



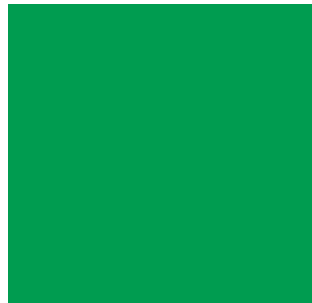
REGIONAL  
AUSTRALIA  
INSTITUTE

# Regionalisation Ambition 2032

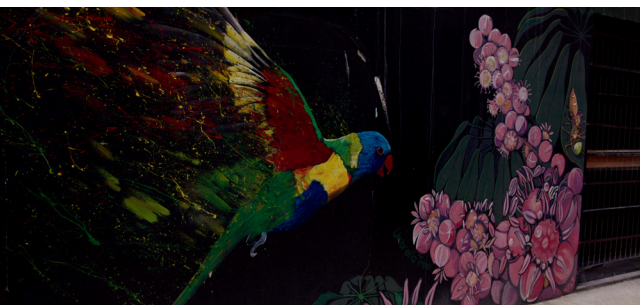
## A Framework to Rebalance the Nation



**REBALANCE**  
THE NATION



**2023**  
Year 1 Progress Report



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Access the digital report and further information at [www.rebalancethenation.com.au](http://www.rebalancethenation.com.au)



**Acknowledgement of country**

The Regional Australia Institute (RAI) acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia. The RAI recognises the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and acknowledges and respects the continuing connections to country, rivers, land and sea. We recognise that sovereignty was never ceded. We also pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to all Traditional Custodians of this land.





**The Hon. Catherine King MP**  
Minister for Infrastructure, Transport,  
Regional Development and Local  
Government

## Foreword

RAI's 2023 progress report against its Regionalisation Ambition 2032 shows positive progress on a range of issues important to vibrant and productive regions.

I commend the RAI on its work building the evidence base and a community of support for regional Australia across diverse sectors.

This report demonstrates that measuring progress is critical to understand what's working. Alongside tools like the Government's new [Regional Data Hub](#), it will continue help to better inform government, industries and communities.

The RAI has been instrumental in lifting understanding and importance of regional development, to not only benefit the millions of Australians who call our regions home, but the nation as a whole. Critically, this work continues to articulate that action is needed across sectors and levels of government to address the complex challenges, as well as hearing the voices of those living and working in the regions.

As we reflect on the past 12 months, we acknowledge significant strides towards a more holistic, national framework have been taken to support better futures for our regions. As the Australian Minister for Regional Development, I am proud to be part of a Government working to support the goals of our regions through a new strategic framework and place-based investments.

Announced in the 2023-2024 Federal Budget, the [Regional Investment Framework](#) identifies four key priority areas for cross-Government investment: people, places, services, and industries and local economies. This approach – harnessing regional investment across all Government portfolios – is a transformative step in setting regional Australia on a path of continued long-term economic and social prosperity.

Further, our investment of \$1 billion in our new regional programs – Growing Regions and the regional Precincts and Partnerships – will provide critical community and economic infrastructure and drive collaboration to transform regional towns and spaces.

I look forward to continuing to work with the RAI, other levels of government, representative groups, and the people, communities and industries that make up regional Australia, as we continue our shared journey towards harnessing the potential of our regions, and through this, our nation.





**Liz Ritchie**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Regional Australia Institute

**One year ago, the Regional Australia Institute (RAI) led the development of a holistic framework to better plan for and invest in the growth of regional Australia – the Regionalisation Ambition 2032 (the Ambition).**

At its heart, the Ambition seeks to ‘rebalance the nation’ to create a more equitable future for the 9.6 million Australians (and growing!) who live in the regions.

The Ambition was co-designed and is co-owned by the RAI’s members and the people of regional Australia. A year on, the coalition of support for the Ambition consists of stakeholders across Government, industry, community and not-for-profits.

Spanning five pillars, the Ambition is underpinned by 20 targets addressing fundamental aspects of regional living. If achieved, these targets will improve the lives of regional Australians for generations to come and, importantly, create a better Australia.

Far from a set and forget plan, the Ambition is dynamic and evolving to meet the needs of our times.

To keep the nation accountable, we are committed to reporting annually on the progress against the 20 targets. Presenting here, the first Regionalisation Ambition Progress Report (the report).

This report looks at progress made towards the Ambition’s targets and importantly showcases the great work our policymakers, corporate leaders and championing communities are delivering to shift the targets in the right direction.

Our research continues to highlight that Australians want to make the move to regional Australia. Capital-to-regional migration remained higher than pre-COVID levels through 2022 and 2023, and one in five city dwellers are thinking about making the move. This sustained interest in the regions will be supported by achieving our 20 targets.

This year, several target measures have moved in the right direction, particularly across education, migration and the transition to net zero in our regions.

However, several target measures are lagging in areas that continue to dominate the national conversation. In particular, the measures of recruitment difficulty and housing availability are not yet shifting in a positive direction.

We do recognise the immense work in these areas, and we look forward to seeing the impact of this engagement over coming years, across all sectors and places.

So, while there is still a way to go in achieving our Ambition, it is important to reflect on the wins, big and small, and continue to do so each year. As it is by sharing and learning from this work that we can build the momentum to truly shift our gaze, and rebalance the nation.



## About the RAI

The Regional Australia Institute (RAI) is the nation's first and only independent think tank dedicated to empowering Australia's regions.

The Institute is a not-for-profit organisation that undertakes research to stimulate and activate rural and regional communities.

In 2021 the RAI celebrated 10 years. We are proud of the vast array of research, data and detailed insights the RAI has provided into many of the significant issues and challenges facing regional Australia.

The work of the Institute is made possible through research partnerships with Federal and State Governments, the national Regions Rising event series, regional consultancy projects, membership and philanthropic funding.

The RAI exists so that decision-makers at all levels of government, not-for-profit, industry and community have the information they need to ensure the best outcomes for regional Australia.

By replacing myths and stereotypes with facts and knowledge, the RAI builds bridges between city and country Australians.

**Our purpose is to empower regions to thrive. When our regions are strong, Australia is strong.**

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Temora - NSW

## Regional Australia in 2023

The past year was not easy in Australia and around the world, with inflationary pressures, rising interest rates, and tight rental and housing markets placing pressure on household budgets. Job vacancy figures continued to hit record highs both regionally, and in our cities, with many regions across Australia competing for the same talent.

As a nation, we also felt brave enough to term 2023 the 'post-COVID' era, as national and international mobility began to return to pre-COVID levels, and many questioned what the 'new norm' would be. Would those who sought the benefits of regional living during pandemic lockdowns stay in the regions? Would the gradual return of overseas migrants ease the record-high job vacancies?

This global context and key questions were front of mind for the RAI as the Institute continued to highlight these regional stories in its work.

### The regional renaissance continues

The Regional Movers Index (RMI), a project delivered in partnership with the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, has continued to highlight the heightened mobility of city-dwellers to our regions, with capital-to-regional migration reaching its third highest level in five years in our March 2023 quarter release.<sup>1</sup> The most recent release noted that even with the mid-year tendency for lower levels of migration, migration flows in the June 2023 quarter were more than 16% higher on average compared to 2018 and 2019 levels.<sup>2</sup>

### Career opportunities abound in regional Australia

A survey, commissioned by RAI, found capital city Australians are increasingly switching on to the career prospects in the regions. To assist, the RAI launched *It's Your Move* - Regional Australia's Biggest Ever Recruitment Drive this year.

RAI's 2022 job vacancies report '*The Big Skills Challenge*' highlighted the continuing record demand for regional workers, outpacing capital city job vacancy growth, with many of these jobs in skilled occupations.<sup>3</sup> The Institute's research also tells us one in five city dwellers want to make the move, with millennials increasingly recognising job opportunities in regions, aided by the increase in working from home roles.<sup>4</sup>

### Shifting the nation's gaze

In an address to the National Press Club in May, RAI CEO Liz Ritchie challenged the nation to shift its gaze in terms of how we plan for and invest in regional growth. Since then, we have seen hopeful signs that decision-makers have heeded this call to collaborate towards a more inclusive, balanced and prosperous Australia.

Despite the budgetary pressures tightening fiscal spending, the Institute is encouraged by the extent of consultation and collaboration the Federal Government is undertaking, with the view of reform in many areas fundamental to regional living and prosperity including housing, education, jobs and skills, migration, population planning, new industry development and energy transition.

The Institute also commends the Federal Government on the development of Australia's first Wellbeing Framework, *Measuring What Matters*. This takes a key step toward measuring the nation's prosperity in a different way – not only measuring growth based on traditional economic indicators, but also monitoring whether we are becoming a more 'healthy, secure, sustainable, cohesive and prosperous Australia'.<sup>5</sup> There is also significant alignment between this Framework and the pillars and objectives of the Regionalisation Ambition.

Another important milestone this year was the release of the Federal Government's '*Regional Investment Framework*'. Outlining four priority areas across regional Australia's people, places, services, industries and local economies, this new Framework seeks to enable focused, system-wide investment in regional Australia.

The Government's most recent *Intergenerational Report* highlights the multiple forces that will influence Australia over the next 40 years. With pressures such as an ageing population, heightened presence of digital and data technology, climate change, the net zero transformation, and rising demand for care and support services, Australia is faced with the challenges, and opportunities, that come with this.

These forces, however, will not impact Australia's diverse regions equally, with the RAI's call to the nation to shift its gaze becoming more important than ever, as national leaders look to shape the nation for the future, and seize the opportunities presented.

### Closing the Gap

The *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* (Closing the Gap) aims to achieve equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in health, education, employment, housing, justice and other socio-cultural outcomes, through the commitment to four priority reform areas and 17 socio-economic outcomes, with measurable targets.

While these targets are set at a national level, this year's *Closing the Gap Annual Data Compilation Report* highlights the increasing disparity in outcomes experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in rural and remote Australia.

The improvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' wellbeing is essential to creating a thriving regional Australia and the achievement of the Regionalisation Ambition 2032.

The RAI acknowledges the opportunity Australians have this year to shift our gaze toward the best pathway possible for a prosperous future, with the Referendum on the Voice to Parliament for First Nations people taking place. Inclusion is a core principle of our Framework and we cannot rebalance the nation without simultaneously striving for equity of Australia's First Peoples.

The RAI has committed to supporting the upcoming referendum on Constitutional recognition of First Nations Australians and the establishment of a Voice to Parliament.

**Missed our Regionalisation Ambition 2032 release, and want to recap? Download the Ambition at [www.rebalancethenation.com.au](http://www.rebalancethenation.com.au) and check out our helpful 'Regionalisation 101' videos while you're there!**



## What's next for 2024 and beyond?

The RAI would like to see continued collaboration across all levels of Government, industry, and communities to propel momentum towards the achievement of the targets set for 2032.

### Government at all levels can:

- Consider the development of a National Population Plan that embeds regional Australia's role in the nation's growth, through the leadership of Federal Government.
- Focus on further policy levers to improve housing access and affordability, establishing clear targets and place-based measures to tackle the housing challenges across Australia's diverse regions.
- Collaboratively shape a new migration strategy that meets place-based needs and sees migration levels in regions rise, through the leadership of Federal Government.
- Continue to invest in programs that increase post-school qualification attainment, particularly in skills and industries of the future, such as increasing VET placements and university study hubs.
- Implement governance frameworks that promote place-based decision making in policy implementation.

### Industry and community can:

- Apply the Ambition's Framework to your next strategic planning or evaluation process, and consider how the Ambition can support your events and conversations.
- Continue to play your part in rebalancing the nation through knowledge sharing and collaboration – one way you can do this is by submitting your pledges of support via our website, and sharing your progress.
- Continue to share your stories and successes from your region with the RAI.
- Help us to amplify our Ambition by encouraging collaboration and fostering connections in your region, connecting conversations to our research.
- Talk to your local member about the Regionalisation Ambition 2032.

Want to explore how the Ambition could support your own organisation or community project?

Talk to our team at: [info@regionalaustralia.org.au](mailto:info@regionalaustralia.org.au)

### RAI key priorities:

The RAI continues to advocate for action right across our target areas and this year we are undertaking a number of actions to further our Ambition to rebalance the nation including:

- Co-designing an outline and regional design principles for a National Population Plan with our members and Alliance network.
- Continued collaboration with state and federal policy makers on how RAI research can support and influence future decisions and translate into tangible policy solutions. This includes our current research as part of the InterGovernmental Shared Inquiry Program shedding light on local labour markets, how regions are approaching the transition to net zero, and the circular economy.
- Building momentum with the National Alliance for Regionalisation to influence the key policy areas of our organisations including skills, education, housing and migration.
- Continued delivery of our Thrive Together workshops across the country, working with our members to connect and collaborate at a grassroots level.
- Continuing to bring to life the Ambition at a state and territory level, with NSW, TAS and NT reports to be released over the coming year. As part of this, we will commit to reporting on state progress each year.
- Continued exploration and identification of improved, and additional measures for the Ambition targets, in key areas identified in this report (refer to 'Building on our methodology').
- Identifying how we can further contribute to improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within our Ambition, as part of the development of our organisation's Reconciliation Action Plan.

### Our Members

We would like to acknowledge and thank our member networks who are working with us to champion the Regionalisation Ambition 2032.



Katoomba and the Blue Mountains - NSW

**Launching the National Alliance for Regionalisation**

In March, the RAI launched the *National Alliance for Regionalisation* (the Alliance) – a powerful group of 34 leading peak bodies and for-purpose organisations who will work towards bringing the Regionalisation Ambition 2032 to life.

The first of its kind in this country, the Alliance aims to better position the regions to reach their potential by viewing the important areas of the Ambition through its collective lens.

In its first year, the Alliance has forged a forum for knowledge-sharing and national leadership to ensure the 20 targets and aspirations set out in the Ambition remain relevant and central to decision-making for regional Australia over the next decade.

While each organisation has its individual policy priorities, the Alliance has gathered to work collectively to progress targets in the Ambition – focusing initially on key areas of alignment such as regional housing, worker shortages, education, migration and resilience.



**Launching the National Alliance for Regionalisation at Parliament House**

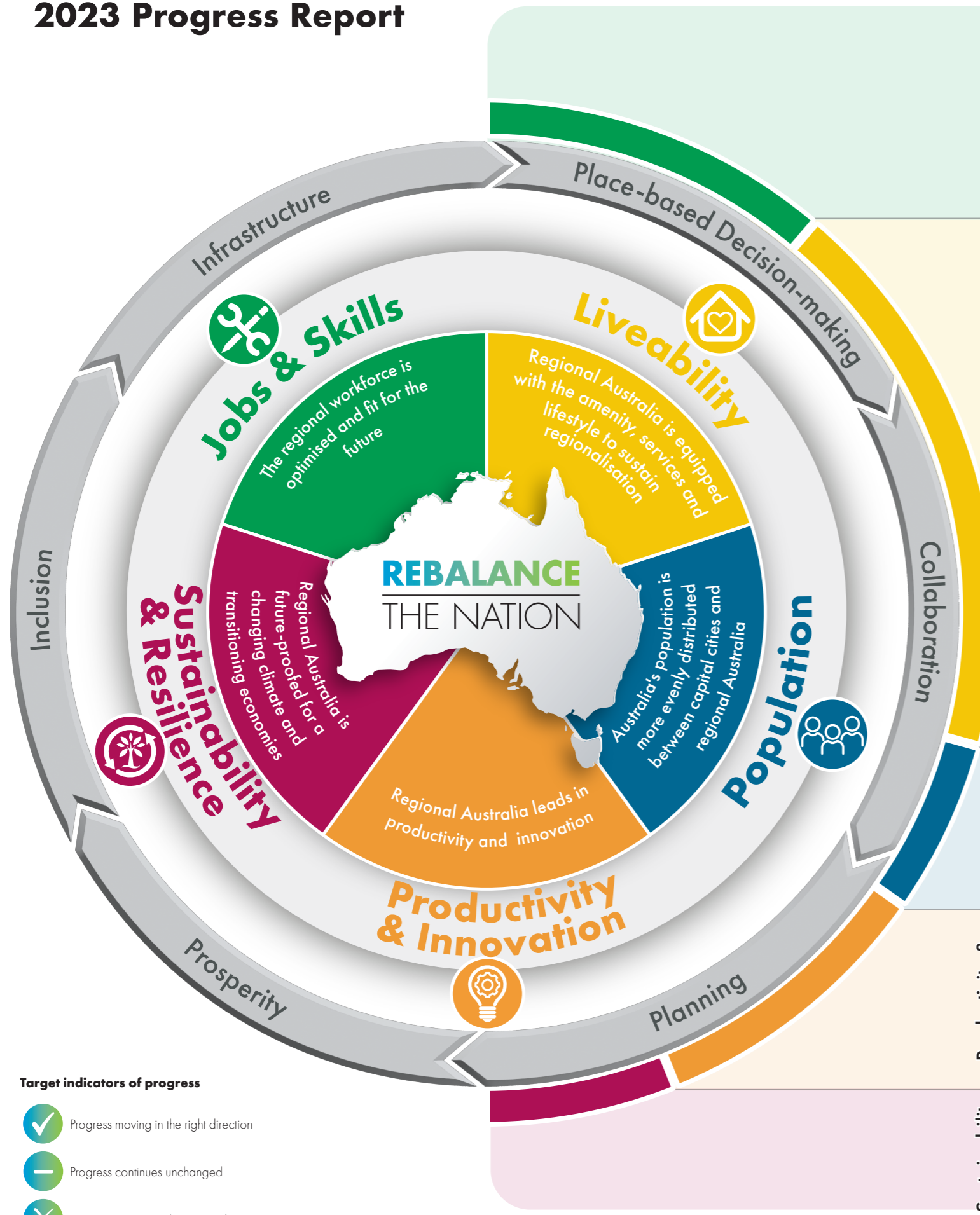


**The first meeting of the National Alliance for Regionalisation kicks off at Parliament House**





# Regionalisation Ambition 2032 2023 Progress Report



- Target indicators of progress**
- ✓ Progress moving in the right direction
  - Progress continues unchanged
  - ✗ Progress moving in the wrong direction

## Ambition 2032 Targets

## Year 1 Progress

Category	Ambition 2032 Targets	Year 1 Progress	Indicator
Jobs & Skills	1. Reduce the recruitment difficulty in regional Australia to below 40%	Regional recruitment difficulty remains high, increasing from 64% to 69% (between 2022-2023), still higher than capital cities (at 66%, June 2023)	✗
	2. Increase the share of skilled workers employed in regional Australia to 80% of the regional workforce	No year-on-year change, with 73.2% of the regional workforce in skilled occupations, compared to major capitals at 79.2% (May 2023)	—
	3. Increase the school attainment rate of young people in regional Australia to 75% or above	The attainment rate for regional students has increased from 69.6% in 2020 to 71.4% 2021, lower than capital cities (at 82% in 2021)	✓
	4. Boost post-school qualification completion in regional Australia to 65% or above	The proportion increased from 57.5% in 2021 to 58.4% in 2022, however the gap between regions and major cities is persisting (with major cities at 64.9%)	✓
Liveability	1. Continue to increase the life satisfaction and wellbeing score of Australians living in regional communities to a score of 75 in the Regional Wellbeing Survey	Regions' score increased from 72 in 2020 to above 73 in 2021, in both the Personal Wellbeing Index and Global Life Satisfaction, higher than metro counterparts (at 70)	✓
	2. Increase regional Australia's Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) score to 75 or above, equal to metropolitan Australia	The regional ADII has increased from 67.4 (2021) to 69.8 (2022) but remains lower than 74.8 in metro areas	✓
	3. Improve access to transport services in and between regional communities	Regional Australians are less satisfied with their access to public transport, with the Regional Wellbeing Survey score dropping from 3.5 (2020) to 2.9 (2021) out of 7, similar to metro areas (dropping from 5.4 to 4.4)	✗
	4. Increase rental vacancy rates in regional areas to above 3% and ensure annual building approvals keep pace with population growth	The regional vacancy rate has increased from 1.0% to 1.5% (Q2 2022 - Q2 2023), and is higher than that in capitals (at 1.1%)	✓
	5. Lift the access to medical practitioners in regional Australia by over 100 FTE per 100,000 population	The number of medical practitioners in regional Australia (per 100,000 population) increased from 323 FTE in 2020 to 334 FTE in 2021, remaining lower than metropolitan areas (at 481)	✓
	6. Halve the population classified as living in a regional childcare desert (to below 2 million)	The number of childcare services in regional Australia increased by 5.2% between 2021 and 2022, a larger increase compared to major cities (2.0%)	✓
	7. Increase the percentage of students in regional Australia who achieve at or above the minimum standard in NAPLAN testing, equal to metropolitan students, across each year level	Across all domains and year levels (except Year 7 spelling), the gaps between Major Cities' and Very Remote students achieving at or above the minimum standard have decreased, though they are still significant (2022)	✓
	8. Strengthen access and opportunities for engagement in arts, cultural, community, and recreational experiences in regional Australia	Regional Australians sense of 'getting involved in the community' in the Regional Wellbeing Survey was strengthened in 2021, with the score increasing to 3.3 out of 7 (from 2.3 in 2020), higher than the metropolitan score of 2.9	✓
Population	1. Over 11 million Australians are living prosperously in the regions by 2032	Regional Australia's population increased from 9.5 million (2021) to 9.6 million in 2022	✓
	2. Increase regional Australia's younger population share (aged 15-39 years) to 35% by 2032	The share of younger regional Australians dropped in 2021 to just under 29.8% (compared to 30.3% in 2020), in line with an ageing population nationally, with metropolitan areas also declining from 36.8% to 36.2%	✗
	3. Double the proportion of new migrants settling in regional Australia by 2032 to 40%	The proportion of overseas arrivals settling in regions in 2021 increased slightly to 18.5% (from 17.4% in 2020)	✓
Productivity & Innovation	1. Increase regional Australia's contribution to national output, boosting Australia's GDP by an additional \$13.8 billion by 2032	The regional contribution to national output in 2022 (35.5%) was nearly the same as the previous year (35.3%)	—
	2. Increase workforce participation in regional Australia to 68% or higher	The regional workforce participation rate increased slightly from 63.5% to 63.9% (between May 2021 and 2023), however remains lower than capital cities (at 68.4%)	✓
	3. Increase new business and innovation in regional Australia	There was a small increase in the regional share of new business entries, from 27.7% in 2021 to 28.8% in 2022. There has been a slight increase in the share of trademarks registered in regions, from 13.0% (2020) to 13.1% (2021), and share of business owner managers in regions, from 38.3% (2016) to 38.5% (2021)	✓
Sustainability & Resilience	1. Regional Australia is trending towards net zero emissions by 2050, unlocking new jobs and industry opportunities	In 2021, over half of employment in renewable electricity generation was based in regional Australia, growing by more than 60% since 2016. This is slower than metropolitan areas, where renewable energy jobs have grown by just over 100%	✓
	2. 90% or more of regional Australia has a moderate to high capacity for disaster resilience	No new analysis has been released this year, with just over 50% of regional Australia having a moderate to high capacity for disaster resilience, compared to over 90% in metropolitan areas (2020)	—

Please refer to the respective pillars detail, later in this document, for additional information and data sources.







# REBALANCE THE NATION

## Progress Across the States








At the RAI's Regions Rising conferences this year, the Institute began to translate the national Ambition to a state level, highlighting how regional areas within each state are tracking across the targets.

Where possible, the RAI has updated this analysis and highlighted the achievements of each state's regions across the targets below. Refer to Appendix A for full 2023 progress data tables for each target and state.

### Northern Territory

-  Continues to have the highest proportion of skilled workers at 80.9% (2023)
-  Continues to have the highest post-school qualification rate at 66.5% (2022)
-  Access to public transport rated the highest of all regional areas, at 3.7 out of 7 (in the Regional Wellbeing Survey, 2021)
-  Has the highest medical practitioner FTE per 100,000 population, at 574 (2021)
-  Continues to have the highest share of younger population at 40.1% (2021)
-  Continues to have the highest workforce participation rate at 74.3% (2023)




### Regional Queensland

-  Has the lowest recruitment difficulty, seeing the largest drop from 69% (2022) to 60% (Q1 and Q2 2023)
-  Has the lowest proportion of regional population living in a childcare desert at 25.8% (2021)
-  Has the smallest gap between regions (367) and metropolitan areas (487) in medical practitioners FTE per 100,000 population (2021)
-  Has the highest population growth rate for 2022 (1.9%)
-  Has the most geographically balanced population, with over half (52%) of Queensland's population living in the regions (2022)
-  Attracts the highest regional share of overseas arrivals to Australia, at 6.1% in 2021-22, taking the lead over regional NSW in 2020-21
-  Continues to hold the largest regional share of national registered trademarks at 5.4% (2021) and new business entries at 9.0% (2022)




### Regional Western Australia

-  Has the highest Personal Wellbeing Index score of 75.2 in the Regional Wellbeing Survey (2021), overtaking 2020's top scorer, regional SA
-  Scored the highest for 'getting involved in the community' in the Regional Wellbeing Survey (2021) at 3.8 out of 7, overtaking 2020's top scorer, the NT
-  Has the second highest population growth rate for 2022 (1.4%) behind regional Queensland
-  Is the only state where regional workforce participation (at 69.6%) is higher than the capital city (with Perth at 69.1%) in 2023

### Regional South Australia

-  Continues to have the highest school attainment rate at 84.7% (2021)
-  Monthly building approvals dropped the least between August 2021 and May 2023 (by -11.5% in regional SA compared to -23.8% across regions nationally)
-  Saw the second highest increase in overseas arrivals, jumping by 347% between 2020-21 and 2021-22 (behind regional Victoria)






### Tasmania

-  Continues to rate access to public transport the second highest, at 3.3 out of 7 (in the Regional Wellbeing Survey 2021)
-  Had the largest growth rate in business owner managers between 2016 and 2021, at 15.6%
-  Continues to have the highest share of national employment in renewables electricity generation in 2021, at 20.4%

### Regional New South Wales

-  Has the highest Global Life Satisfaction score of 74.5 in the Regional Wellbeing Survey (2021), taking the lead from regional Victoria in 2020
-  Has the second highest share of people living in regions, at 39.3%, behind regional Queensland (2022)
-  Attracts the second highest share of annual overseas arrivals to Australia, at 5.7% in 2021-22 (behind regional Queensland)
-  Continues to hold the second highest share of new business entries, at 8.8% of the national total (2022), behind regional Queensland
-  Continues to have the highest share of business owner managers, at 12.9% of the national total (2021)
-  Continues to have the second highest share of national renewables employment at 15.8% (2021), behind Tasmania
-  Has the second highest proportion of areas with moderate to high resilience at 76.2%, behind regional Victoria (according to the Australian Disaster Resilience Index, 2020)

### Regional Victoria

-  Has the largest proportion of LGAs (6.1%) with a Digital Inclusion Index higher than the metro average (2022)
-  The proportion of students at or above the minimum standard in NAPLAN testing are higher than the national averages of regional Australia across all domains and year levels, except for Year 7 and 9 writing (2022)
-  Saw the highest increase in overseas arrivals, jumping by 474% between 2020-21 and 2021-22
-  Saw the second largest growth in business owner managers between 2016 and 2021, at 10.5% (behind Tasmania)
-  Has the highest proportion of areas with moderate to high resilience, at 82.7% (according to the Australian Disaster Resilience Index, 2020)

# REBALANCE THE NATION

Note: (1) Based on the RAI's definition of regional, the ACT is not included in this comparison, and the whole of state for the Northern Territory and Tasmania are considered regional. (2) With access to LGA level datasets in this year's analysis and alignment to this report's methodology, several figures have been adjusted from previously released baselines across Western Australia, Queensland and Victoria.

## Bringing the Ambition to Life

The RAI has been busy activating the Ambition and amplifying our call to action, receiving strong support right across the system - from local communities and councils, corporations, not-for-profits and peak bodies, and Federal and State Governments.

Here are a few of the highlights from 2023 below, but to stay up to date more regularly, sign up to our news at [www.regionalaustralia.org.au](http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au)!

### National Press Club audience of 8+ million



Regions were top of the nation's agenda when RAI CEO Liz Ritchie delivered a keynote address to the *National Press Club* in May 2023, calling for decision-makers to shift their gaze. RAI's message reached an audience of almost 8 million across print, online, TV and radio with a further 2,000 streams since!

The RAI's Regionalisation Ambition 2032 reached an audience of more than 40 million since launching last September, through our media, socials and other digital channels.



### The Ambitions' message reached an audience of 40 million

### Engaged with 3000+ event attendees



More than 3,000 people have engaged with the Ambition at conferences and events across the country, from Echuca and Geelong, to the top end's Darwin and Cairns.

The RAI has been advancing the Ambition's targets through input into parliamentary consultations on housing, wellbeing, childcare and migration.



### 9 Parliamentary Submissions

### 3 Bespoke State Ambitions



The RAI has developed state Ambitions for Queensland, Western Australia, and Victoria, each launched at state-based Regions Rising events.



### Thrive Together workshops

RAI delivered three Thrive Together workshops in regional towns, to connect communities to the RAI's work and facilitate further collaboration and connection amongst leaders, young people, long-serving locals and new faces.

### Over 60 pledges to Rebalance the Nation

More than 60 pledges from supporters right across the nation have been received to date. Thank you to these organisations who are committing their own actions to rebalance the nation! Check out their progress in the pillar sections of this report.

**63**  
Pledges  
this year

**17**  
Jobs &  
Skills

**15**  
Liveability

**8**  
Population

**8**  
Productivity  
& Innovation

**15**  
Sustainability  
& Resilience

Interested in making a pledge? Visit [www.rebalancethenation.com.au](http://www.rebalancethenation.com.au) to find out more.



Liz Ritchie addresses the National Press Club challenging the nation to shift its gaze

## Collaborating with Communities: RAI's Thrive Together Workshops

This year, as part of the RAI's broader activation of our research and purpose, the Institute hosted a series of local workshops across regional Australia, embracing the Ambition's central themes of place-based decision-making, inclusion, and collaboration.

Delivered in partnership with our Regional Activator Alliance members, these workshops aim to encourage community members to step beyond their day-to-day thinking and consider the bigger picture of their community and broader region.

Three workshops have been delivered to date in the Northern Grampians, Victoria, Western Downs, Queensland and Broken Hill, New South Wales regions, with attendees of all ages, sectors and roles joining us from across the community. This diversity has proven invaluable to the outcomes, with executives, employees, students and community volunteers discussing their region's challenges, opportunities, and most importantly, what they can each contribute to a thriving region into the future.

Learn more about the workshops and actions from each of the communities on our Latest news page – [www.rebalancethenation.com.au/latest-news](http://www.rebalancethenation.com.au/latest-news)



Participants gather in Stawell, Victoria for the Northern Grampians workshop

## Actions from the Thrive Together Workshops

### Northern Grampians - Victoria



#### Jobs & Skills

To better support and educate our youth on career opportunities and connect them with our community:

- Federation TAFE will investigate the empty Stawell Fed Uni facility as a place for community programs and youth engagement.
- Pinnacle, Grampians Community Health, and Stawell Neighbourhood House will partner with local industry and education providers to support quality careers and local placements.
- North Central Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) will share learnings and access to the Destination Tracking dataset to inform and improve the younger population's journey into work.
- Pinnacle and TAFE commit to improving accessibility for culturally and linguistically diverse community members to engage with training and employment activities.



#### Liveability

To support an increased population in the Northern Grampians through housing:

- Northern Grampians Shire Council will work with developers to identify housing needs, new models and opportunities for growth, and lead education and awareness of housing density needs in the region.
- Pinnacle will provide support and advice to local government and developers on specialist disability accommodation stock, needs and accessibility criteria.
- AusNet will provide advice to the Northern Grampians Shire Council on future workforce needs.




#### Population

To support migrants to settle in the Northern Grampians:

- Northern Grampians Shire Council will explore a community coordinator role for migrant support, and investigate increasing the Council's support for migrant support services.
- The Weekly Advertiser will increase the diversity of stories and people represented in their articles.
- Together, the group will establish a community club partnering program, where each community club in the region draws a 'partner' club to engage, network and collaborate with.





Chinchilla - QLD

**Western Downs - Queensland**

 **Jobs & Skills**

To increase access to tertiary education opportunities in the Western Downs region:

- Chinchilla High School will introduce a new timetabling approach to support school-based apprenticeships, and develop a strategy to make the Trade Training Centre accessible.
- Western Downs Regional Council is advocating for more tertiary education to be delivered within the region, and will work with regional schools and education providers to connect students to education and training options.
- BUSY at Work will develop direct communications and information tools to help disengaged students become more informed about workforce and skills opportunities.



 **Liveability**

To improve access to health services and social assistance for the Western Downs community:

- Toowoomba and Surat Basin Enterprise (TSBE) will create a workforce participation database of qualified health workers in the region.
- Chinchilla High School and TSBE will investigate a health services pathway program in the region's schools.
- RDA Darling Downs and South West will launch the Digital Work Experience matchmaking service to link employers with job seekers and the career-curious.



**Broken Hill - New South Wales**

 **Jobs & Skills**

To improve local education opportunities to bolster the workforce:

- The Local Jobs Program will continue to support local employers in accessing the Regional Aboriginal Partnerships Program to support local Aboriginal employment outcomes and opportunities.
- The Broken Hill Country Universities Centre (CUC), Council and local VET organisations will investigate opportunities to work with local influencers to promote Broken Hill as a great place to live and work.
- The RAI will explore and connect with regional influencers as part of the Move To More campaign, and build a suite of comparison narratives looking at different career opportunities and pathways in regional and metro areas.

 **Liveability**

To facilitate an increase in quality housing supply:

- Foundation Broken Hill will work with local partners, philanthropists and industry to identify funding avenues for a new housing development in Broken Hill.
- Broken Hill City Council will investigate a different promotional stall for local events –promoting the tourism, life and career opportunities in Broken Hill.

 **Productivity and Innovation**

To better support local business and industry in the region:

- Broken Hill CUC and Outback Astronomy will collaborate to develop and deliver local STEM programs to build local STEM skills.
- Outback Astronomy will work with industry, the space sector and educators to help develop career pathways in the region, including attracting specialists and speakers to stimulate conversation and awareness of STEM careers.
- Landcare will partner and support First Nations people in sharing native plants knowledge.



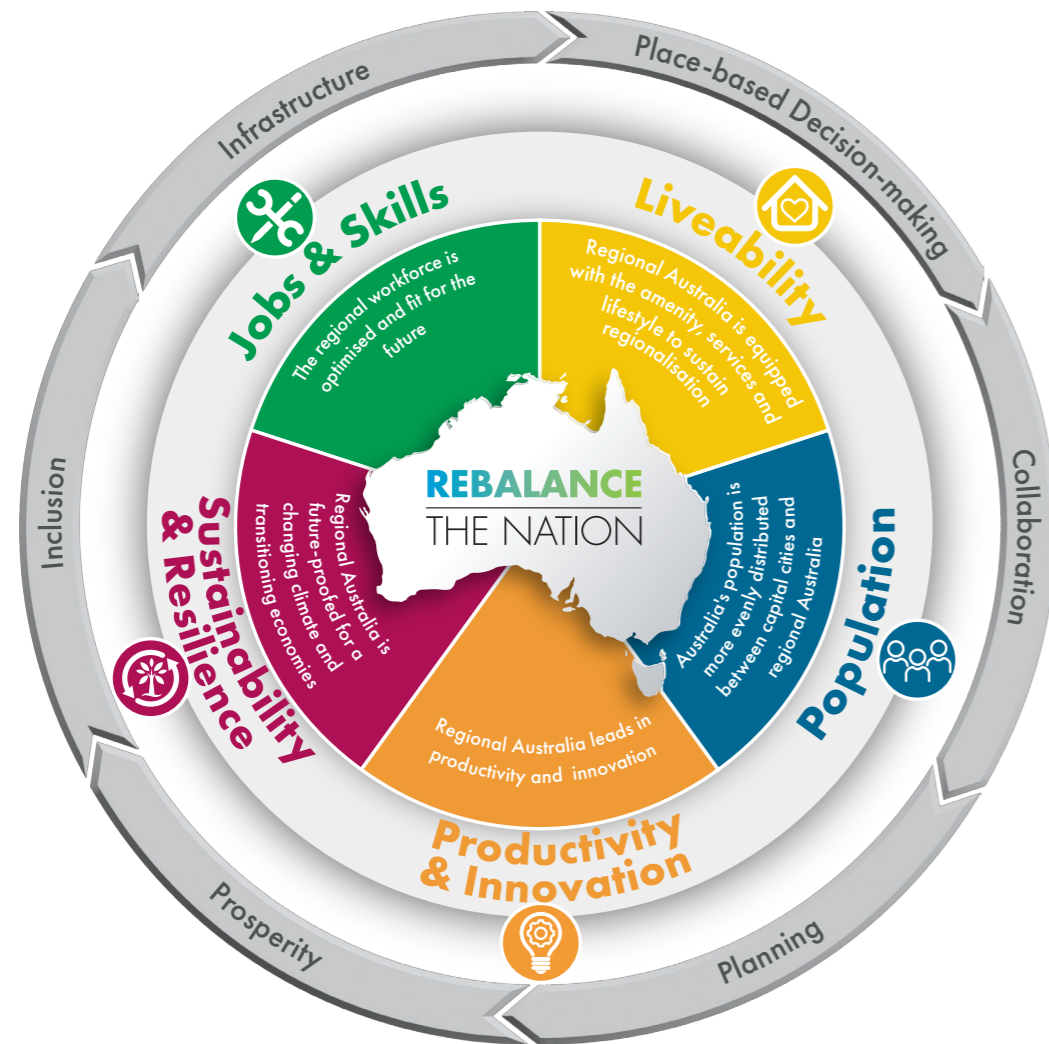
## The Regionalisation Framework as a Toolkit

The Regionalisation Ambition 2032 was designed to be a living, practical toolkit for all levels of Government, the community and business to leverage and help shape their own strategic thinking around regional development.

Check out these examples highlighting how the Committee for Ballarat and the Western Downs Regional Council have both translated the Ambition into their own work – in very different applications!

**Want to explore how the Ambition could support your own organisation or community project?**

**Talk to our team at:** [info@regionalaustralia.org.au](mailto:info@regionalaustralia.org.au)



### Leveraging the Ambition to guide local strategic planning in the Western Downs, QLD

The Western Downs Regional Council is a member of the Regional Activators Alliance and contributed to the shaping of our Regionalisation Ambition 2032 last year. Since the launch of the Ambition, the Council has leveraged the Framework's pillars and targets in their own region, creating their very own Framework as part of the recent refresh of their Economic Development Strategy.

Hear from the team directly about their journey with us and the Ambition on our Latest news page:

[www.rebalancethenation.com.au/latest-news](http://www.rebalancethenation.com.au/latest-news)



### Systems-thinking in local leadership at Ballarat, VIC, Future Shapers

The *Future Shapers leadership program*, delivered by the Committee for Ballarat, highlights how non-government organisations are creating impact from the Ambition.

As part of a refresh of the program this year, the Framework pillars and 20 targets were leveraged to restructure dialogue and focus topics. This prompted participants to elevate their gaze, and to think not just beyond their own organisation, but also beyond their local community.

From the Future Shapers 2023 perspective, the Ambition highlighted the important role played by Ballarat as a regional city centre in servicing and facilitating growth across Western Victoria. What's more, the Ambition reinforced to participants the actions they can take to support their own community and the rural areas surrounding their city.

Read about their application of our Framework on our Latest news page:

[www.rebalancethenation.com.au/latest-news](http://www.rebalancethenation.com.au/latest-news)



Dubbo - NSW

## Pillar Progress in 2023

The Regionalisation Ambition 2032 outlines a Framework to Rebalance the Nation (the Framework), containing cross-cutting themes, and five pillars that are each interlinked and equally important.

Across each pillar the Ambition outlines key targets, actions and benefits that will contribute to building stronger regional communities and a stronger Australia.

This section provides a deeper dive into the year-that-was across regional Australia for each of our pillars. The progress updates provide a glimpse of the great work that organisations across the country are undertaking to progress our Ambition's targets. They also embody one, or several, of the key cross-cutting themes that underpin our progress – collaboration, continued prosperity, inclusion, infrastructure, and place-based decision-making.

Each pillar section includes:

- Regional Australia's progress towards the targets, including differences across the diverse regions
- New insights and research
- Policy progress and announcements from the year
- Highlights and good news stories from across Australia's regions
- Progress updates from our pledge organisations.



## Guide to reading the 2023 pillar progress

The Regionalisation Ambition 2032 is a dynamic document and the RAI will continue to build on and improve our target indicators. Adjustments to the methodology of several target measures have been made in this year's progress report, with these changes noted in the footnotes. Definition of key terms and other characteristics of our analysis are included below and in Appendix B.

### What is regional Australia?

The Regional Australia Institute's definition of 'regional Australia' refers to everything beyond the major capital cities of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide and Canberra.

Regional Australia comprises hundreds of diverse regional areas, each possessing its own characteristics. RAI has developed regional typologies to capture this rich diversity and shed light on the shared challenges encountered by these areas – these typologies are displayed in the map below (see Appendix B for further detail).

Where possible, analysis in this report is based on the RAI's regional definition and typologies, with these typologies corresponding to Local Government Area (LGA) boundaries. With access to additional LGA level datasets in this year's analysis, new boundaries based on the RAI's regional typologies have been applied to several targets for consistency, adjusting previously released baselines. This has been noted in the corresponding footnotes.

There are many datapoints available, however, that are not disaggregated to the geographic level required to enable this analysis. For example, datasets are often only presented at a national level by 'remoteness area' structure according to the Accessibility and Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+),<sup>7</sup> including Major Cities of Australia, and four 'regional' Australia classes of Inner Regional Australia, Outer Regional Australia, Remote Australia, and Very Remote Australia.

Accordingly, when LGA data is not available, or figures are directly extracted from reports, different regional definitions (other than these regional typologies) have been employed and noted in the corresponding reference.

### Regional Typologies



### Data availability and recency

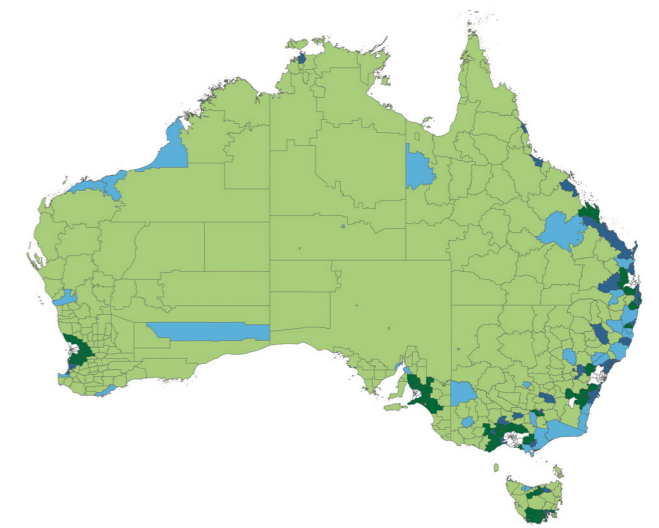
While this report is an update for the year 2022-23, several targets reported on are based on the most recent datasets available, which in some instances are for previous years. The year of the dataset is noted for each measure (see Appendix B for further detail).

### Measuring What Matters – Australia's first wellbeing framework

This year, the Federal Government released Australia's first national wellbeing framework – 'Measuring What Matters'. This Framework outlines five key wellbeing themes and four cross-cutting dimensions, supported by a suite of 50 national indicators that will help monitor Australia's progress towards a 'more healthy, secure, sustainable, cohesive and prosperous Australia'.

While this year's reporting does not include specific measures for different places across regional Australia, the document acknowledges this limitation, and commits to including 'further disaggregation in future iterations.'

The first iteration of the Measuring What Matters Dashboard includes data by remoteness area where available. A link is provided to the dashboard when relevant to the targets in this report.





# Jobs & Skills

## Target Year 1 Progress Regional Comparison

<p>Reduce the recruitment difficulty in regional Australia to below 40%</p>	<p>Regional recruitment difficulty remains high, increasing from 64% (July 2022) to 69% (June 2023), based on a 12-month moving average.<sup>8*</sup></p>	<p>While recruitment difficulty has been higher in regional areas than capital cities in recent years, the difference has been reducing with capital cities reaching 66% this year, compared to regions at 69% (June 2023). Recruitment difficulty is also present across regional Australia, with very little difference between Inner Regional Australia (68%) and other more remote regions (69%) (Q2 2023).</p>	
<p>Increase the share of skilled workers employed in regional Australia to 80% of the regional workforce</p>	<p>No year-on-year change, with 73.2% of the regional workforce in skilled occupations (May 2023).<sup>9</sup></p>	<p>No disaggregation available for this dataset.</p>	
<p>Increase the school attainment rate of young people in regional Australia to 75% or above</p>	<p>The attainment rate for regional students has increased from 69.6% (2020) to 71.4% (2021).<sup>10+</sup></p>	<p>Although the difference between Remote (73%) and Inner and Outer Regional (72%) was not significant, there was a large gap in attainment for students in Very Remote areas (51%) (2021).</p>	
<p>Boost post-school qualification completion in regional Australia to 65% or above</p>	<p>The proportion of regional Australians aged 15-74 years with a post-school qualification has increased to 58.4% in 2022, from 57.5% in the previous year.<sup>11</sup></p>	<p>The proportion has increased over the last decade, from 51.5% (2013) to 58.4% (2022), with the gap between regions and major cities persisting at 6-7% each year. Nationally, the gap between different regional areas is not significant, with Inner Regional the highest at 59.6%, Remote &amp; Very Remote at 57.9%, and Outer Regional the lowest at 55.9%. <i>To explore more indicators by remoteness, check out the Measuring What Matters Dashboard for Education attainment and Developing skills and lifelong learning.</i></p>	

## New Insights

- The RAI report **Regional Jobs 2022: The Big Skills Challenge** highlights that demand for workers in the regions hit record levels in 2022, with December recording a 10% annual increase in advertised roles (outpacing 3% growth in capital cities). The analysis also found strong demand for skilled workers in regions, particularly in key occupations such as medical practitioners and nurses.<sup>12</sup>
- The **Australian Universities Accord Interim Report** recognises that to tackle today's skills shortage, as a nation we must enable better access to higher education for those from underrepresented backgrounds, including people living in regional areas, challenging the nation to aspire towards 'growth for skills through greater equity'.<sup>13</sup>
- Jobs and Skills Australia released a report on **Vocational Education and Training (VET) access for regional, rural and remote students**, highlighting that in regional Australia, students are more likely to be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or from lower socio-economic backgrounds than students in major cities. This reinforces the Universities Accord Interim Report findings, with the aspiration applying to both higher education and vocational training sectors.<sup>14</sup>
- The **Regional Education Commissioner's first Annual Report** was released this year, highlighting 15 key considerations for policy-makers in improving access, participation and attainment in education across the entire system, from early childhood to higher education.

\* Moving average of 12 months were used in this year's analysis, as opposed to the baseline monthly figure (of 77% in July 2022).  
+ A weighted average across remoteness areas was used in this year's analysis, thus adjusting the baseline figure from 65% to 69.6%.

# REBALANCE THE NATION



## Policy Progress

### Federal

- Jobs and Skills Australia is a newly established independent agency responsible for providing advice to the Government to guide Australia's response to current and future labour market and workforce needs.
- To invest in our future workforce and bolster skills in regions, the Federal Government led the development of the renewed five-year National Skills Agreement, negotiated with states and territories (in place from January 2024). *This includes supporting 300,000 fee-free TAFE and Vocational Education and Training (VET) places for in-demand skills, and the establishment of TAFE Centres of Excellence.*
- Carers and aides are the third most in-demand profession in regional Australia, according to RAI research. To encourage more workers into the industry, and retain existing workers, the Federal Government introduced a 15% wage increase for all aged care workers and a streamlined visa process for key occupations in aged care.
- Following the announcement of eight new Regional University Centres earlier in the year (taking the total to 34 nationally), the Government has announced a further 20 new centres to be established (regional locations yet to be announced).

### States

- There has been a renewed focus on access to VET pathways in regional Australia, with New South Wales' expanded training opportunities for NSW skills providers, South Australia's Regional Skills Development Fund and Western Australia's increased allowances to support more rural and remote students to access their VET courses.
- In recognising future growth in science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) jobs, states have introduced new STEAM-focused school-level programs – the Northern Territory announcing a new STEAM centre at Katherine High School, and Victoria funding new tech schools in two regional locations.
- Governments are facilitating regional learning systems and greater school-industry linkages, with Queensland announcing the establishment of new school-industry partnerships and nine Regional School Industry Partnership Managers.
- To enable regional communities to grow their own workforces, the Northern Territory introduced a new Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education Program, encouraging remote residents to pursue a teaching career. Other targeted support programs include Queensland's Nursing and Midwifery Student Regional Placements Allowance and New South Wales' Grow Your Own Teacher training program.





## Actions Across the Nation

### Move To More launches 'It's Your Move'

During July, the RAI launched 'It's Your Move' – Regional Australia's Biggest Ever Recruitment Drive via the [Move To More](#) platform. Running until September 2023, this campaign is spotlighting the diverse and rewarding jobs on offer across our regions. Visit [www.movetomore.com.au](http://www.movetomore.com.au) for more information.

### Regional Development Australia (RDA) Riverina and Transgrid form Workforce Development Strategic Partnership

Regional Development Australia (RDA) Riverina and Transgrid have formed a \$1.5 million [Workforce Development Strategic Partnership](#). The Partnership will support RDA Riverina's Liveability and Workforce Hubs in attracting new workers to the region, and the organisation's Grow Our Own program facilitating youth employment and career pathways. To learn more about the program, [check out their new case study videos](#) - [www.youtube.com/@growourownwr170](http://www.youtube.com/@growourownwr170).

### Moreton Bay Regional Council launches 'My Future in Moreton Bay'

[Moreton Bay Regional Council](#) launched a virtual careers platform, 'My Future in Moreton Bay', providing young high school students with a virtual window into local career opportunities across key industries such as advanced manufacturing, food and agribusiness, and tourism.

### Integrated Pathways at Kepnock (IP@K) program launches

[Integrated Pathways at Kepnock \(IP@K\)](#) program launched in the Wide Bay Burnett region, providing high school students with hands-on experiences at local hospitality and agriculture businesses. The program pilot saw a significant improvement in attendance, self-confidence and engagement from participating students.

### Minerals Council of Australia implements career pathway programs

Minerals Council of Australia (MCA) are tackling the skills shortage in the mining industry by implementing career pathway programs such as their [Industry Liaison Coordinator at Central Queensland University](#), and [Mining Career Immersion program in regional Victoria](#), creating stronger linkages for students with educators and regional career opportunities.

### Think Regional's Pledge Progress

**"We pledge to launch, in 2023, an innovative, collective strategy to activate regional employment in Australia."**

Think Regional is delivering on their pledge to establish a national strategy to elevate the employment opportunities in regional Australia. Having launched to local business and industry earlier in the year, they will now co-design and build a robust user-ready platform in readiness for a public launch in October 2023.

With an initial focus on local employers on the South Coast of NSW, Think Regional will provide a platform, branding assets and campaign materials promoting the local careers on offer across all industries in the region.



Actively engaging with regional career builders at all stages of their career journey, Think Regional aims to enhance their awareness and connection with employers, education and the business communities in regional Australia.

Find out more, and keep up to date as they officially launch this year at [www.thinkregional.com.au](http://www.thinkregional.com.au).

[Read more about Think Regional's journey to date via our Latest news.](#)

### Bendigo and Adelaide Bank's Pledge Progress

**"We pledge to grant \$700,000 to 200 scholarship recipients over the next two years to help young rural and regional Australians access higher education and training opportunities.**

**We pledge to invest \$240,000 over the next two years to offer eight Work Integrated Learning Program placements for La Trobe University (Bendigo) students to grow digital skills and employment opportunities in rural and regional Australia."**

Bendigo and Adelaide Bank is committed to supporting young Australians, particularly in the regions the Bank serves. The organisation proactively supports the Ambition's Jobs and Skills pillar by helping young rural and regional Australians access higher education and training opportunities and increasing skilled work opportunities in regions.



**Bendigo and Adelaide Bank**



[Hear from the Bank, and several of their scholarship students, in our video.](#)



**17 pledges to support Jobs and Skills in regional Australia**

[www.rebalancethenation.com.au/all-pledges](http://www.rebalancethenation.com.au/all-pledges)



## Target

## Year 1 Progress

## Regional Comparison

<p>Continue to increase the life satisfaction and wellbeing score of Australians living in regional communities to a score of 75 in the Regional Wellbeing Survey</p>	<p>Regions' score increased from 72 in 2020, to above 73 in 2021, in both the Personal Wellbeing Index and Global Life Satisfaction.<sup>15</sup></p>		<p>Nationally, and across each state, regional Australians continue to score their wellbeing and life satisfaction higher than their metro counterparts (who score a lower 70 in both indices nationally).</p>
<p>Increase regional Australia's Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) score to 75 or above, equal to metropolitan Australia*</p>	<p>The regional Digital Inclusion Index score has increased from 67.4 (2021) to 69.8 (2022), but remains lower than metro's 74.8.<sup>16</sup></p>		<p>While the indices for Inner Regional (71.3) and Remote Australia (70.0) are closer to the metro level, Outer Regional and Very Remote Australia lag behind (at 66.3 and 62.6 respectively). The gap is even larger for First Nations people living in Remote and Very Remote Australia, with an overall Index at 49.0 and 48.0 respectively. Across the regional types, Connected Lifestyle Areas have the largest proportion of LGAs (at 8.6%) scoring equal to or above the metro level.</p>
<p>Improve access to transport services in and between regional communities</p>	<p>Regional Australians are less satisfied with their access to public transport, with the Regional Wellbeing Survey score dropping from 3.5 (2020) to 2.9 (2021) out of 7.<sup>17</sup></p>		<p>Metro Australians' average score for 'access to public transport' also dropped, from 5.4 (2020) to 4.4 (2021). The score decreases significantly with the increase of remoteness (from Major Cities' 4.4 to Very Remote Australia's 1.9).</p>
<p>Increase rental vacancy rates in regional areas to above 3%, and ensure annual building approvals keep pace with population growth</p>	<p>Though the regional vacancy rate has increased to 1.5% (Q2 2023) from 1.0% (Q2 2022), regional rental markets are still very tight.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, monthly building approvals for regions have been decreasing since August 2021.<sup>19</sup></p>	 	<p>The rental vacancy rate in regions (1.5%) is higher than that in capitals (1.1%) (Q2 2023). Compared to twelve months ago, the rental rates in regions have increased by 4.9%, however this is half the increase experienced by capital cities (11.5%) (Q2 2023). Monthly building approvals show similar trends in regions and capital cities, increasing from early 2021 and then decreasing since late 2021. This drop is mostly driven by a decline in approvals for houses rather than other types of buildings.</p>
<p>Lift the access to medical practitioners in regional Australia by over 100 FTE per 100,000 population</p>	<p>The number of medical practitioners in regional Australia has increased from 323 FTE in 2020 to 334 FTE (per 100,000 population) in 2021.<sup>20+</sup> As in 2020, the regional share of allied health workers in 2021 in each occupation (except Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners) is still lower than the share of population.<sup>21</sup></p>		<p>Regional Cities have higher FTE per 100,000 than metropolitan areas (481, compared to 469), while other regional areas – especially Connected Lifestyle Areas (174) and Heartland Regions (192) – face a large shortage of medical practitioners (2021). Of allied health workers, osteopaths is the only occupation in which the regional share has increased – from 22.0% (2020) to 22.4% (2021). <i>To explore more health indicators by remoteness, check out the Measuring What Matters Dashboard for <a href="#">access to quality care and support services</a>, <a href="#">access to affordable and available health services</a> and <a href="#">prevalence of poor mental health/chronic conditions</a>.</i></p>
<p>Halve the population classified as living in a regional childcare desert (to below 2 million)</p>	<p>While the number of childcare services overall in regional Australia has increased by 5.2% between 2021 and 2022, not all service types have increased, with family day care services decreasing by 6.7%.<sup>22</sup></p>		<p>Between 2018 and 2022, the number of approved childcare places has risen in Major Cities but remained stable in Remote and Very Remote areas. In 2022, Major Cities had 391 approved places per 1,000 children, while Very Remote Australia had 166 places (in centre-based and family day care).<sup>23</sup> In 2022, almost 30% of services were yet to meet the National Quality Standards in Remote and Very Remote Australia, compared to just over 10% in Major Cities.<sup>24</sup> <i>To explore more indicators by remoteness, check out the Measuring What Matters Dashboard for <a href="#">childhood development</a>.</i></p>
<p>Increase the percentage of students in regional Australia who meet or exceed the minimum standard in NAPLAN testing, with this proportion equal to metropolitan students, across each year level</p>	<p>Across all domains and year levels (except Year 7 spelling), the gaps between Major Cities' and Very Remote students achieving at or above the minimum standard have decreased, though they are still significant (2022).<sup>25</sup></p>		<p>Across all domains and year levels (except Year 7 spelling), the proportion of students achieving at or above the minimum standard in Very Remote Australia has increased compared to 2021. The gap between regions and Major Cities also increases with year level, as the proportion of students in year 7 and 9 who achieve at or above the minimum standard is especially low in Very Remote areas. <i>To explore more indicators by remoteness, check out the Measuring What Matters Dashboard for <a href="#">literacy and numeracy skills at school (Years 3)</a>.</i></p>
<p>Strengthen access and opportunities for engagement in arts, cultural, community, and recreational experiences in regional Australia</p>	<p>Regional Australians sense of 'getting involved in the community' in the Regional Wellbeing Survey was strengthened in 2021, with the score increasing to 3.3 out of 7 (from 2.3 in 2020).<sup>26</sup></p>		<p>In 2021, regional Australians scored higher than their metro counterparts (2.9), while in 2020 it was the opposite, with regional Australians scoring 2.3 compared to metro score of 2.8. <i>To explore more indicators by remoteness, check out the Measuring What Matters Dashboard for <a href="#">valuing diversity, belonging and culture, social connection and engagement in volunteering, time for recreation and social interaction, and trust in healthcare institutions</a>.</i></p>

\* With metropolitan Australia also scoring higher this year, the target has been updated to correspond to this.

+ Instead of total medical practitioners FTE, the FTE of medical practitioners employed and working in registered profession has been used for this year's analysis and accordingly updating the baseline figure from 328 (RAI 2022) to 323.



## New Insights

- The [RAI Childcare Study](#), funded by Origin Energy, in Queensland's Western Downs and Maranoa regions, highlighted that there are currently nearly two people with relevant childcare qualifications for every person employed in the sector within the region – emphasising the opportunity for workforce re-engagement to tackle childcare worker shortages.<sup>27</sup>
- The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's [Interim Report](#) (for the inquiry into the supply of childcare services across Australia) highlights that, as remoteness increases, the number of childcare places per population declines. Further, the quality rating of childcare providers decreases with remoteness.<sup>28</sup>
- The National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation's [State of the Nation's Housing Report \(2022-23\)](#) highlighted that regional Australian housing markets have fared better than cities this year, with house prices in regional areas of Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory still higher than they were the previous year.<sup>29</sup>
- [Domain's Quarterly House Price report](#) reinforced this trend, highlighting that house prices in some regional areas continued to increase by up to 40% earlier in 2023, as city dwellers look for more affordable housing options.<sup>30</sup>
- The [Royal Flying Doctor Service 2022 snapshot of rural and remote health](#) highlighted that Australians living inland in more rural and remote areas are nearly three times more likely to be hospitalised than those living in major cities.<sup>31</sup>
- [New research by the National Rural Health Alliance](#) found that healthcare spending in rural Australia is almost \$850 lower per capita than in urban areas. This is a total annual disparity in per capita spending of \$6.5 billion between urban and rural Australia.<sup>32</sup> To explore the differences between regions, visit their [Workforce Mapping Tool](#) - [www.ruralhealth.org.au/mapping-tool](http://www.ruralhealth.org.au/mapping-tool).

## Policy Progress

### Federal

- To strengthen regional connectivity, the Federal Government announced a [\\$1.1 billion Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia](#), which includes support for on farm connectivity, broadcasting resilience, and upgrades to the NBN fixed wireless and satellite networks.
- All levels of government, industry and investors united this year to agree to a shared ambition for home-building in Australia under the [National Housing Accord](#).
- The [Regional First Home Buyer Guarantee](#) expanded to friends, siblings and other family members for joint applications (in line with changes to the First Home Guarantee), offering 10,000 places to 30 June 2025.
- To improve access to [general practice in rural Australia](#), the Federal Government introduced the Rural Bulk Billing Incentive, encouraging bulk billing practices in rural and remote areas, and a new pre-fellowship program was announced to support international medical graduates to work and settle in rural communities.
- Changes to the [Child Care Subsidy](#) were introduced from July this year – with a greater subsidy rate for lower income earners and broader eligibility improving affordability for families across Australia.
- [Growing Regions Fund Round 1](#) opened for expressions of interest on 5 July 2023, with \$300 million available to support capital works projects for community and economic infrastructure across regional and rural areas. In addition to Growing Regions, the [regional Precincts and Partnerships Program \(rPPP\)](#) was recently announced – providing a further \$400 million investment in regional liveability and infrastructure.
- With the launch of Australia's new [National Cultural Policy](#), 'Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place', the Federal Government is supporting cultural development in regional and remote Australia, by piloting long-term loans of the National Gallery of Australia collection to regional and suburban institutions.
- The Federal Government has also signalled increased interest in social impact investment and enterprise in Australia to tackle entrenched disadvantage in communities. This includes investing in a [range of initiatives](#), such as a new outcomes fund, the Stronger Places Stronger People initiative, and support to grow social enterprises.

### States

- Governments continue to invest in better connectivity for regional communities, including New South Wales' [new agreement with NBN Co](#) facilitating a network of 56 new and co-located fixed wireless towers.
- Governments are improving regional connectivity, such as South Australia's investment in their [regional bus services](#), Victoria [capping regional public transport rates](#) and Western Australia's boost to their [Regional Airfare Zone Cap](#).
- To improve regional housing the Northern Territory is introducing the [Remote Housing Investment Package](#) to increase remote Aboriginal housing, South Australia established a dedicated [Regional Housing Office](#) to address housing shortages, and Western Australia's new [Regional Development Assistance Program](#) will deliver more development ready land in regional WA.
- As part of Queensland's [QuickStarts Queensland program](#) 147 new social homes will be built in three regional locations.
- Where key services are not available in more remote areas, governments are looking to alternative strategies to facilitate access, such as Queensland's [Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme](#), and Tasmania's boost to the [Royal Flying Doctor Service](#) to provide oral health care in regional communities.
- Governments across the nation have introduced incentive programs to attract teaching staff to their regions, such as the Northern Territory's [upgrade in housing for teachers in regional and remote communities](#), and Queensland's boost to [teacher housing in rural and remote areas](#). Victoria also introduced allowances for pre-service teachers to undertake placements at regional and remote schools.
- Supporting community facilities and experiences remains a focus for governments, with the Northern Territory supporting the [upgrade of public places](#) for regional and shire councils, and Victoria announcing a new [\\$10m Tiny Towns Fund](#) to help improve public places for communities of up to 5,000 people.

## Actions Across the Nation

### Victoria's Murray Primary Health Network establish new Integrated Health Network

A new *Integrated Health Network Alliance* has been established in Victoria's Murray Primary Health Network, encouraging the sharing of resources to better support their communities' health needs.

### Regional Early Education and Development Inc expands services in WA

The cluster-based childcare provider Regional Early Education and Development Inc (REED) in the Wheatbelt of WA *continues to expand and prove its model*, with their latest addition this year taking its number of operating services within the region to 20.

### 'Our Spaces' explores unique housing solutions

The *RDA Mid North Coast in NSW* launched 'Our Spaces' this year, a short film examining the unique housing opportunities that everyday locals have created in their own homes, from welcoming in flatmates, sharing vacant land, to re-purposing spare rooms to support private living with shared facilities.

### New childcare and co-working space on the Central Coast

A new co-working space on the Central Coast of NSW, *BubbaDesk*, offers parents returning to work the benefit of an established, bookable co-working space for their workday, alongside a co-located, staffed childcare space.

### NRMA's Pledge Progress

**"We pledge to leverage our Member base and communication channels to represent regional community views to Australian Governments on local road conditions and safety following the impacts of heavy rain and floods."**

This year the NRMA launched a *new report 'Fix Our Broken Roads'* highlighting a \$1.9 billion local road infrastructure backlog in NSW. To bolster these findings and advocate for change, the NRMA launched their 'Rate Your Road' survey across NSW, calling on members and the community to rate their own local roads. At the close of the 'Rate Your Road' survey, 30,000 responses had been received, making the initiative the largest transport survey ever conducted in Australia outside the Census.

Following these efforts, commitments exceeding \$1.5 billion have been made towards the repair and maintenance of local roads, with the bulk of these funds directed towards regional NSW and Western Sydney. Learn more about the Rate your Road findings at - [www.mynrma.com.au/community/initiatives/rate-your-road](http://www.mynrma.com.au/community/initiatives/rate-your-road).



### StepAhead Psychology's Pledge Progress

**"We pledge to increase access to affordable and integral mental health services in regional communities by expanding our practice into regional and rural NSW over the next two years."**

StepAhead Psychology has established a psychology clinic in Forbes, NSW, and is currently *recruiting additional psychologists* to increase regional access to mental health services. The team is embedding the Ambition's principles of systems-change, collaboration and inclusion by establishing a wide network amongst the region's service providers, clinicians and other community organisations to build advocacy and awareness to address the lack of mental health services in the region, whilst also delivering national seminars promoting regional career opportunities through the Australian Association of Psychologists Inc (AAPi).



### Moynessh Council are tackling the rental shortage with multi-purpose short-term accommodation

In an attempt to curb their immediate rental shortage, *Moynessh Council* is building multi-purpose short-term accommodation to support key worker needs and provide holiday accommodation when such demand dies down. The Council has also written letters to non-resident ratepayers prompting them to consider the long-term rental of their homes – a strategy that many *other regional towns* are also employing.

### Tatiara District Council's Pledge Progress

**"We pledge to facilitate local investment in housing to accommodate key workers."**



Tatiara District Council have built eight new worker accommodation units in the region this year, with fit-out to be finalised and the units ready for key workers in the coming months. The Council is now exploring further housing opportunities, including co-operative models with neighbouring councils that would bolster economies of scale and funding options. Watch this space!

### Nutrien Ag Solutions' Pledge Progress

**"We pledge to partner with CareFlight to increase lifesaving trauma skills in regional Australia to help bridge the gap between those who arrive first on the scene of an accident and when professional medical help arrives."**

Nutrien Ag Solutions delivered 45 courses in 2023, training 630 regional Australians in lifesaving trauma first aid skills. This means 630 people in rural areas are now better equipped to save lives in the critical minutes following a traumatic incident in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia.



In line with the Ambition's principles, Nutrien Ag Solutions, in partnership with CareFlight, is delivering this training in a place-based, collaborative way, with local branches given the remit and authority to deliver the training when, where and with whom they feel would most benefit. Nutrien Ag Solutions is aiming to deliver a further 135 workshops over the next two years, training an additional 1,800 people.






**15 pledges to support Liveability in regional Australia**

[www.rebalancethenation.com.au/all-pledges](http://www.rebalancethenation.com.au/all-pledges)



**Nutrien CareFlight trauma incident training**

## Target Year 1 Progress Regional Comparison

Over 11 million Australians are living prosperously in the regions by 2032	Regional Australia's population increased from 9.5 million (2021) to 9.6 million in 2022. <sup>33</sup>	Among the regional types, Connected Lifestyle Areas and Regional Cities have the highest annual population growth rate (1.6% and 1.5% respectively) between 2021-22. 
Increase regional Australia's younger population share (15-39 years) to 35% by 2032	The share of younger regional Australians dropped slightly in 2021 to just under 29.8% (compared to 30.3% in 2020). This is in line with an ageing population overall, with metropolitan areas also declining to 36.2% (from 36.8% in 2020). <sup>34</sup>	Among the regional types, Regional Cities have the highest share of younger people, at 31.3%. The share of younger population dropped across all regional types between 2020-2021, though not significantly. 
Double the proportion of new migrants settling in regional Australia by 2032 to 40%	The proportion of overseas arrivals settling in regions in 2021 increased slightly to 18.5% (from 17.4% in 2020). <sup>35+</sup>	Two-thirds of overseas arrivals settling in regions went to Regional Cities in 2021, with all regional types increasing in share of overseas arrivals slightly from the previous year. 

## New Insights

- Capital-to-regional migration reached its third highest level in five years in the **Regional Movers Index** March 2023 quarter release.<sup>36</sup> This pattern has continued into the June 2023 quarter with capital-to-regional migration more than 16 per cent higher on average compared to 2018 and 2019 levels, despite the mid-year tendency for lower levels of migration.<sup>37</sup>
- Overseas migrants continue to play an integral role* in the growth of regional Australia. Between the 2016 and 2021 Census periods, 70% of the 254 Local Government Areas that saw an increase in population in both Australian and overseas-born residents, were regional areas. Census data also shows that migrants are helping to buffer the population decline in some regional communities. Between 2016 and 2021, 103 regional LGAs had their Australian-born population decline while their overseas-born population rose.<sup>38</sup>
- Our **recent survey** of more than 1,000 capital city residents highlighted that one in five city dwellers were thinking of making the move to our regions, with the cost of living cited as a key driver. Survey findings also highlighted the impact of our 'new normal' on lifestyles, with nearly three-quarters citing their ability to work from home as a further enabler fuelling their interest in moving to the regions.<sup>39</sup>
- Flexible Workspace Australia's report **Flex Futures 2023** found that just under 30% of flexible workspaces in Australia were based in regional locations. This spans from 18% of those in South Australia, to 49% in Queensland and 50% in the Northern Territory.<sup>40</sup>
- The **Billion Dollar Benefit report** released by Settlement Services International this year placed a spotlight on the important contribution skilled migrants could make in our workforce, if we made it easier for them to work at their skill level. The report reiterated CEDA's recent findings that one in four permanent skilled migrants work below their skill level today, with the cost of this underutilisation equivalent to \$1.25 billion in lost wages between 2013 and 2018.<sup>41</sup>

\*RAI's regional typologies based on LGA boundaries were used, and the baseline figure has been changed from 31% (RAI 2022) to 30.3%.

\* RAI's regional typologies based on LGA boundaries were used, and the baseline figure has changed from 19.7% to 17.4%

## Policy Progress

### Federal

- A *review of the Migration System* was undertaken this year and presented to Government in March 2023, with the Federal Government releasing in response their *Outline of the Government's Migration Strategy*.
- A *Joint Standing Committee on Migration* was also established to hear evidence about the effectiveness of the current permanent visa program, with a strong representation of regional voices.
- With the *new Office for Youth* established, several Youth Advisory Groups were appointed this year to represent young Australians and work with Government. Each group has strong regional representation, and a dedicated First Nations Advisory Group.

### States

- In Tasmania, *Strategic Regional Partnerships Funding* is provided to establish Strategic Regional Partnerships, which will bring together government, business, industry and community to deliver a targeted regional growth strategy that is in line with the specific needs of a region.
- The Department of Regional NSW launched their *'Regional Youth Insights' report*, noting the five priority areas for investment as identified by over 2,000 regional NSW youth. These areas include career pathways, mental health services, public transportation, recreational activities and events, and secure and affordable housing.





Auntie Yvonne Green (Esperance, WA) featured in Series 1 of the You Moved Where?! podcast.

## Actions Across the Nation

### Move To More highlights opportunities in regional Australia

The RAI's Move To More campaign has continued to highlight the opportunities in both life and work that regional Australia can offer. This year, the RAI launched a new *podcast series*, 'You Moved Where?!', and several new short films sharing stories of satisfied people who have moved to more. Check out their stories at [www.movetomore.com.au/mover-stories/](http://www.movetomore.com.au/mover-stories/)

### RDA Riverina's new Country Change website showcases how migrants are welcomed in the Riverina

The RDA Riverina has worked with partner LGAs (Leeton and Temora shires) and Multicultural NSW to produce *NSW GROW* videos that highlight how migrants are welcomed in the Riverina. These NSW GROW videos will also be showcased on the RDA Riverina's new *Country Change* website.

### Welcoming Committee established by Temora Shire Council to champion community and diversity

Temora Shire Council established a new *Welcoming Committee* this year, to support the integration of all newcomers to the community – hosting its first 'Welcome to Tea-Town' in September last year, gathering members of the community new and old to come together, learn about their community, and forge new connections.

### Temora Council's Pledge Progress

"We pledge to implement the NSW GROW migrant resettlement program."



Temora Shire Council has hit the ground running this year in implementing a new migrant resettlement program in their region, and have hosted their first "NSW GROW Look, See, Visit". Fifteen migrant community leaders from Western Sydney visited Temora to meet with local leaders, business owners and managers, and learn more about the benefits of living and working in the region.

The Council has also introduced multiple new events for newcomers and existing residents, embracing new cultures and encouraging diversity, including the hosting of their inaugural multicultural event, the Embrace Festival.

To support the practical side of settling in a new country and culture, the Council has also established a new Language Café and buddy system at the local library. Community members, particularly in the migrant community, can join these monthly language café meetings to connect with others and build language skills as they chat. The library also runs the Language Buddy, where local retired teachers are helping existing and new community members to expand their English skills – all while familiarising themselves with the region!



**8 pledges to support Population in regional Australia**

[www.rebalancethenation.com.au/all-pledges](http://www.rebalancethenation.com.au/all-pledges)

Temora - NSW



# Productivity & Innovation

## Target Year 1 Progress Regional Comparison

<p>Increase regional Australia's contribution to national output, boosting Australia's GDP by an additional \$13.8 billion by 2032</p>	<p>The regional contribution to national output in 2022 (35.5%) was nearly the same as the previous year (35.3%).<sup>42*</sup></p>	<p>Regional Australia experienced higher Gross Regional Product (GRP) growth (4.2%) than metropolitan areas (3.4%) between 2021 and 2022.</p> <p>Although Industry and Service Hubs and Connected Lifestyle Areas only respectively contributed to 5.9% and 3.2% of the national output, they had the largest GRP growth rates (at 6.4% and 5.8%) across the regional types.</p>	-
<p>Increase workforce participation in regional Australia to 68% or higher</p>	<p>The regional workforce participation rate increased slightly to 63.9% in May 2023, compared to 63.5% in May 2021.<sup>43†</sup></p>	<p>Nationally, the participation rate is lower in regions (63.9%) than in capital cities (68.4%).</p>	✓
<p>Increase new business and innovation in regional Australia</p>	<p>There was a small increase in the regional share of new business entries, from 27.7% in 2021 to 28.8% in 2022.<sup>44</sup></p> <p>There has been a slight increase in the share of trademarks registered in regions, from 13.0% (2020) to 13.1% (2021)<sup>45</sup>, and share of businesses owner managers in regions, from 38.3% (2016) to 38.5% (2021).<sup>46#</sup></p>	<p>Regional Cities represented 16.2% of national new business entries, while Industry and Service Hubs, Connected Lifestyle Areas, and Heartland Regions represented 3.1%, 3.6%, and 4.7% respectively (2022).</p> <p>More than half of the business owner managers in regional Australia were from Regional Cities (2021).</p> <p>No disaggregation available for trademarks registered.</p>	✓

## New Insights

- The *Productivity Commission's 5-year Productivity Inquiry released this year, 'Advancing Prosperity'*, highlighted the slowing productivity growth experienced in Australia (and globally), with labour productivity growth at its slowest rate in 60 years.<sup>47</sup> With the increasing size of the service sector and global factors such as trade barriers and climate change challenging productivity growth, the report highlights key areas for policy focus to change this trajectory.
- In particular, the report highlights the opportunity to foster and enable 'Innovation of the 98%', enabling the 98% who are 'early adopters, adapters and incremental improvers' to take up new technology and innovations, access new data, and adopt more secure applications.
- A report released by the CSIRO and Tech Council of Australia this year, *'The geography of Australia's digital industries'*, highlights that while digital clusters are concentrated predominantly in our nation's capitals, many also thrive in regional areas, identifying 36 regional 'niche' clusters in regions across Australia such as Newcastle, Cairns and Daylesford.<sup>48</sup>
- In September 2023, the MCA released the *'Future Critical: Meeting the minerals investment challenge'* report. The report sets out a policy reform agenda for minerals development and productivity growth to ensure Australia is well positioned for the next wave of mining investment.

<sup>\*</sup> This dataset has been adjusted by CPI and aligned to the 2021 census data, thus updating the baseline figure from 34% (RAI 2022) to 35.3%.  
<sup>†</sup> Here the RAI regional definition and the moving averages of participation rates rather than original figures are used, updating the baseline figure accordingly from 64% (RAI 2022) to 63.5%.  
<sup>#</sup> The RAI regional typologies based on LGA boundaries was used in this year's analysis, adjusting the baseline figure of business owner managers from 42% to 38.3% (2016).

# REBALANCE THE NATION



## Policy Progress

### Federal

- The *National Reconstruction Fund* was established to invest in the diversification and transformation of Australia's industry and economy in key areas where opportunities abound for regional Australia including renewables and low emissions technologies, transport, value-add in agriculture, forestry and fishing, and minerals.
- In addition to the five existing *Industry Growth Centres* aligned to these priority areas, the Federal Government announced the establishment of the *Powering Australia Industry Growth Centre*, which will be dedicated to supporting manufacturing of renewables technology.
- Federal Government is supporting new opportunities in the hydrogen sector, with the establishment of *Hydrogen Headstart* (a program to support the hydrogen sector as it matures).

### States

- Queensland announced \$4 billion in *productivity-enhancing investments* across regional areas to support investments in the energy, water, and port sectors that will drive Queensland's prosperity in the years to come.
- Western Australia announced \$2 million from the New Industries Fund to *support innovation and develop entrepreneurs in WA's regions*.





## Actions Across the Nation

### New employment training program launched by Port Augusta City Council

Port Augusta City Council launched a new employment training program this year, *the Access and Inclusion Program (AIP)*, designed to address high local unemployment, underemployment, and promote inclusivity in the workplace. Employing locals with disabilities in roles for a period of 26 weeks, the Council are hoping to extend this program to other local businesses in the future.

### Youth Entrepreneurship Summit heads to Dalby

The Australian School of Entrepreneurship brought their *Youth Entrepreneurship Summit #YES! to Dalby* this year, with the support of Western Downs Regional Council. Attracting over 300 students from the surrounding regions, this was the first time the event has been held outside a metropolitan city.

### New support service established by the Toowoomba and Surat Basin Enterprise and major energy provider

The Toowoomba and Surat Basin Enterprise (TSBE), in partnership with a major energy provider, established a new support service this year. The *Indigenous Business Connector Program* aims to support the growth of Indigenous businesses across the Western Downs and Surat Basin.

### Innovation abounds in regional Australia

Start-ups are prospering across *Australia's entrepreneurial regions*. Agtech startup Cauldron (based in Central West NSW) secured a massive \$10.5 million in seed funding this year, and Newcastle-based MGA Thermal is developing energy storage solutions that will enable energy companies to retro-fit traditional power stations.<sup>49</sup>

### STEM innovation lab launched at the Upper Hunter Innovation Precinct

The Upper Hunter Innovation Precinct, a research and education facility delivered in partnership with the University of Newcastle and the Muswellbrook Shire Council, reached an exciting milestone this year with the launch of its *latest innovative facility*, housing a STEM innovation lab, and advanced manufacturing and prototyping incubator, 'The Melt'.

## The Regionalisation Ambition is going global

The Global Entrepreneurship Conference (GEC) will be held in Melbourne this September, accompanying the launch of the GEC x Nectir Challenge Collaborator App. Participants at the Conference, and others interested, are encouraged to jump on and contribute their ideas and opportunities across several challenges linked to the conference discussions. With two challenges dedicated to rural opportunities related to the Ambition's workforce and innovation targets (and many more touching on other targets!) you can also contribute – head to <https://genaustralia.org/program/challenge-collaborator/> to get started.

### Elders' Pledge Progress

**"We pledge to contribute to innovation and productivity in the agricultural industry through the support of EvokeAg and other programs in 2023 and beyond."**



Elders have led conversations across the country this year championing innovation and productivity in the agriculture industry – attending 48 industry field days, and delivering 18 internal conferences to support continued learning, development and capacity building across Elders' employees.

Dedicating over a million dollars investment in sponsorship and industry-focused conferences and events, Elders is building productivity and capacity in the industry and their people. Elders has sponsored national events throughout the regions, including EvokeAg, the RAI's National Summit, Hort Connections, the Bush Summit, Beef Australia, and VicVid.



**8 pledges to support Productivity & Innovation in regional Australia**  
[www.rebalancethenation.com.au/all-pledges](http://www.rebalancethenation.com.au/all-pledges)

**Youth Entrepreneurship Summit #YES! Dalby - QLD**





# Sustainability & Resilience

## Target Year 1 Progress Regional Comparison

<p>Regional Australia is trending towards net zero emissions by 2050, unlocking new jobs and industry opportunities</p>	<p>In 2021, over half of employment in renewable electricity generation was based in regional Australia, growing by more than 60% since 2016.<sup>50</sup></p>	<p>Most new employment in regional Australia was in Regional Cities (45.2%) and Heartland Regions (45.4%).</p> <p>Between 2016 and 2021, in regional Australia, new employment in renewable was mainly driven by increased technician and trade roles (+240), followed by professionals (+172) and managers (+114). Labourers also increased from 20 (2016) to 68 (2021).</p> <p>This is in comparison to metropolitan Australia, where increased employment in renewables electricity generation were driven mainly by growth in managerial (+242) and professional (+241) roles, followed by clerical and administrative (+96), and technicians and trade workers (+95).</p>
<p>90% or more of regional Australia has a moderate to high capacity for disaster resilience</p>	<p>No new analysis has been released this year, with just over 50% of regional Australia having a moderate to high capacity for disaster resilience (2020).<sup>51</sup></p>	<p>While 72.5% of Inner Regional areas have moderate or high disaster resilience, the proportions for Outer Regional, Remote, and Very Remote Australia are only 38.9%, 10.4%, and 2.1% respectively (2020).</p> <p>For Outer Regional, Remote, and Very Remote areas with moderate or high resilience, high community capital and social cohesion are two major supporting factors (Parsons et al., 2021).<sup>52</sup></p>

## New Insights

- The [Clean Energy Council released an annual report](#) on the year-that-was in energy transition, this year highlighting the increasing share of renewable energy contributing to Australia’s electricity generation – from 32.5% in 2021, to 35.9% in 2022.<sup>53</sup>
- Accessing up-to-date regional data continues to be a challenge in reporting against this pillar. With the establishment of the Climate Change Act 2022, we look forward to seeing a greater focus on regional outcomes and transition benefits, with the Federal Government now required to report each year within its [Climate Change Statement](#) on the social, economic and employment impacts of climate change policies on rural and regional Australia.<sup>54</sup>

# REBALANCE THE NATION



## Policy Progress

### Federal

- The \$1.9 billion Powering the Regions fund, announced in the October Budget, will support industrial decarbonisation, clean energy industries, and workforce development as regions transition to a net zero economy.
- The Federal Government has announced it will [advance \\$1.8 billion in disaster payments](#) to the states through the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, designed to allow councils to fast-track local repair works following recent years of floods, fires, and cyclones.
- The [National Net Zero Authority](#) was launched on 1 July 2023 to support investors, industry and workers’ transition to net zero. The Authority will coordinate programs and policies to support regions and communities to attract new clean energy industries, and set those industries up for success.
- The [National Safeguard Mechanism](#) came into effect on 1 July 2023, which will help regulate emissions of the 215 biggest polluting facilities as Australia transitions to net zero.
- The [Community Energy Upgrades Fund](#) of \$100 million was announced to help communities transition, such as replacing energy intensive heating in council pools with heat pumps, and battery storage at sporting fields, libraries, and community centres.

### States

- With many communities still recovering from devastating flood events in recent years, governments have responded with targeted programs, including New South Wales’ allocation of [10 new Community Recovery Officers to support recovery efforts following floods](#), and South Australia’s direct funding programs to support the [River Murray flood event](#).
- There has been additional investment in renewables infrastructure as the nation transitions to net zero, such as the Northern Territory boosting the [Renewable Remote Power Program](#) to continue to advance the delivery of clean and reliable electricity to remote communities, and Western Australia’s investment in [their transition to a low carbon future](#), supporting battery storage and renewable energy projects in the regions.
- In planning for better response and community resilience against future disasters, governments have increased funding for disaster responses and emergency services, with South Australia boosting their [aerial firefighting aircraft capability](#), and further support for the [extraordinary response costs for the Country Fire Service](#).
- As part of Victoria’s [Renewable Energy Workforce](#) strategy, a new TAFE Clean Energy Fund was established this year to train workers with critical skills for the renewables transition. This includes investment to continue the establishment of new training facilities across Ballarat, Morwell and Warrnambool regions.



## Actions Across the Nation

### nbn® co's Pledge Progress

“We pledge to support connectivity to regional communities for future disaster events.”

nbn® co. have installed 33 hybrid power cubes across regional QLD to ensure uninterrupted power supply to Fixed Wireless sites during a natural (or other) disaster. This was funded under the Black Summer Bushfire Recovery Grants Program (BSBR).



### Australia's first community-owned windfarm goes from strength to strength

As Australia's first community-owned windfarm, *Hepburn Energy* (based in central Victoria) is continuing to champion their transition to renewables with funding from the Federal Government now awarded to establish a new battery alongside the windfarm.

### The Bega Valley community aim to become the most circular economy in Australia

The Bega Valley community on the Far South Coast of NSW has set a bold vision as part of the *Bega Circular Valley (BCV) 2030 strategy* to become the most circular economy in Australia. In delivering on this vision, a new *National Circularity Centre* was announced earlier this year, to drive research in circularity and demonstrate effective and replicable models for the circular economy.

### NRMA's Pledge Progress

“We pledge to have 180+ charging sites installed in regional Australia by 2026 to support our regions as we transition to electric vehicles.”



The NRMA have continued to grow their regional EV fast charging network, installing 99 chargers and partnering with the Federal Government to deliver a further 117 regional fast charging sites across the national highway network. This investment will help to ensure that regional Australia is not left behind while the nation continues to transition to electric cars.

The NRMA has embraced the principles of the Ambition as they expand their EV charging network, engaging and consulting with the communities they work in, particularly working with local Indigenous communities to decorate charger stations in Indigenous artwork.

### Empowering communities to tackle local issues head on

This year the *Leading Australian Resilient Communities (LARC) program* was delivered in 10 locations, to more than 200 participants across regional Australia.

The program delivered practical tools, expert guidance, and collaborative discussion to build community capacity to implement change, readiness and opportunity, rather than by 'coping' or 'surviving' crises. Participants experienced growth in their confidence and leadership skills, empowering them to work together to address local community issues.

The program was a collaboration between RAI and the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation (ARLF), delivered as part of the Australian Government's \$5 million Building Resilient Regional Leaders Initiative (Pilot) commitment.

Hear from participants and their learnings at our website: [www.regionalaustralia.org.au](http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au)

### Capricorn Coast's Pledge Progress

“We pledge to achieve the Eco Destination Certification by the end of 2024.”

Capricorn Enterprise, in collaboration with the Livingstone Shire Council, is in full swing to deliver their pledge to achieve the new Eco Destination Certification by next year. The team hired a new Eco Tourism Officer at the beginning of 2023, who is now diligently working through the 73 criteria with Eco Tourism Australia to achieve Eco Destination Certification.

This certification will help the Capricorn Coast to continue to thrive as a nature-based tourism destination with an emphasis on sustainable tourism, nature and environmental management through strong community and stakeholder connections.



**15 pledges to support Sustainability & Resilience in regional Australia**  
[www.rebalancethenation.com.au/all-pledges](http://www.rebalancethenation.com.au/all-pledges)



NRMA EV Charger



York Peninsula - SA

## Building on our Methodology: Continuous Improvement and Data Gaps

The RAI will continue to report on our Ambition each year, and improve how targets are measured as new data and research is released.

In this year's progress report, the RAI has identified several areas where measures could be improved, and is currently working with stakeholders to explore alternative or new datasets. We encourage others to connect with us on indicators that might address these areas for improvement.

These areas include:

- Indicators that highlight access to schools across primary and secondary years, which can impact on the current outcome-oriented measures reported on (such as school attainment, and NAPLAN results). The recent [Productivity Commission's Review of the National School Reform Agreement](#) also notes the absence of an agreed definition of educational disadvantage.
- Indicators which speak to access and investment in public transport in regional Australia. The measure used in this report is based on people's subjective assessment of their local public transport service.
- A measure of social housing improvements in a consolidated, nationally consistent means of reporting.
- A comprehensive measure for access to health services, in addition to primary health care. The RAI is currently working with the National Alliance for Regionalisation organisations to explore possible measures.
- Measures for engagement in artistic, cultural, community, and recreational experiences in regional areas.
- A more frequent, comprehensive index of innovation. Currently the measures that exist at a disaggregated level, such as the Quantifying Regional Outputs tool of the AURIN, are not recent (based on Census years to 2016).
- A more frequent and comprehensive measure of employment in the renewables industry (beyond the current measure for employment in electricity generation), disaggregated to a local government, or similar, spatial scale.
- A more frequent measure as to the improvement of region's resilience against natural disasters.

### Launching the Regional Data Hub

One of the major challenges regional communities and decision-makers face is the accessibility and recency of data, relevant to their place. As part of the Federal Government's Better Use to Support Delivery for Regional Australians program, the Regional Data Hub<sup>55</sup> was launched in July 2023, which provides users with access to a data catalogue and interactive dashboards for regions at the level of LGAs, SA2s, suburbs or postcodes.

To explore the Regional Data Hub, visit [www.regionaldatahub.gov.au](http://www.regionaldatahub.gov.au).

## Appendices

### Appendix A – 2023 Progress Update: Regional States and Territories Data Tables

The figures presented here as share of national total may not add to the national regional total reported earlier in this report, due to rounding of figures to 1 decimal place.

Other regional national total figures reported earlier in the report cannot be obtained by averaging the regional state figures presented here, due to differences in population size and number of areas across regional states and territories.

Target	State	Baseline Year	2023 Update
<b>1.1 Recruitment difficulty</b>  Baseline: 2022; Update: Q1 and Q2 2023; by GCCSA Source: Data requested from Jobs and Skills Australia	Regional NSW	67%	65%
	Regional Vic.	75%	69%
	Regional Qld	69%	60%
	Regional SA	67%	67%
	Regional WA	71%	72%
	Tasmania	59%	64%
	Northern Territory	72%	66%
<b>1.2 Proportion of skilled workers</b>  Baseline: May 2022; Update: May 2023; by RAI regional definition Source: ABS Labour Force (Detailed) June 2023 release	Regional NSW	75.8%	74.0%
	Regional Vic.	73.4%	75.5%
	Regional Qld	72.0%	72.3%
	Regional SA	66.2%	67.3%
	Regional WA	68.7%	67.5%
	Tasmania	73.9%	75.0%
	Northern Territory	79.9%	80.9%
<b>1.3 Attainment rate</b>  Baseline: 2020; Update: 2021; by Remoteness Source: Productivity Commission, Report on Government Services 2022	Regional NSW	62.1%	63.9%
	Regional Vic.	76.0%	75.0%
	Regional Qld	75.1%	77.8%
	Regional SA	82.8%	84.7%
	Regional WA	73.0%	73.8%
	Tasmania	59.1%	57.8%
	Northern Territory	55.4%	55.4%
<b>1.4 Post-school qualification rate</b>  Baseline: May 2021; Update: May 2022; by Remoteness Source: ABS Education and Work November 2022 release	Regional NSW	60.2%	59.4%
	Regional Vic.	57.5%	59.5%
	Regional Qld	54.7%	56.2%
	Regional SA	51.7%	52.9%
	Regional WA	59.1%	59.4%
	Tasmania	60.1%	60.5%
	Northern Territory	62.8%	66.5%

Target	State	Baseline Year	2023 Update
<b>2.1 A. Wellbeing (Personal Wellbeing Index)</b>  Baseline: 2020; Update: 2021; as per Regional Wellbeing Survey Source: Regional Wellbeing Survey 2020 and 2021	Regional NSW	72.9	74.8
	Regional Vic.	73.2	74.1
	Regional Qld	71.5	70.4
	Regional SA	73.3	72.3
	Regional WA	70.7	75.2
	Tasmania	71.9	74.7
	Northern Territory	68.7	67.0
<b>2.1 B. Wellbeing (Global Life Satisfaction)</b>  Baseline: 2020; Update: 2021; as per Regional Wellbeing Survey Source: Regional Wellbeing Survey 2020 and 2021	Regional NSW	72.6	74.5
	Regional Vic.	73.4	73.9
	Regional Qld	71.5	71.0
	Regional SA	72.9	73.0
	Regional WA	70.5	73.7
	Tasmania	72.0	72.6
	Northern Territory	69.4	70.4
<b>2.2 Digital Inclusion Index - Proportion (number) of LGAs above the national metro average</b>  Baseline: 2021; Update: 2022; by RAI's regional typologies Source: Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2021 and 2022	Regional NSW	0.0% (0)	3.1% (3)
	Regional Vic.	0.0% (0)	6.1% (3)
	Regional Qld	1.4% (1)	0.0% (0)
	Regional SA	3.9% (2)	0.0% (0)
	Regional WA	5.6% (6)	0.9% (1)
	Tasmania	3.5% (1)	3.5% (1)
	Northern Territory	N/A	5.3% (1)
<b>2.3 Access to public transport</b>  Baseline: 2020; Update: 2021; as per Regional Wellbeing Survey Source: Regional Wellbeing Survey 2020 and 2021	Regional NSW	3.2	2.8
	Regional Vic.	3.9	3.2
	Regional Qld	3.3	3.0
	Regional SA	2.6	2.2
	Regional WA	3.3	2.6
	Tasmania	4.1	3.3
	Northern Territory	4.3	3.7
<b>2.4 Housing - monthly building approvals (moving average)</b>  Baseline: August 2021; Update: May 2023; by GCCSA Source: ABS Building Approvals June 2023 release	Regional NSW	1,600	1,356
	Regional Vic.	1,594	982
	Regional Qld	1,636	1,375
	Regional SA	229	202
	Regional WA	350	206
	Tasmania	356	269
	Northern Territory	66	52

Target	State	Baseline Year	2023 Update
<b>2.5 Medical practitioners FTE per 100,000 population</b>  Baseline: 2020; Update: 2021; by Monash Modified Model areas Source: Department of Health and Aged Care, Health Workforce Data	Regional NSW	301	315
	Regional Vic.	284	291
	Regional Qld	358	367
	Regional SA	194	203
	Regional WA	283	295
	Tasmania	427	446
	Northern Territory	556	574
<b>2.6 Proportion of regional population living in childcare desert</b>  Baseline: 2021; by GCCSA Source: Mitchell Institute, 2022 <sup>56</sup>	Regional NSW	42.1%	N/A
	Regional Vic.	39.6%	N/A
	Regional Qld	25.8%	N/A
	Regional SA	81.7%	N/A
	Regional WA	89.1%	N/A
	Tasmania	61.4%	N/A
	Northern Territory	47.2%	N/A
<b>2.7 NAPLAN - Percentage at or above the National Minimum Standard, Year 9's writing as an example</b>  Baseline: 2021; Update: 2022; by Remoteness Source: ACARA, NAPLAN National Reports 2022	Regional NSW	74.4%	77.8%
	Regional Vic.	79.0%	82.9%
	Regional Qld	69.9%	71.0%
	Regional SA	74.5%	76.3%
	Regional WA	77.7%	75.7%
	Tasmania	77.9%	78.2%
	Northern Territory	50.8%	58.6%
<b>2.8 Getting involved in the community</b>  Baseline: 2020; Update: 2021; as per Regional Wellbeing Survey Source: Regional Wellbeing Survey 2020 and 2021	Regional NSW	2.2	3.2
	Regional Vic.	2.0	3.2
	Regional Qld	2.3	3.4
	Regional SA	2.5	3.2
	Regional WA	2.9	3.8
	Tasmania	2.6	2.9
	Northern Territory	3.1	3.1

Target	State	Baseline Year	2023 Update
<b>3.1 Regional population (number and share of state)</b>  Baseline: 2021; Update: 2022; by RAI's regional typologies Source: ABS Regional Population April 2023 release	Regional NSW	3,182,530 (39.3%)	3,208,343 (39.3%)
	Regional Vic.	1,657,054 (25.3%)	1,676,583 (25.3%)
	Regional Qld	2,723,429 (52.1%)	2,774,719 (52.2%)
	Regional SA	438,940 (24.3%)	442,587 (24.3%)
	Regional WA	704,667 (25.6%)	714,495 (25.6%)
	Tasmania	567,909	571,540
	Northern Territory	249,200	250,702
	<b>3.2 Proportion of younger population (15-39 years)</b>  Baseline: 2020; Update: 2021; by RAI's regional typologies Source: ABS Regional Population (by Age and Sex) August 2021 and August 2022 releases	Regional NSW	29.4%
Regional Vic.		29.6%	28.9%
Regional Qld		31.0%	30.7%
Regional SA		26.9%	26.6%
Regional WA		30.3%	29.9%
Tasmania		31.5%	31.3%
Northern Territory		40.4%	40.1%
<b>3.3 Share of total overseas arrivals</b>  Baseline: 2020-21; Update: 2021-22; by RAI's regional typologies Source: ABS Regional Population April 2022 and April 2023 releases	Regional NSW	6.6%	5.7%
	Regional Vic.	1.3%	2.6%
	Regional Qld	6.0%	6.1%
	Regional SA	0.3%	0.5%
	Regional WA	1.1%	1.1%
	Tasmania	1.1%	1.2%
	Northern Territory	1.0%	1.2%

Target	State	Baseline Year	2023 Update
<b>4.1 Gross Regional Product</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>4.2 Participation rate</b>  Baseline: May 2021; Update: May 2023; by GCCSA Source: ABS Labour Force (Detailed) June 2023 release	Regional NSW	61.0%	62.1%
	Regional Vic.	62.0%	62.0%
	Regional Qld	64.6%	64.6%
	Regional SA	59.3%	58.1%
	Regional WA	68.2%	69.6%
	Tasmania	61.8%	62.5%
	Northern Territory	72.7%	74.3%
	<b>4.3 A Innovation - share of total trademarks registered</b>  Baseline: 2020; Update: 2021; by RAI regional definition Source: Intellectual Property Government Open Data (IPGOD) 2022	Regional NSW	4.2%
Regional Vic.		1.7%	1.9%
Regional Qld		5.5%	5.4%
Regional SA		0.5%	0.4%
Regional WA		0.5%	0.6%
Tasmania		0.4%	0.7%
Northern Territory		0.1%	0.2%
<b>4.3 B Innovation - share of total business entries</b>  Baseline: 2020; Update: 2022; by RAI's regional typologies Source: ABS Data by Region 2011-2022 (by LGA) series		Regional NSW	8.5%
	Regional Vic.	4.7%	5.3%
	Regional Qld	9.1%	9.0%
	Regional SA	1.0%	0.9%
	Regional WA	1.5%	1.7%
	Tasmania	1.5%	1.4%
	Northern Territory	0.6%	0.6%
<b>4.3 C Innovation - share of total business owner managers</b>  Baseline: 2016; Update: 2021; by RAI's regional typologies Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2016 and 2021	Regional NSW	12.8%	12.9%
	Regional Vic.	7.0%	7.1%
	Regional Qld	11.2%	11.4%
	Regional SA	2.0%	1.8%
	Regional WA	2.8%	2.6%
	Tasmania	1.9%	2.1%
	Northern Territory	0.6%	0.6%

Target	State	Baseline Year	2023 Update
<b>5.1 Share of employment in renewable electricity generation</b>  Baseline: 2016; Update: 2021; by RAI's regional typologies Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2016 and 2021	Regional NSW	18.4%	15.8%
	Regional Vic.	3.0%	3.9%
	Regional Qld	5.0%	10.4%
	Regional SA	0.8%	2.0%
	Regional WA	1.7%	0.5%
	Tasmania	28.9%	20.4%
	Northern Territory	0.4%	0.2%
	<b>5.2 Proportion of areas with moderate or high resilience</b>  Baseline: 2020; by Remoteness Source: Australian Disaster Resilience Index 2020	Regional NSW	76.2%
Regional Vic.		82.7%	N/A
Regional Qld		37.1%	N/A
Regional SA		58.0%	N/A
Regional WA		21.5%	N/A
Tasmania		55.8%	N/A
Northern Territory		0.0%	N/A

## Appendix B - Notes: Guide To Reading The 2023 Pillar Progress

### What is regional Australia?

There is no single definition of what constitutes regional Australia. Many different definitions exist and can vary depending on the user and the purpose for which the definition is required.

The RAI uses a broad definition for its research, policy and advocacy work. For the RAI, regional Australia includes all the cities, towns and areas outside of Australia's largest capital cities: Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Canberra.

While this definition is a useful starting point to conceptualise what "regional Australia" encompasses, it is more important to recognise and acknowledge the diversity that exists throughout regional Australia. There are different types of regional communities and different factors that will shape their futures. When analysing future trajectories of regional communities, the most relevant factors are their population, industry and proximity to a capital city. On this basis, the RAI has identified four different regional types. Called the 'Foundations of Regional Australia', they provide a basis for understanding the range of unique pathways to future prosperity that exist across regional Australia.

The factors that influence the socioeconomic development and potential of regional areas can be broadly divided into three categories:

- Population: How many people live there
- Employment: The kinds of jobs that people have
- Proximity/distance to major cities

These are key drivers of economic growth and social change and provide a starting point for understanding the diverse pathways to future prosperity across regional Australia. Based on them, the RAI developed the following four typologies for regional areas:

- Regional Cities, which have populations of over 50,000 people. They have diverse economies and the chance to use their size and diversity to shape their own future.
- Connected Lifestyle Regions do not have city population size but are close to our major metropolitan regions. They will be influenced by their connection with these cities.
- Industry and Service Hubs are regional centres with between 15,000 and 50,000 residents, located further from major metropolitan areas. Their performance is linked to industry outcomes, but their population size means they could be resilient to change.
- Heartland Regions are smaller regional areas that are not close to other major metropolitan or Regional Cities. Industry trends and local ingenuity will shape their future.

### Data availability (continued)

The original datasets leveraged in this analysis are retrieved from different sources such as Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), CoreLogic, Department of Health and Aged Care, Jobs and Skills Australia, Productivity Commission, and so on. They are available either monthly, quarterly, semi-annually, annually, or every Census period.

For monthly or quarterly data, the RAI use the (12-month or 4-quarter) moving averages instead of original figures to exclude seasonal effects.

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