

Positively

PENRITH

Your Voice, Your Future: Penrith Youth Strategy and Action Plan 2027–31

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge and pay respect to the Darug and Gundungarra peoples who are the traditional owners in which Penrith Local Government Area is situated.

We also pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging, and to the First Nations people living in our community today.

DRAFT

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Data Disclaimer

The Penrith Youth Strategy and Action Plan 2027–31 (the plan) draws on a range of national, state and local data sources to understand the experiences and priorities of young people in Penrith. The 8 to 24 age range reflects both international and national context — while the United Nations defines youth as 15 to 24 years and the Australian Government's *Engage! Youth Engagement Strategy* identifies young people as aged 12 to 25 years, the plan intentionally extends the lower age boundary to 8 years. This reflects Penrith's local priorities, including the Maximising the Middle framework, which recognises that 8–12-year-olds are a critical but frequently underrepresented cohort in youth-focused strategies and services.

While the target age range for this project is **8 to 24 years**, most publicly available datasets do not report information using this exact age bracket. To ensure relevance and continuity, the analysis uses data from age ranges that fall within or closely align with the 8 to 24 cohort (e.g., 10–14, 12–24, 15–19, 20–24). Where required, insights have been interpreted with consideration of these variations.

All data has been used in good faith to provide an accurate representation of young people's needs, while acknowledging minor differences in age segmentation across sources.

A message from our Mayor

It is my pleasure to present the *Draft Penrith Youth Strategy and Action Plan 2027–31*. This plan outlines how Penrith City Council will support and empower our young people over the next 5 years. One in 5 people in Penrith is aged 8 to 24 and we are at the heart of one of the country's fastest-growing regions, which presents fantastic opportunities for our community.

Council acknowledges the significant contributions of young people to this City. To ensure that they feel seen and heard, we spoke with more than 300 young people to develop this plan. Council thanks those who shared their needs, ideas and aspirations for a bright future in Penrith.

Feeling safe near home, having access to opportunities and being included in decisions that impact them were some of the priorities revealed in our community engagement. These have shaped the plan's goals and actions.

The civic youth engagement program in this strategy brings these priorities together and will better connect Council with young people. This 2-year pilot will include an annual youth forum and the establishment of the Penrith Youth Committee Action Group.

We continue to proudly deliver one of my favourite programs – the Penrith Mayoral Challenge. This sees students from schools across the City learn leadership, decision-making and budgeting skills as the vision for their local playspace comes to life.

Council also recently engaged young people who use the award-winning Gipps Street Recreation Precinct at Claremont Meadows to inspire the design for a colourful mural that brightens the space and helps to build community pride.

I look forward to what we will achieve together through this plan.

A message from our General Manager

Penrith City Council recognises and values that our region has one of Western Sydney's youngest demographics. As an innovative and future-focused organisation, Council has developed the *Draft Penrith Youth Strategy and Action Plan 2027–31* to drive civic engagement with this City's young people and find new ways to enable the next generation to thrive.

This plan builds on Council's achievements and aims to strengthen the support of young people in Penrith. It aligns with Council's *Delivery Program 2025–29* and responds to feedback that has informed our longer-term *Penrith 2041+ Community Strategic Plan*.

With the Western Sydney International Airport connecting Penrith to the world from the end of October and with the Metro to follow, there has never been a more opportune time to create exciting pathways to education and jobs of the future for our community.

From improving health and wellbeing outcomes to building connection and belonging, there is a clear vision for what Council will set out to achieve over the next 5 years.

Our Penrith City Libraries offer various skill-building workshops and study support sessions for young people that are well attended, which shows there is an appetite for more.

Council will enhance its projects and services for young people, continue to advocate the Australian and NSW Governments for greater investment in Penrith, and lead collaboration with key industry partners, youth services and other organisations.

Together, we can make a real difference in the lives of our young people - the leaders, thinkers, teachers and problem-solvers of tomorrow.

The role of young people in Penrith

Young people are at the heart of Penrith's story. They bring creativity, curiosity and courage to everything they do – shaping the City's identity today and leading it into the future.

We especially acknowledge the strength, creativity and leadership of First Nations children and young people whose voices and cultural knowledge continue to shape Penrith's story.

Across schools, workplaces, sports clubs, neighbourhoods and online spaces, young people contribute in many ways:

- **Community builders** – through volunteering, mentoring, leading youth projects or civic representation, young people help strengthen community connection and local pride.
- **Creative thinkers** – through music, art, storytelling or performance, they share new perspectives and make Penrith's culture richer and more vibrant.
- **Innovators and problem-solvers** – from influencing the design of public spaces in the Penrith Mayoral Challenge to shaping digital engagement and sustainability projects, young people bring fresh ideas to local decision-making.
- **Future leaders** – programs like Council's Youth Leadership Team develop the next generation of civic leaders who are confident to speak up, collaborate and influence change.
- **Advocates and change-makers** – young people use their lived experiences to inspire action. For example: a Youth Leadership Team member is sharing her story to challenge the stigma around homelessness and advocate for better support.

Young people aged 8 to 24 make up around one-fifth of Penrith's population¹ and bring energy, innovation and empathy to community life.

Their participation reminds us that leadership isn't defined by age – it's about ideas, collaboration and commitment to making Penrith an even better place to live.

The role of Council for young people

Penrith City Council plays an important part in creating a city where young people feel supported, included and able to reach their potential. Council works with schools, youth services, community organisations and other levels of government to create opportunities for young people to be included in local conversations and decisions that shape Penrith's future.

Council's role focuses on connection, partnership and advocacy with Council working alongside others to strengthen collaboration and create pathways for young people to be heard and involved.

- **Connector** – Council connects young people with opportunities, programs and networks that encourage participation, wellbeing and belonging. Council creates and maintains places for leisure, transport, learning and culture to provide young people an opportunity to connect and build their community.
- **Partner** – Council works alongside youth services, schools and community organisations to share ideas, coordinate efforts and create positive outcomes for young people.
- **Advocate** – Council listens to young people and shares their perspectives to inform planning, policy and decision-making across Penrith and the wider region.

The plan identifies Connector, Partner and Advocate as 3 Council roles strategically aligned with Council's roles in the Penrith Community Strategic Plan (CSP) 2041+, translating its long-term community vision into direct action and outcomes for young people.



What is the Penrith Youth Strategy and Action Plan 2027–31?

The Your Voice, Your Future: Penrith Youth Strategy and Action Plan 2027–31 (the plan) sets out how Penrith City Council supports, engages and empowers young people. The age range of the plan includes 8 to 24-year-olds to ensure the middle years population of Penrith are not overlooked. Strongly guided by young people, it reflects their ideas, priorities and aspirations for a community that values inclusion, belonging and opportunity.

More than 300 young people took part through workshops, surveys and creative engagement. They shared what matters most – feeling safe, having opportunities, and being included in decisions that affect them.

Young people helped shape every stage, from designing online engagement questions, to delivering engagement and refining the pillars and directions for action.

Why we need your voice, Your Future: Penrith Youth Strategy and Action Plan 2027–31

Penrith is home to one of the largest youth populations in Western Sydney, with around one in 5 residents aged 8 to 24 years. As our City grows, so does the need to understand and respond to the issues that shape young people's lives.

While many young people are thriving, others are navigating challenges such as transport, housing costs, mental health and access to local opportunities.

The plan captures what young people told us and offers a roadmap for how we can collectively support young people to thrive.

There are 4 key pillars. Each pillar starts with youth voice, which provides perspective and sets the intention of the plan. The pillars provide a snapshot of current relevant data, detail the feedback received through different engagement methods and offer a summary of findings. From this data, a set of goals is outlined for each pillar, which guide how we can practically contribute to addressing the key issues identified by young people.

Developmental needs by age group

The Your Voice, Your Future: Penrith Youth Strategy and Action Plan 2027–31 recognises that young people are not a single, uniform group. Across the ages of 8 to 24, young people experience vastly different life stages, needs and priorities. To ensure the plan is genuinely responsive, Penrith's young people are considered across 3 distinct age groups, each reflecting the unique opportunities and challenges that come with each stage of growing up in Penrith. Importantly, while their needs differ, young people across all age groups identified common pressures including cost of living, access to affordable activities, mental health and feeling safe, reinforcing that the issues shaping young lives in Penrith are felt from as early as 8 years old.

- **Young people aged 8 to 12 years** benefit from safe, inclusive social spaces, opportunities to build skills, and strong connections with family and community.
- **Young people aged 13 to 17 years** seek to develop their identity, express their voice, build autonomy, and explore pathways and future aspirations.
- **Young people aged 18 to 24 years** need support to navigate education and career pathways, alongside access to wellbeing and mental health supports.

The chart below outlines the key developmental needs of young people across each of the 3 age groups, helping to ensure the plan remains responsive to where young people are in their lives.

8 to 12-year-olds	13 to 17-year-olds	18 to 24-year-olds
• Belonging and safety • Identity, autonomy and voice • Skill development • Transition support • Family and community connection • Safe and secure housing and transport	• Identity, autonomy and voice • Wellbeing and mental health • Connection and positive relationships • Pathways and aspirations • Educational and career support • Life skills and civic participation development	• Economic participation • Educational and career support • Wellbeing and mental health • Social connection and community belonging • Mentorship, life skills and civic leadership opportunities • Affordable housing and reliable public transport options

What's the big picture?

The Your Voice, Your Future: Penrith Youth Strategy and Action Plan 2027–31 (the plan) is informed by and aligns with the national *Engage! Youth Engagement Strategy (2024)*¹⁰, developed by the Australian Government's Office for Youth. Engage! sets out a national vision that young people aged 12 to 25 are empowered, valued and able to contribute to government decision making. Both strategies share a commitment to ensuring young people are genuine partners in shaping the decisions that affect them, not passive recipients of services. The themes that emerged through Penrith's local engagement including mental health, cost of living, belonging, accessibility and the need for inclusive spaces mirror the national priorities identified through *Engage!*. This reinforces that the challenges facing Penrith's young people are part of a broader picture, one that warrants a coordinated response across all levels of government.

The plan builds on our shared Community Vision of opportunity, connection, pride, sustainability, care and prosperity.

It aligns with the direction set in Penrith Community Strategic Plan 2041+, which describes the City we want to become:

"We are welcoming, healthy, happy, creative and connected."

The plan translates this vision through the lens of young people, showing how Council and partners can create the conditions for them to learn, participate and shape the future.



The plan complements other key strategies and action plans that work together to make Penrith inclusive and resilient, including:

- Resilient Penrith Action Plan 2021–30
- Cultural Strategy and Action Plan 2024–28
- Multicultural Action Plan 2024–27
- Draft Reconciliation Action Plan
- Draft Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2026–30
- Community Safety Plan 2023–27

Together, these plans help embed the wellbeing and participation of children and young people across everything Council does – from community development and culture to infrastructure and safety.

Ways to use the plan

The plan is an intention-setting document that provides a shared roadmap for everyone supporting or wanting to support young people in Penrith. It can be used by Penrith City Council, schools, community organisations and partners to inform their work with young people. It can also be used by young people to self-organise or partner with organisations to co-lead projects or activities.

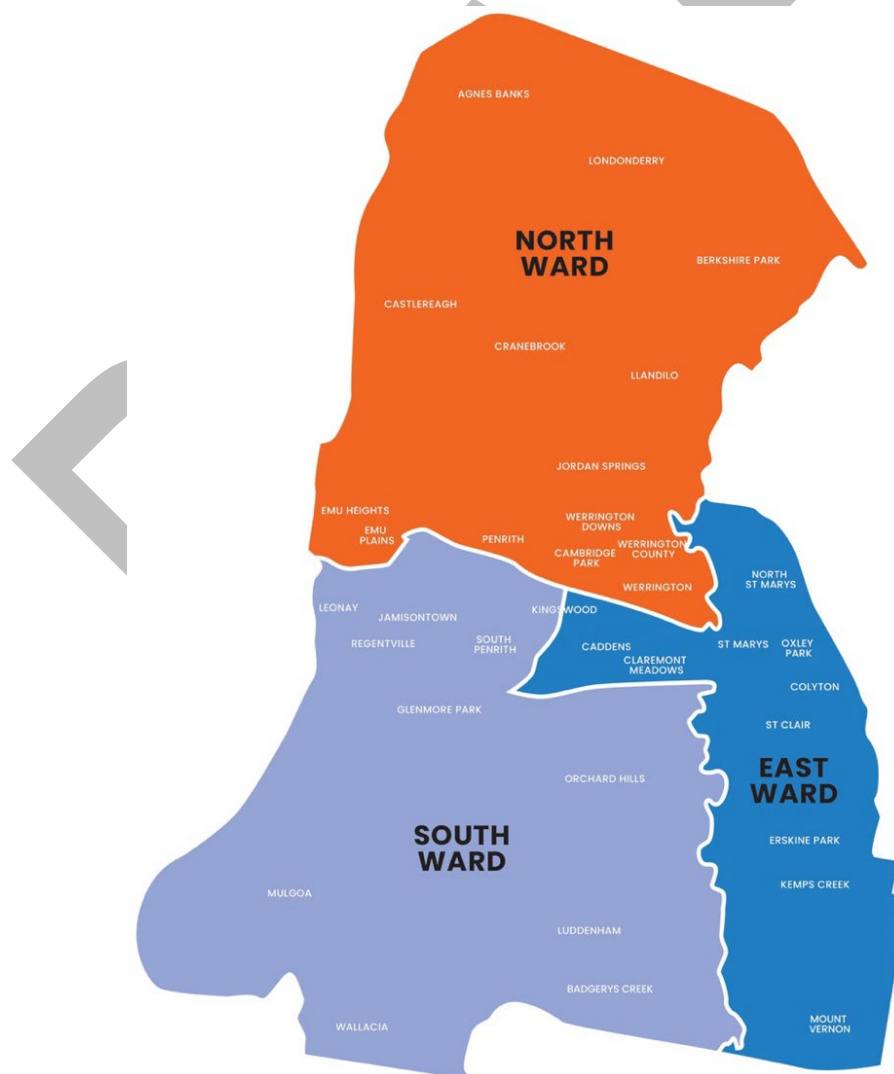
- **A guide for planning and reflection** – The plan helps shape priorities, spark collaboration and inform initiatives that reflect what young people value.
- **A living document** – The plan has been created so it can survive shifting priorities and remain relevant as Penrith grows and young people's needs change.
- **Led by young people** – The Youth Leadership Team was fundamental in the development of the plan, their ideas, insights and lived experiences sit at the heart of every pillar and will continue to guide future engagement.

The plan helps keep young people's voices central to decision-making and ensures Penrith remains a city where every young person can belong, contribute and thrive.

Youth Snapshot

Penrith is a young and growing city — a place where children and young people are shaping the story of one of Western Sydney's most dynamic communities. Home to more than 219,000 residents, Penrith stretches from the Nepean River to the foothills of the Blue Mountains, blending city life with open space, creativity, and opportunity.

Around one in 5 people in Penrith are aged 8 to 24 years, bringing energy, culture, and fresh perspectives to the community. 7.2% of 12 to 24-year-olds identify as being of First Nations descent, and many others have cultural connections that span over 110 countries across the world. English is the most spoken language, but more than one in 5 households speak another, creating a rich cultural mix that defines modern Penrith.



Young people are studying, working, volunteering, representing their peers and contributing across every part of community life. Most are in education, many balance work and study, and local industries such as retail, hospitality, construction, and health care are powered by youth employment. Yet challenges remain – with transport access, housing costs, and mental health support emerging as shared concerns through community engagement.

Penrith's young people are resilient, creative, and future-focused. They want a city that listens, includes, and empowers them, a city that offers opportunities for growth, connection, and leadership.

Penrith at a glance:

- 404 km²
- 55 km west of Sydney CBD
- 2021 Population – 217, 664
 - 9th largest LGA in NSW
- 2041 Population – 271, 518
- Youth Population (8 to 24 years) ~48,000 (22%)
- Top languages
 - Arabic – 1.8%
 - Punjabi – 1.4%
- Youth employment – 77% of (18 to 24) in labour force
 - Retail
 - Hospitality
 - Construction
- Youth disengagement (not in work or study) – 15% (18 to 24)
 - Above Greater Sydney (11%)
- Most common long-term health issue – mental health (12.5% of 18 to 24-year-olds)
 - Higher than Greater Sydney average
- 5.5% need assistance with core activities
- 5% First Nations
 - Higher than metro average (1.7%)
- 29% people born overseas
- 24% households where non-English language is used
 - Tagalog – 1.2%
 - Hindi – 1.1%
 - Mandarin – 0.8%

How this strategy and action plan was formed

The Your Voice, Your Future: Penrith Youth Strategy and Action Plan 2027–31 was developed through a collaborative process shaped by the voices, experiences and ideas of young people across Penrith.

In February 2025, 29 young people responded to an Expression of Interest to join the Penrith Youth Leadership Team to inform the development of the plan. Council also worked with schools, youth services and community organisations to ensure the plan reflects a broad range of youth perspectives and experiences.

Between June and November 2025, more than 300 young people aged 8 to 24 shared their views through online engagement and face-to-face conversations. The process aimed to reach young people across different settings – schools, community spaces and digital platforms – ensuring participation was inclusive and accessible.

The online engagement was co-designed with the Youth Leadership Team (YLT) – a group of young people aged 15 to 20 who helped design survey questions and lead the engagement during Youth Week 2025. Their involvement ensured the process stayed grounded in youth perspectives and lived experience.

Youth led engagement snapshot

- 300+ young people engaged
- 171 Your Say responses
- 128 workshop participants
- 55 stakeholders consulted
- 6 engagement sessions
- 20+ youth organisations are actively engaged

Who we heard from

Young people who participated represented a wide range of experiences and identities, including:

- Children and teenagers aged 8 to 17 years participating through schools and youth programs
- Young adults aged 18 to 24 living, studying or working in Penrith

- First Nations young people (25% of total participants)
- Young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (5% of total participants)
- Young people with disabilities or who access additional support (9% of total participants)
- LGBTQIA+ young people and peer advocates (10% of total participants)
- Young parents, students, workers and job seekers

This diversity of voices helped shape a holistic picture of what young people value, what they want to see change, and how they contribute to Penrith's community life.

It is important to note that while demographic information was sought at each engagement activity throughout the process, providing this information was optional for participants. The data recorded is therefore only indicative of those who chose to respond to those specific questions and may not fully reflect the demographic intersectionality of all participants.

Engagement tools and approach

To hear from as many young people as possible, Council used a mix of online and face-to-face tools. Each approach was designed to make participation easy, meaningful and youth friendly.

- **Your Say Penrith survey** – The Your Say Penrith online platform hosted a short, youth-focused survey open from March to April 2025. It asked young people about:
 - What they enjoy most about living, studying or working in Penrith
 - What challenges or barriers they experience day to day
 - What would make Penrith a better place for young people
 - How Council and the community can support their wellbeing and opportunities

The Youth Leadership Team (YLT) helped shape the questions used in the survey to ensure they were clear, concise, engaging, and relevant. They also encouraged their peers to participate through schools, local networks and social media – helping make the survey more accessible and relatable to a wider group of young people.

The survey received 171 responses, representing young people from across Penrith's suburbs, schools and backgrounds.

- **Face-to-face engagement** – To complement the online survey, Council facilitated 7 engagement sessions across schools and community settings. These sessions reached over 128 participants, ranging in age from 8 to 17 years, and were designed to be interactive. We asked young people:
 - What do you think Penrith Council does?
 - From a list of 22 items, choose the 5 most important and the 3 least important
 - If you were the Mayor, what 3 things would you do to make your neighbourhood a better place?
- Face-to-face engagement included:
 - **A Place to Go** (North St Marys) – is a program for young people aged 10 to 17 in contact with the justice system. 12 young people participated in the engagement.
 - **Community Junction** (Werrington) – delivers a range of youth programs for 12 to 18-year-olds. 15 participants took part.
 - **Braddock Public School** (Cranebrook) – 27 students aged 10 to 12 participated in a facilitated workshop.
 - **Pride Place** (Breakthru Office, High Street Penrith) – is a monthly drop in LGBTIQA+ safe space. We had 3 participants identifying as gender and sexually diverse.
 - **Vacation Care Groups** (Erskine Park/Emu Plains/Kindana/Ngamae coordinated by Uniting and Penrith City Council Children's Services) – 51 children and young people participated in guided activities to identify their top 3 ideas for improving their local area, encouraging creative and aspirational thinking.
 - **Culture Fusion** (St Marys) – a multicultural event for families. 20 young people provided feedback at an engagement pop up stall.

Each session used creative tools including engagement boards, voting activities and visual worksheets to help young people share ideas about their lives, their communities, and their aspirations for Penrith's future. Asking young people about what they would do if they could be the Mayor for a day helped draw out what truly matters for young people.

- **Peer-to-peer engagement** – Peer engagement was a cornerstone of the process. The Youth Leadership Team (YLT) – made up of 29 young leaders aged 15 to 20 years – acted as ambassadors for the plan. They helped refine engagement questions, promoted the Your Say survey, hosted

informal conversations within their networks and schools, and led a large engagement campaign during Youth Week 2025.

- **Partner and stakeholder engagement** – Council surveyed 55 members at Penrith Youth Interagency to understand the most effective ways to engage young people and identify key partners to help develop and deliver the plan. PCC also worked with more than 20 organisations to understand the broader landscape of youth programs, needs and opportunities across the LGA.

Partners included:

- Local schools and education providers
- Youth and community services such as A Place to Go, Community Junction, Youth Employment Services, Platform Youth Services, Street Uni, Uniting and others through the Penrith Youth Interagency
- Youth health and wellbeing organisation, including Breakthru and Headspace
- Cultural and recreation groups and interagency networks

These conversations helped confirm that the themes raised by young people were consistent with what local practitioners and educators observe every day.

Key pillars, findings and action plans

The engagement process revealed a clear and consistent message: young people across Penrith share many of the same priorities, even if their experiences are different.

Through workshops, surveys, pop-ups and conversations, 4 key pillars emerged. Each pillar reflects what young people said matters most to them, supported by local data, youth stories and community insights.

These pillars build on one another, together showing what young people value, the challenges they navigate, and how Council and partners can respond in ways that make a meaningful difference.

1. **Health, Wellbeing & Safety** – *Feeling safe, supported and connected is essential for young people's wellbeing.*

This pillar explores young people's views on mental health, access to support, safety in public spaces, and the importance of inclusion and belonging. It combines youth insights with data on health, safety and access to services.

2. **Affordable Living & Opportunities** – *Creating opportunities for young people to live, learn and work locally.*

This pillar captures what young people told us about cost of living, housing, jobs and access to education and training. It includes insights on how affordability affects participation and independence, supported by local economic and social data.

3. **Connection, Belonging & Culture** – *Celebrating diversity, identity and inclusion across Penrith.*

This pillar focuses on how young people connect with each other, their communities and culture. It explores belonging, representation, and how creative and cultural spaces can help young people express who they are and feel part of Penrith's story.

4. **Environment, Accessibility & Movement** – *Building a sustainable, inclusive and connected city for young people.*

This pillar explores access to transport, parks, recreation, and the natural environment. It includes young people's ideas on sustainability, accessibility and what makes Penrith's neighbourhoods feel safe and easy to move through.

Snapshot of goals

Within each pillar are several goals. These goals form the basis of the action plan and guide how Council will support young people to live, work and thrive in Penrith.

Pillar One: Health, Wellbeing and Safety

- 1.1 Communities where young people can access support early and without stigma
- 1.2 Environments and spaces that are inclusive, accessible and welcoming for all
- 1.3 A culture of respect, healthy relationships and safety across everyday settings

Pillar Two: Affordable Living and Opportunities

- 2.1 A city where young people are connected to opportunities and meaningful pathways into education, training and work
- 2.2 Housing, transport and services that support young people's independence and participation
- 2.3 Young people are equipped with the skills and confidence to navigate work, learning, civic engagement and life

Pillar Three: Connection, Belonging and Culture

- 3.1 A community that celebrates identity, culture and diversity in everyday life
- 3.2 Social spaces that invite participation, leadership and expression

Pillar Four: Environment, Accessibility and Movement

- 4.1 A city that is easy, safe and intuitive for young people to move through
- 4.2 Neighbourhoods and natural spaces that support health and connection to place
- 4.3 Public spaces and facilities designed with youth accessibility at their core

Pillar One: Health, Wellbeing & Safety

Youth Voice: Jaden's Story – 16 years old

LGBTQIA+ young person | Balancing school, work and belonging

"I'm in Year 10 and live with my family in Colyton. I go to school nearby and work part-time at a café on Queen Street in St Marys. Most weekends I'm out with my friends – sometimes at the shops, sometimes at the skate park or just hanging out at home.

I like school, and I've got a good group of friends, but there are times I feel out of place for being different. I'm part of our school's diversity club, which really helps – it's one of the few places I can talk openly and feel supported.

Getting around can be tricky, though. Buses don't always line up with school or work, and it's hard to get home from youth events when they finish late. Sometimes that means I just don't go.

I'd love to see more safe spaces and programs for young people – places that are easy to get to, where you can just be yourself and not feel judged."

What Jaden's story tells us

- Many young people are balancing study, part-time work and social life while navigating identity and confidence.
- Inclusive spaces at school and in the community play a major role in supporting mental health and belonging.
- Access to safe, reliable transport affects whether young people can attend programs, events or services.
- Young people want environments that are welcoming, inclusive and affirming of diversity.

What the data tells us^{3,4,10}

- The Black Dog Institute Youth Mental Health Survey found the proportion of young people aged 15 to 19 years who reported psychological distress increased from 18.7% in 2012 to 24.9% in 2023.³
- In Penrith, young people are 7% more likely to have a long-term health condition when compared to Greater Sydney⁴
 - 12 to 17-year-olds – 16% (Penrith) vs 13% (Greater Sydney)

- 18 to 24-year-olds – 25% (Penrith) vs 16% (Greater Sydney)
- The most common health conditions for our young people in Penrith:
 - Asthma – 12 to 17-year-old (9.7%) vs 18–24-year-old (9.8%)
 - Mental health conditions – 12 to 17-year-olds (7%) vs 18 to 24-year-olds (12.5%)
- The national *'Engage! Youth Engagement Strategy'* quotes that 46.1% of young people aged 12 to 25 identified mental health as one of the most important issues for the government to address.¹⁰

What young people tell us

Your Say Penrith Survey – 171 responses

- 56% said healthcare services (doctor, dentist, mental health support) are most needed or used in their local area.
- 49% said they need mental health support (therapy, counselling) to be happy and healthy.
- 54% said they need a safe environment to be happy and healthy.
- Young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds were more likely to value “healthy food” (83%) compared with non-CALD participants (42%).
- Male participants valued “physical activity” (60%) more than the female participants (35%).

Face-to-Face Engagement – Focus Groups – 128 participants

- 56% of respondents rated access to doctors and health care services as very important. This ranked second out of all topics, demonstrating that this is a critical concern for young people.
- 40% of respondents identified safe neighbourhoods as an important feature of their local area, while 20% highlighted the importance of healthy relationships, indicating that safety is experienced as both physical and social.
- Support for mental health was identified as an important service by 24% of respondents, reinforcing its significance for young people.
- Participants at Community Junction mentioned drug use and safety concerns more frequently than their peers at Pride Place and a Place to Go, reflecting local differences in experience.

Peer to Peer Engagement – 29 YLT members

- Young people emphasised the role of parents, family, and trusted adults in supporting wellbeing and a sense of safety.

Love and care start from parents and trusted adults – young people said “family, teachers and mentors all play a role in creating a sense of safety.”

- They also linked financial stress, limited transport and access barriers with feelings of isolation, anxiety and disconnection – showing that wellbeing and safety are influenced by both emotional and practical factors.

“When you can’t get to things or afford them, it makes you feel cut off. It’s not just about health; it’s about being included.”

What the findings tell us

Young people across Penrith spoke openly about their health and wellbeing; what helps them stay well and what gets in the way.

The data shows rising levels of psychological distress among young people over the past decade, with mental health conditions now among the most common long-term health issues.⁵ Young people in Penrith are also more likely to have a long-term health condition than their peers across Greater Sydney.⁶

Through the Your Say Penrith survey, focus groups and peer-led engagement, young people described a strong need for early mental health support, safe public spaces, and affordable healthcare. They also spoke about wanting to feel safe at home, at school and in their neighbourhoods, and about the importance of trusted relationships with adults and peers.

For many, wellbeing was not just about services but about connection, confidence and belonging. Young people from culturally diverse backgrounds linked health to family, food and cultural connection, while LGBTQIA+ young people and those living with disabilities emphasised the need for inclusion and acceptance.

Together, these insights show that for young people in Penrith, health and safety are about more than access to care; they’re about feeling valued, connected and supported by their community.

1.1: Communities where young people access support early and without stigma

ACTION	COUNCIL'S ROLE	KEY PARTNERS	MEASURE	TIMEFRAME
1.1.1: Partner with local businesses and service providers to support the development of resources that create accessible, safe, welcoming and inclusive services for young people	Partner	Youth and community services Local businesses Young people	Number of businesses and service providers engaged Number of resources developed, updated or shared annually	Ongoing
1.1.2: Support the development of a youth-led resource with key touchpoints that help young people navigate mental health services	Advocate	Youth mental health services Youth services Young people	Youth-led resource developed with input from young people and relevant services Resource promoted through Council, schools, youth services and community networks	2026-2027

1.2: Environments and spaces that are inclusive, welcoming and accessible for all

ACTION	COUNCIL'S ROLE	KEY PARTNERS	MEASURE	TIMEFRAME
1.2.1: Work with local businesses and venue providers to identify how they could make their public spaces and events more safe, welcoming and inclusive for young people	Partner	Youth and community services Local businesses Venue providers Young people	Number of businesses or venue providers engaged Number of practical inclusion initiatives identified and communicated to key stakeholders	Ongoing

1.3: A culture of respect, healthy relationships and safety across everyday settings

ACTION	COUNCIL'S ROLE	KEY PARTNERS	MEASURE	TIMEFRAME
1.3.1: Partner with schools, youth services and community organisations to support the delivery of programs that encourage respectful relationships and wellbeing	Partner	NSW Police Local schools Youth and community services	Number of partnerships or collaborative activities delivered Number of programs, workshops or events supported	2027-2030

Pillar Two: Affordable Living & Opportunities

Youth Voice: Nick's Story – 23 years old

Job seeker | Outdoor enthusiast | Rebuilding confidence

"I live in Emu Plains and recently finished a construction traineeship. When the company closed, I thought I'd find something new quickly – but it's been harder than I expected.

I've applied for heaps of jobs, but most want experience I don't have. Volunteering at the community garden has helped me stay busy and clear my head, but it's tough seeing rent and bills go up while work feels out of reach.

I want to build a career and stay in Penrith – near my friends and family – but it feels like everything's getting more expensive. I just want more chances to learn, work and get ahead."

What Nick's story tells us

- Transitioning from training to employment remains challenging, particularly where entry-level roles require experience.
- Rising living and housing costs compound employment barriers, making it harder for young people to establish independence.
- Motivation and community involvement alone are not enough without clear pathways to work and skills development.
- Accessible employment, training and affordable living options are critical to help young people build careers and remain connected to Penrith.

What the data tells us^{7,10}

- Most young people in Penrith City live in single-dwelling properties (freestanding houses)
 - 88% – 12 to 17-years-old
 - 81% – 18 to 24-years-old
- Medium density properties (townhouses/villas)
 - 10% – 12 to 17-years-old
 - 11% – 18 to 24-years-old
 - Only a small portion of young people live in medium-density housing likely due to a lack of availability, reducing options for young people when they are looking to live independently.
- High density (apartments/units)
 - 1% – 12 to 17-years-old
 - 6% – 18 to 24-years-old

- A very small portion of young people live in high-density households, meaning young people likely have very few affordable and accessible rental options, pushing them to less suitable housing types.
- Education
 - 92% of 15 to 17-year-olds had a secondary school qualification
 - 1.2% had a certificate I to IV qualification
 - 0.4% stated having no formal qualification
 - 21.6% of Penrith City young people aged 18 to 24 attended university
- Youth disengagement from education and or employment
 - 4.3% – 15 to 17 years old
 - 15% – 18 to 24 years old
- Income
 - The median household income where 12 to 17 years old lives is \$2,532 per week
 - The median household income where 18 to 24 years old lives is \$2,831 per week
- Employment
 - 92% are employed
 - 33% – full-time
 - 41% – part-time
 - 8% are unemployed
 - 3% – looking for part-time work
 - 5% – looking for full-time work
 - Industry of employment for people aged 18 to 24 years old:
 - 16% retail trade
 - 16% construction
 - 12% accommodation/food service
- The national *'Engage! Youth Engagement Strategy'* quotes that 55.3% of young people aged 12 to 25 identified cost of living as the single most important issue for government to address, with housing affordability, rent and home ownership identified as a priority by 30.3% of respondents.¹⁰
 - The national *'Engage! Youth Engagement Strategy'* quotes that 29.1% of young people aged 12 to 25 identified education and training as a priority issue for government to address.¹⁰
 - The national *'Engage! Youth Engagement Strategy'* quotes that young people aged 12 to 25 preferred accessing employment and training information through events at school, TAFE or university (40.3%) and youth organisations (31.7%).¹⁰

What young people tell us

Your Say Penrith Survey – 171 responses

- 33% of participants said that they need financial resources to be happy and healthy.
- 67% of young people with disability or additional support needs said they need financial resources to be happy and healthy compared to 29% of young people living without a disability or additional needs
- Over 40% of respondents said employment services or support are the most needed or used services in their local area.
- 78% of young people with disability valued employment support as a service most needed in their area

Face-to-Face Engagement – 128 participants

- 80% of respondents voted affordable homes as a priority for young people ranking it highest out of all responses
- 44% of respondents voted having enough money as a priority for young people
- 40% of students at Community Junction said Council provides valuable support for people experiencing financial stress or homelessness.
- Nearly 21% of the respondents said if they were Mayor, they would improve housing and homelessness support across the City.

Peer to Peer Engagement – 29 YLT members

- Young people said that finding and keeping work is one of their biggest challenges.
- Many mentioned the need for access to local employment opportunities, training and apprenticeships close to home.
- They highlighted cost-of-living pressures as major barriers to staying in Penrith or taking part in work and study.
- Participants valued mentors, role models and leadership programs that focus on their strengths and help them build confidence, not just qualifications.
- Several spoke about wanting open, youth-friendly spaces where they can meet, learn new skills and feel supported by their community.

What the Findings Tell Us

Young people across Penrith are ambitious and community-minded, but many are finding independence harder to achieve. They spoke about the pressure of rising rents, transport costs and the difficulty of finding local jobs that match their skills or study schedules. For some — particularly those living with disability or

from low-income households — these barriers affect confidence, wellbeing and connection.

Peer discussions reinforced that financial stability, access to training, and reliable transport are essential to wellbeing. Young people want to feel secure, capable and optimistic about their future. They also emphasised the importance of mentorship and supportive environments that help them stay motivated and build real-world experience.

At the same time, young people recognise Penrith's potential. With its mix of education providers, local businesses and community programs, they see opportunities for a city that connects learning, work and affordable living.

They want a Penrith where they can rent affordably, travel easily and find meaningful work close to home - a community that helps them thrive, not just get by.

2.1: A city where young people are connected to opportunities and meaningful pathways into education, training and work				
ACTION	COUNCIL'S ROLE	KEY PARTNERS	MEASURE	TIMEFRAME
2.1.1: Support work experience opportunities at Council's community events as entry point for young people into work and civic participation	Advocate	Education providers Employment services Youth and community services	Number of work experience opportunities for young people at Council community events	Ongoing
2.1.2: Proactively promote Council's Community Funding Program and other local grant opportunities to youth and community services for the delivery of youth-focused outcomes	Partner/Connector	Youth and community services	Number of youth-focussed grants funded through Council's CFP Number of other local grant opportunities promoted to youth and community organisations	Ongoing
2.1.3: Continue to coordinate sector networking opportunities that support a collective and cohesive approach to youth outcomes	Partner/Connector	Youth and community services	Number of networking opportunities Number of participants Number of organisations	Ongoing

2.2: Housing, transport and services that support young people's independence and participation				
ACTION	COUNCIL'S ROLE	KEY PARTNERS	MEASURE	TIMEFRAME
2.2.1: Continue advocating to Australian and NSW governments for an improved public transport network	Advocate	Youth and community services	Number of advocacy actions completed	Ongoing
2.2.2: Prepare a Public Transport Position Paper and deliver a public and active transport-focused advocacy campaign	Advocate	Youth and community services	Position paper developed Advocacy campaign delivered	2026–2028
2.2.3: Continue to advocate for affordable housing options for young people in Penrith	Advocate	Housing services Youth and community services	Advocacy delivered	2027–2030

2.3: Equip young people with the skills and confidence to navigate work, learning, civic engagement and life

ACTION	COUNCIL'S ROLE	KEY PARTNERS	MEASURE	TIMEFRAME
2.3.1: Continue to deliver youth programming and proactively connect young people to Library youth programming including workshops and HSC lectures	Connector	Youth and community services Local schools	Number of youth-focused Library programs delivered Number of young people participating in Library programming each year	Ongoing
2.3.2: Investigate the feasibility and opportunity for Children's Services to develop a "Middle Years" program that promotes wellbeing and connection, and supports the development of confident, socially engaged citizens during the middle years	Connector	Youth and community services	Feasibility assessment completed	2029–2030
2.3.3: Design and deliver civic youth engagement program that includes a Youth Forum and Youth Committee Action Group as a two-year pilot	Connector	Young people Schools Youth and community services	Deliver at least one Penrith Youth Forum annually during the pilot period Deliver up to 6 Penrith Youth Committee Action Group meetings annually during the pilot period Number of participants in each	2027–2028

Pillar Three: Connection, Belonging & Culture

Youth Voice: Aaliyah's Story – 11 years old

First Nations young person | Creative learner | Loves her community

"My name's Aaliyah and I live in Cambridge Park with my mum and 2 younger brothers. I'm proud of my Darug heritage – we talk about Country and culture at school, and I love when we get to paint or dance.

I feel happiest when I can be creative and share stories about who we are. Sometimes it's hard when activities cost too much or are too far away. I wish there were more free things to do after school, close to home – places to hang out, learn, paint and make new friends.

I love Penrith because it feels like home. I just want more spaces for kids like me to be creative, proud and connected."

What Aaliyah's story tells us

- Affordable, local activities are critical to ensure young people can participate without cost or transport barriers.
- Creative and cultural expression supports identity and wellbeing, particularly for First Nations young people.
- Accessible youth-friendly spaces enable connection, learning and positive social relationships.
- Celebrating culture strengthens belonging, helping young people feel seen, proud and connected to their community.

What the data tells us^{8,10}

- 7.5% of 12 to 17-year-olds and 6.9% of 18 to 24-year-olds identified as having First Nations ancestry – higher than the Greater Sydney average.
- In 2021, 14% of people aged 12 to 17 and 18% aged 18 to 24 in Penrith were born outside of Australia.
- One in 5 Penrith residents speak a language other than English at home.
- The national 'Engage! Youth Engagement Strategy' quotes that 5% of young people aged 12 to 25 identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.¹⁰
- The national 'Engage! Youth Engagement Strategy' quotes that 16.3% of young people aged 12 to 25 are born overseas, and 25.9% live in regional and remote areas.¹⁰

- The national '*Engage! Youth Engagement Strategy*' quotes that 7.3% of young people aged 12 to 25 identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual.¹⁰

What young people tell us

Your Say Penrith Survey – 171 responses

- 57% of participants said creative opportunities (art, music, performance, theatre, cultural expression) are important to their happiness and wellbeing.
- 74% said they connect with friends and family in-person while 34% also connect via Instagram and Snapchat.
- 51% said they need social support (friends, family, community) to be happy and healthy.
- Young people from CALD backgrounds were more likely to value social support (friends, family, community) (83%) compared with the non-CALD participants (65%).

Face-to-Face Engagement – 128 participants

- Young people highlighted free events and activities and places to hang out as the top 2 important factors to connection and belonging.
- 24% valued friendly communities and 18% valued access to music and arts.
- Participants at *Pride Place* expressed a strong desire to celebrate diversity and different cultures.
- Across all groups, there were at least 10 mentions of healthy relationships and friendly communities, reinforcing the link between connection, wellbeing, and happiness.

Peer to Peer Engagement – 29 YLT members

- Young people want to feel accepted and respected for who they are, without judgment. They spoke about the importance of tolerance, kindness and understanding differences.
- They described a need for more open, youth-friendly places where they can connect with friends, be creative and feel welcome. They want alternatives to commercial or adult-dominated areas.

What the findings tell us

Young people in Penrith see connection as essential to feeling well and confident. They told us that belonging comes from being accepted and represented – through culture, creativity and shared experiences.

Participation in art, music and cultural events helps young people build identity, pride and community ties. Those opportunities are most meaningful when they reflect Penrith's diversity – its First Nations heritage, multicultural communities, people with disabilities, the LGBTIQ+ community and the growing creative scene.

Many participants said they want more welcoming spaces that invite interaction – places to gather, collaborate and relax without cost or judgement. They also described kindness, empathy and community spirit as the values that make Penrith feel like home.

Mentors, role models and inclusive programs were seen as vital for helping young people feel seen and supported, particularly for those who may not always feel they belong. When creativity, diversity and connection are nurtured, young people gain a stronger sense of who they are and where they fit, and Penrith becomes a city where everyone can belong.

3.1: A community that celebrates identity, culture and diversity in everyday life

ACTION	COUNCIL'S ROLE	KEY PARTNERS	MEASURE	TIMEFRAME
3.1.1: Investigate and pilot a legal graffiti wall in the LGA to celebrate young people's creative and cultural expression	Connector	Local cultural organisations Young people Youth and community services Schools	Legal graffiti wall delivered Number of young people participating	2028–2029
3.1.2: Partner with Penrith Performing and Visual Arts (PPVA) to support accessible and inclusive programs and events for young people that celebrate identity, culture and diversity	Partner	Penrith Performing and Visual Arts Young people	Number of accessible and inclusive programs or events for young people delivered annually Number of instances of access	Ongoing

3.2: Social spaces that invite participation, leadership and expression

ACTION	COUNCIL'S ROLE	KEY PARTNERS	MEASURE	TIMEFRAME
3.2.1: Work with young people to design and deliver events that meet their needs and celebrate identity, belonging and culture	Connector	Youth and community services Young people	Number of events delivered Number of young people participating	Ongoing
3.2.2: Deliver the Penrith Mayoral Challenge in partnership with a local school to support young people to contribute to the design and delivery of playgrounds and public spaces	Connector	Schools Young people	Penrith Mayoral Challenge delivered in partnership with a local school Number of young people participating	Ongoing

Pillar Four: Environment, Accessibility & Movement

Youth Voice: Maya's Story – 20 years old

First-generation university student | Living with disability | Aspiring social worker

"I'm studying social work at Western Sydney Uni, and I live with my parents in Jordan Springs. My family moved here from the Philippines when I was little.

I use a mobility aid because of a chronic condition. Uni has been supportive, but it can be hard to get to places or join events when transport isn't easy or venues aren't accessible. Sometimes it makes me feel like I'm missing out.

I love volunteering at the youth centre and mentoring younger students from multicultural backgrounds. It's where I feel most connected – like I'm part of something.

I just want Penrith to be a place where everyone can join in, where accessibility isn't an after-thought – whether it's at uni, at work or in the community."

What Maya's story tells us

- Accessibility remains a barrier to participation, particularly for young people living with disability when transport and venues are not inclusive.
- Inclusive design supports social connection, enabling young people to fully participate in education, work and community life.
- Volunteering and mentoring build belonging and purpose, especially for young people from multicultural backgrounds.
- Accessibility must be embedded, not incidental, to ensure all young people can engage equally across services, spaces and opportunities in Penrith.

What the data tells us^{9,10}

- In 2021, 4.6% of 12 to 17-year-olds and 2.9% of 18 to 24-year-olds in Penrith reported needing assistance due to disability.
- 2021 Census Data shows that only 3.1% of Penrith residents travelled to work by public transport, while 51.3% used a private vehicle highlighting car reliant travel networks that limit young people's mobility and access to education, work and recreation.

- The national '*Engage! Youth Engagement Strategy*' quotes that 9.3% of young people aged 12 to 25 have a disability.¹⁰
- The national '*Engage! Youth Engagement Strategy*' quotes that 4.1% of young people aged 12 to 25 are carers.¹⁰

What young people tell us

Your Say Penrith Survey – 171 responses

- 40% of participants said that access to green space is important for being happy and healthy.
- Participants with disability (78%) valued access to green space more highly than participants without disability (42%).
- 43% said recreational spaces (parks, gyms) were the most used or needed facilities in their local area.
- 54% said they need a safe environment to feel happy and healthy (e.g. public spaces with good lighting).

Face-to-face Engagement – 128 participants

- Young people made more than 10 mentions of wanting better access to nature and footpaths showing a strong preference for green, walkable neighbourhoods.
- 36% mentioned that looking after the environment is important, reflecting a sense of environmental responsibility and care for future generations.
- 36% through the 'dotmocracy' exercise voted for prioritising public transport and accessibility.
- Participants at *Pride Place* and *A Place to Go* called for more frequent and reliable transport options, especially in the evenings.
- Students at *Braddock Public School* said that they feel unsafe riding bikes alongside cars, but cycling is often the only way they can visit friends.

Peer to Peer Engagement – 29 YLT members

- Young people spoke about how accessible environments and reliable transport are essential for independence and wellbeing. They said that when spaces are hard to reach or navigate, it limits their ability to participate in community life.
- Participants said caring for the environment helps them feel connected to community and place.
- Young people with disability and mobility needs shared the importance of accessible design: ramps, crossings, and inclusive facilities that allow everyone to join in.

What the findings tell us

Young people want Penrith to be green, connected and inclusive – a city where they can move freely, access spaces easily, and feel safe wherever they go. They see transport, accessibility and sustainability as deeply linked to independence and wellbeing.

They spoke about the challenge of limited public transport and car dependency, which make it harder to get to school, work or events. Many said they want safer, more reliable options – especially for cycling and walking – and more youth-friendly public spaces connected by well-lit paths.

Young people with disability or mobility needs emphasised that accessibility should be built into everything, from playgrounds and parks to public transport and events. They also expressed pride in Penrith's natural environment and a shared responsibility to protect it – through clean green spaces, recycling, tree planting and sustainable design.

For young people, a connected and inclusive city is one where everyone can move, meet and participate – where green space, good design and safe transport bring people.

4.1: A city that is easy, safe and intuitive for young people to move through

ACTION	COUNCIL'S ROLE	KEY PARTNERS	MEASURE	TIMEFRAME
4.1.1: Partner with state agencies and community services to improve safety, accessibility and movement options for young people across Penrith	Partner	NSW Police Youth and community services	Number of joint initiatives, workshops or projects delivered	Ongoing

4.2: Neighbourhoods and natural spaces that support health and connection to place

ACTION	COUNCIL'S ROLE	KEY PARTNERS	MEASURE	TIMEFRAME
4.2.1: Connect young people to Caring for Country programs that support environmental stewardship and connection to land	Connector	State government agencies Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations Schools Youth and community services First Nations community	Number of Caring for Country programs delivered Number of instances of access	Ongoing
4.2.2: Deliver the Muru Murak Junior Rangers program in partnership with local schools and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations	Connector	Schools Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations Youth and community services First Nations community	Muru Murak Junior Rangers program delivered Number of instances of access	Ongoing

4.3: Public spaces and facilities designed with youth accessibility at their core

ACTION	COUNCIL'S ROLE	KEY PARTNERS	MEASURE	TIMEFRAME
4.3.1: Investigate the development of a resource that promotes accessible and inclusive youth-friendly public space and facility design	Connector	Youth and community services Young people	Resource developed and promoted with key stakeholders	2028–2029

How Penrith will monitor delivery

The Your Voice, Your Future: Penrith Youth Strategy and Action Plan 2027–31 sets out the actions we will take over the next 5 years, in conjunction with our partners and the broader youth sector, to support and empower young people in Penrith.

Many actions will be delivered by and in partnership with community organisations, youth services and state government agencies. Council's role will vary – at times leading delivery, and at others facilitating, advocating or linking. Where actions are delivered alongside partners, progress will be considered as a shared outcome across the sector.

The timelines assigned to each action reflect the nature of the work involved. Some actions are focused on a specific outcome and will be completed within a defined period, while others require sustained effort across the life of the plan to be effective. All actions include explicit measures. Progress on delivery will be reported annually.

Progress on the plan will also be monitored through Council's existing strong relationships with youth services and community partners, particularly through the Penrith Youth Interagency. This will provide an ongoing forum to share updates, test progress, and maintain sector-wide alignment on agreed priorities.

In addition, monitoring will occur through the continued promotion and integration of the plan across Council business. This includes ensuring that relevant grant-funded and business-as-usual activities are aligned with the priorities identified by young people through the engagement process.

Together, these mechanisms will support a shared understanding of progress across Council and the broader youth sector, recognising that delivery is both a Council and collective responsibility. Regular updates on progress will continue to be communicated to young people, partners and the wider community through Council's established communication channels, including sector newsletters and youth engagement platforms.

The development of the Penrith Youth Strategy and Action Plan 2027–31 was led by the Community Capacity and Community Safety Teams at Council. If you would like to discuss the content of this document or find out more about this work, please contact us at community.capacity@penrith.city or at 4732 7777.

References

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). *2021 Census All persons QuickStats — Penrith (LGA16350)*
2. Black Dog Institute. (2021). *Youth Mental Health Report 2012–2020*.
3. Penrith City Council. (n.d.). *Demographic Analysis Report: Young People*
4. Australian Government Office for Youth. (2024). *Engage! A strategy to include young people in the decisions we make*.

Appendices

Key partners

- Headspace Penrith
- Nepean Blue Mountains PHN
- NSW Health
- Disability Inclusion Network
- Western Sydney University
- Community Junction
- A Place to Go
- NSW Police
- Local schools
- PCYC
- Nepean Community & Neighbourhood Services (NCNS)
- TAFE NSW
- Business Penrith
- Mission Australia
- Bushcare groups
- Environmental organisations
- Community garden groups
- WSU environmental programs