside. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present.

HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

Our Northern Rivers community has a lot to be proud of. While we face challenges, we are ready to start difficult conversations towards a better future for our region. Our community spirit is strong and we encourage you to use the information in this report to start conversations about how you, along with your community, can make a difference and be a changemaker for a stronger and better Northern Rivers region.

Ask the Questions

- What issues do I care about?
- What surprised me?
- How can I make a difference?

Get Involved

Give: Find out how you can donate or volunteer your time at: nrcf.org.au/get-involved/

NRCF will use the Vital Signs report and the feedback we receive to focus our grant making on the most important issues for our community.



WHAT WE LOVE ABOUT OUR COMMUNITY

I love driving home from work towards Murwillumbah, and seeing Wollumbin/ Mt Warning and the sugar mill and sensing the welcome home aura. I love the cane fires and the smell when they crush the cane.

Tracey, Murwillumbah

I love all of the natural landscapes, the friendliness of the people, the willingness of people to pull together for others in the community, and the proximity of the Gold Coast and Brisbane for other necessities (hospitals, airports, etc).

Kate, Tweed

OUR VILLAGE

IF THE NORTHERN RIVERS WAS A VILLAGE OF 100 PEOPLE:

313,422

2022 POPULATION

0.77% increase since 2021
Regional NSW: 0.98%

47

MEDIAN AGE

NSW: 39 Aus: 38

GENDER



49

Male



51

Female

AGE

17



Children
0 - 14 yrs

10



Youth
14 - 25 yrs

49



Adults
25 - 64 yrs

25



Senior
65+ yrs

HOW WE LIVE



27

Live alone



22

Couples with children

DIVERSITY & MULTICULTURALISM



5

Aboriginal /
Torres Strait
Islanders

13

Born overseas

14

Culturally and
linguistically
diverse

ACROSS OUR REGION



123

Nationalities

611

Speak Australian
Indigenous
languages at home

1,265

People have
poor English
proficiency

RELIGION - TOP 3



45

Christian



43

No religion /
secular beliefs



4

Other
religion

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



16

Volunteer

35,000

Unpaid carers

\$1.40

Donated to charity
for every \$100 spent

ACCESSIBILITY & CONNECTIVITY

7

Require help in
their daily lives

16

Work
at home

5

Have
no car

75

Live and work in
the same LGA

EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT

Thriving and resilient communities offer flexible, affordable opportunities for meaningful learning throughout life, providing pathways to meaningful employment.

PRIMARY EDUCATION



Children attending primary school

Regional NSW: 17.9%
NSW: 18.2%

HIGHER EDUCATION



Attending TAFE/
vocational
qualifications

Regional NSW 2.5%



Attending university

Regional NSW: 3.0%



Hold Bachelor or higher degrees

5.8% increase 2016 to 2021.
Regional NSW: 17%, NSW: 27.8%

QUALIFICATIONS

51% of the population aged 15+ held educational qualifications

37.5% had no qualifications
Regional NSW 39%, NSW 35.9%, AU 36.8%

YOUTH DISENGAGEMENT

11% of 15-24 year olds were **not engaged in employment or education**, a decrease of 1.2% since 2016.

Regional NSW: 10.5%, NSW: 9.5%, Australia: 9.1%

EMPLOYMENT



of the workforce is **employed**, up by 2.3% from 92.7% in 2016.



worked full-time

Regional NSW: 54.5%,
NSW: 55.2%, AU: 55.9%



worked part-time

Regional NSW: 33.7%,
NSW: 29.7%, AU: 31.2%



of 15+ year olds participate **in the workforce**, an increase of 1.8% since 2016.

WHAT WE DO



2 in 5 people work in the following industries:

Healthcare 17.5%
Retail trade 10.4%
Construction 9.8%

There are more professionals than any other occupation.



Professionals



Technicians / trades



Community / personal service

SENIORS



13.8% of 65+ year olds are in the labour force, increased from 10.6% in 2016.

Regional NSW 14.0%,
NSW 14.7%

WEEKLY INCOME



Median weekly household income increased \$251 since 2016, but is still lower than Regional NSW and NSW.
Regional NSW \$1,466, NSW \$1,849

JOBSEEKER

8.5%

Jobseeker recipients 21% higher than in Regional NSW.

14%

JobSeeker Payments accounted for 14% of the working age population in 2019-20.
NSW: 8.6%

HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

Access to safe, affordable housing that meets the diverse needs of a community is a key measure of a successful and equitable community. Housing supply, rental and mortgage stress are key issues in our region.

FLOOD IMPACTS ON HOUSING

 **10,000**
People displaced

 **6,300**
Homes damaged
1,337 badly damaged
5,000 other damage

1,800
People still living in temporary housing
This includes pod villages, at-home caravans and emergency accommodation.
(As of March 8, 2023)

WHERE WE LIVE


Two of our seven LGAs are in the top ten higher needs ranking compared to other housing areas: Byron #1 and Tweed #7.

66%
Purchasing or fully own their home

21%
Live in private rentals

3%
Live in social housing


BUYING A HOME

 Since March 2022, the average cost of houses increased by 0.2%, but the **cost of units increased by 23%**.


HOME PRICES


Median house price:
\$1,009,214
Median unit price:
\$541,463


COST OF RENTING

 **6%**
Rental costs went up 6% between March 2022 and March 2023.

MORTGAGE AND RENTAL STRESS

 **43.4%**
of renters are experiencing rental stress.

 **15.6%**
of homeowners are experiencing mortgage stress.

 Changes to interest rates, along with the increase in house prices, means **homeowners are paying almost 30% more to service their mortgage.**

A CRISIS AT HOME

The Northern Rivers community has long experienced housing and homelessness issues, and these have been exacerbated by recent events including bushfires, a global pandemic, and multiple significant floods of 2022.

The housing and homelessness situation is a complex issue. Due to a range of factors, such as the broader housing market, government policies, wage stagnation and internal migration, housing in the Northern Rivers is hard to find or afford.



HOUSING AVAILABILITY



598 Available private rentals

and 6,849 Airbnb listings. Only 963 available for longer-term rent. Average price per night is \$517, which is not an affordable housing option.



13,604 Unoccupied dwellings

38% are short term rental accommodation.

NSW: 13%

HOUSING SUPPLY



11%

The number of dwellings increased by 11% between 2011 and 2021 (+14,139), however the number of households increased by 13%.



259,774

Households, an increase of 113% since 2016, and with average household size of 2.35.

Regional NSW: 2.41 NSW: 2.57

Over last five years:

7,018

New dwellings approved

12,135

Population increase

SOCIAL HOUSING



78

4,262 social housing dwellings (2022) 3% of total dwellings, and a reduction of 78 since 2021.

Regional NSW: 3.8%, NSW: 4%



4.5 Yrs

The median wait time for general applicants in northern NSW has reached **4.5 years**. For priority applicants, it is 4.6 months.

+6,200



Additional social and affordable dwellings are needed by 2026.

HOMELESSNESS



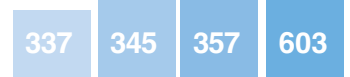
2%

Our homeless population continued its climb with an increase of 2% since 2016.

69%



The true figure of those sleeping rough has increased by 69% in the past 12 months. That's people sleeping on the street, the beach, in their cars, tents or crisis accommodation.



2020 2021 2022 2023

STREET COUNT (7 LGAs)

1,487

Homeless people



42% Female



58% Male

320 Homeless but employed

336 Over 55 years of age

204 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

273 Children and youth under 19 years of age



+1,373

An additional 1,373 people are living in marginalised housing, including crowded dwellings, improved dwellings or caravan parks.



We have found families are really struggling to meet basic needs due to many having to find new housing and having to pay exorbitant rents leaving them very little to feed their families and pay essential living costs.

Wendy Constantine, Manager,
Murwillumbah Community Centre Inc



The upside of the floods is the wonderful community response. We've seen so many people taking care of each other. I believe that real change and healing comes from the ground up, through building connections with country and community.

Elissa McAuliffe, Director, Arcoora

ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

Our economy, social connectivity and cultural identity are reliant upon the region's natural resources. How we manage and protect these systems determines their sustainability and our own.

RENEWABLE ENERGY



54% of dwellings have rooftop solar power panels. Tweed has highest uptake at 54.6%, while Clarence Valley the lowest at 43%. NSW: 30.6%.



Rooftop solar installation increased 4.3% between 2021 and 2022 to 18.6%, significantly higher than NSW (13.5%) and Australia (12.1%).

CLIMATE



Projected that the number of maximum temperature **days above 40 degrees will increase by 21% by 2030.**

BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEMS



Only 1% of the Big Scrub lowland subtropical rainforest remains, scattered across less than 700 hectares.



THREATENED SPECIES

- 206** Endangered plants
- 7** Critically-endangered plants
- 90** Endangered animals
- 20** Critically-endangered animals

WASTE

59.4% Regional recycling rate. Australia: 60%



895 tonnes kept out of landfill.



348 tonnes of wasted food re-circulated into local compost systems.

NORTHERN RIVERS FLOOD IMPACT

The weather event, the worst natural disaster to hit the region in over a century, saw rainfall totals and water levels exceeding historical records significantly in many parts of the region.

The recovery effort is underway, but it is complex and long-term. The full cost of the damage is currently estimated at \$4.6 billion. This is likely to increase as the recovery continues.

NRCF acknowledges the courage and determination of the people of the Northern Rivers, and we are committed to supporting the recovery through our research and grant funding.

Flood Environmental Impact

Area flooded	989 sq km
Agricultural land flooded	719 sq km
Residential land flooded	35.24 sq km

28 February 2022 records



Wilsons River in Lismore peaked at 14.4 metres. The previous record of 12.9 metres was set in 1954.



Richmond River in Casino peaked at 12.7 metres. The previous record of 11.9 metres was set in 1974.



Tweed River in Murwillumbah peaked at 11.8 metres. The previous record of 11.4 metres was set in 1980.



The region received an average of 1,000mm of rain in February 2022, **more than double the average monthly rainfall.**



The floods affected over 40,000 people in the region.



Every home owner who's houses are being put back the way they were will likely suffer PTSD every time there's a severe rain event. It is ludicrous with the projections of climate change that this is allowed to happen. Who is helping these people avoid a repeat? Noone.

Sasha Mainsbridge, General Manager, Mullum Cares

HEALTHY & RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

Community connection, expression and participation builds a healthy and vibrant community, and is vital to people's health, wellbeing and sense of place.

COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS

50% Regularly attend community events, festivals and markets.
Regional NSW: 44.1%, Regional Australia: 43.97%

23% Take part in sports groups or teams.
Regional NSW: 23.6%, Regional Australia: 26.8%

72% Feel part of the community.
Regional NSW 78.3%, Regional Australia 77.7%

60% Agree this community copes pretty well when faced with challenges.
Regional NSW 81.6%, Regional Australia: 73.8%

89% Agree there's good community spirit.
Regional NSW 77.2%, Regional Australia 75.7%

83% Feel this community has a bright future.
Regional NSW: 78.6%, Regional Australia 77.9%

DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY RISK



Almost **1 in 3 primary students** and more than **1 in 3 secondary students** are at risk.



Students not identifying as male or female are at greatest risk for both.

RESILIENT KIDS

40%

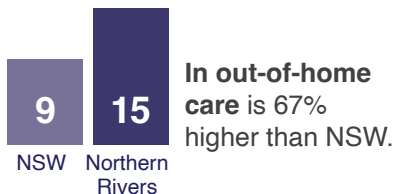
More than 40% of all primary students are at risk of trauma-related stress.



Almost **4 in 10 primary students** and **3 in 10 secondary students** report being bullied at school.

CHILDREN AT RISK

Rate of children and young people per 1,000 population 0-17years



ADULT HEALTH



One in three people suffers from at least one long-term health condition.

The top three long term health conditions are:

12% Arthritis

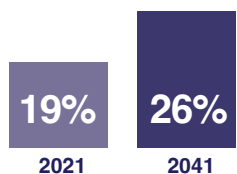
10% Mental Health Conditions

9% Asthma

AGEING POPULATION



The region has a rapidly ageing population with **1 in 4 people 65yrs+**.



The proportion of people aged 65yrs+ is expected to increase from 19% in 2021 to 26% in 2041.

MENTAL HEALTH

22% Reported having a mental health or behavioural condition.



In 2019-20, the rate of **self-harm hospitalisations** was **127.8 per 100,000** NSW: 87.7

DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE



1 in 6 women experience physical or sexual violence by a current or former partner.

Richmond Valley, Lismore, Clarence Valley were higher than NSW.

THANKS

The Northern Rivers Community Foundation would like to thank those individuals and organisations who have assisted and contributed to this report, including End Street Sleeping Collaboration, North Coast Landcare, and our program partner, The Vasudhara Foundation.



LOCAL CONNECTS GLOBAL

The United Nations has adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. The SDGs were set up in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly and are intended to be achieved by the year 2030.

Our Vital Signs report is relevant to the following goals:



CONTACT NRCF

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You can see capital recovery and progress in buildings. You can't see the mental health crisis and damage caused by this massive trauma. Some are finding it hard to put one foot in front of the other.

James Short, Director, Business of Smiles



I have always believed that we need to create the community that we want to live in - that no joy or success has meaning if it isn't shared with those around us.

Lynda Dean, NRCF Deputy Chair

ABOUT VITAL SIGNS

Vital Signs is a community check-up conducted by community foundations around the world that measures the vitality of our communities and identifies trends in a range of areas critical to quality of life. With special thanks to the Toronto Foundation for developing and sharing the Vital Signs concept. The Vital Signs logo and program is used with permission from Community Foundations of Canada. Community Foundations Australia manages the licensing of Vital Signs within Australia. Community Foundations Australia is the peak body for Community Foundations in Australia, and manages licensing the Vital Signs program in Australia by agreement with Community Foundations of Canada. For enquiries, contact info@cfaustralia.org.au.

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