

Southern Highlands

# VitalSigns<sup>®</sup>

2023

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Taking the pulse  
of our community

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**The Southern Highlands  
Foundation**



Vital Signs Southern Highlands is a community research initiative led by The Southern Highlands Foundation that explores four key themes:



Health



Education and  
Employment



Housing



Belonging

Vital Signs is a global research methodology designed to help identify a community's successes and challenges. Data has been sourced from dozens of government and private databases including the 2021 Census. In the third quarter of 2022, a community survey was undertaken across the Wingecarribee Local Government Area (LGA) and the results are also included in this Vital Signs Southern Highlands report.

# The Southern Highlands Foundation

The Southern Highlands Foundation's purpose is to connect with and strengthen our community, foster giving and generate hope. Our aim is to support a thriving community through partnerships, leadership and giving. We focus on building and supporting long lasting initiatives.



The Foundation has funded the inaugural Vital Signs Southern Highlands Report to create a detailed snapshot of the needs of our community in order to ensure help and support is directed where it is most needed.

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## Acknowledgment to Traditional Custodians

We wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land of Wingecarribee Shire, the Gundungurra and Tharawal people. We wish to acknowledge and pay respect to their continuing culture and the contributions their elders past, present and future make to the life of this region.

# Vital Signs Southern Highlands

## Key Findings



84% of us are satisfied with our life



We feel a lot more people are moving to the area than actually are



We have a larger percentage of seniors



The great majority see benefits in community diversity but we are not very diverse. 77% born in Australia, 88% speak only English compared to 68% in NSW



We have a high level of private school enrolment 49%



We have a higher percentage of married people

There is a high rate of child development vulnerability in the area of physical health and well being (AEDC)



Low unemployment



10% of businesses exit each year



Service industries dominate employment



Majority of businesses are very small and sole traders



There are more jobs than resident workers. Rental affordability and availability is inhibiting employment



We have many of Australia's richest people living or owning property here but by all measures of median income we rate lower than NSW averages in Personal-Family-Household Income. There are massive gaps between richest and poorest



In the last 12 months 8% asked for financial assistance and 10% could not pay bills on time



A higher percentage of our population lived in areas with a SEIFA IRSD above 1000 (more advantaged) at 75.14% compared with 58.16% in NSW



Homeless rate is low - 19.5 per 10,000 compared to 50.5 per 10,000 in NSW



Very high level of home ownership



4.33% receiving Commonwealth rental assistance



Most dissatisfied aspect of living here; condition of roads, lack of transport options and rental affordability



Around 600 properties in any week on short-term rental market impacting long-term rental stock

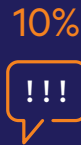


5 year trend increase in crime associated with sexual assaults, domestic violence and breach of AVO. Many other crimes are trending down.

Domestic violence related assaults increased over 5 years as have breaches of AVO's



10% said members of their family experienced domestic violence, abuse or coercive control in last twelve months



Single parent families are 13.2% of all families and 80% are female

90% of dwellings are a single house higher than normal with 26% of households containing 1 person



Low level of medium density housing half regional NSW average

Around **400 new residences approved** per year similar number for many years less than most people think

Domestic Tourism is increasing making us feel the place is getting overcrowded



The best thing about living here - natural environment and open spaces



75% of our landmass is allocated to Primary Production and Parkland



We are a generous community and we volunteer



Of six major long-term health conditions we have higher incidences in 5 of them



We have higher levels of alcohol use, obesity, suicide and hospitalisation for mental health

20% have a disability and 5.5% have a profound disability higher than NSW average



We are disadvantaged by low ratio of hospital beds and have average ratio of GP's



Just under half don't feel part of their local community



# Our Southern Highlands

## POPULATION

2021

52,456

2041

65,275

estimated growth of 24.4% or 1% per year

## GENDER



48%

25,313 Male



52%

27,397 Female

## DEATH RATE



536

Annual deaths 536 slightly higher per 100,000 than NSW

## LAND USE

Total land area

2,689 sq km

People per sq km

19.51

7,200 km of waterways

370 native mammals, reptiles and bird species making the shire one of the most diverse regions in Australia.

1558 native plant species and 474 native animal species

40 plant and 42 fauna species have been classified as threatened.

Rural	53.29%
Urban	3.03%
Protected Forrest	43.68%

103,000 hectares of national parks and native reserves 38% of the shire

## AGE



Median age 45-49

NSW 35-39

Bowral 55-59

Hill Top - Colo Vale 35-39



22.4%

aged 0-19



34.8%

aged 60 and older



17.4%

Larger % of seniors than regional NSW

## REGIONAL PRODUCT

\$3B

Gross regional product



22,795

Local jobs



6,039

Local businesses



25,793

Employed residents

## MIGRATION

NSW has had negative net internal migration. The Southern Highlands had net migration of 522 a similar number to the previous three years. Mittagong saw the largest net internal migration 252 people

Areas we lived	Population	Land area sq km	people per sq km
Bowral	10,695	39.7	269.7
Mittagong	10,626	69.8	152.2
Moss Vale	9,274	79.6	116.6
Hill Top	5,158	245.9	21.0
Bundanoon	3,927	106.3	36.9
Robertson	3,698	371.4	10.0
Burradoo	2,859	12.4	229.6
Wingello - South West	2,066	725.2	2.8
Yerrinbool	1,536	331.4	4.6
Berrima	1,406	55.9	25.2
North West District	1,214	651.9	1.86

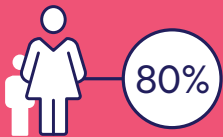
## MARITAL STATUS



A higher proportion are married at 52% compared to NSW at 47%

Married	23,009	52.4%
Separated	1,309	3%
Divorced	4,500	10.2%
Widowed	2,928	6.7%
Never Married	12,153	27.7%

## FAMILY COMPOSITION



Single parent families 26.5%, while 80% of lone parents were female



1.9 children per family with children



Couples without children up 900 households since 2016



Lone person households up 644 since 2016



One parent families up 169 since 2016

## HOUSEHOLDS



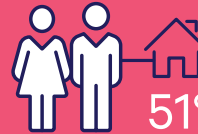
x 23,618 13.65% since 2016

There are 23,618 private dwellings up 13.65% since 2016. Largest increase was Mittagong 834 new dwellings



$\bar{x}$  2.44

The average household has 2.44 residents 26% of households contained 1 person 51% of households had only 2 people compared to 41% in NSW

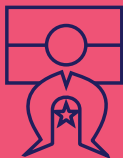


51%



Average motor vehicles per dwelling is 2

## DIVERSITY



2.3%

Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islanders 2.3% 1,210 people

86% feel there are benefits in living in a community of diverse ages backgrounds and cultures however the **three largest ancestries were English, Australian & Irish**

76.7% of people were born in Australia compared to 65.4% in NSW



9,480 residents were born overseas. The most common overseas countries of birth were England, New Zealand, India & Nepal



ENGLAND  
NEW ZEALAND  
INDIA  
NEPAL

The largest changes in birthplace between 2016 to 2021 were

UK	+317
Nepal	+277
India	+209

88% speak only English compared to 68% in NSW



The four most common languages used at home other than English in order

Nepali	440
Italian	262
Mandarin	224
German	199

331 reported difficulty speaking English



## RELIGION



53% reported affiliation with Christian religions compared to 48% in NSW

37% reported no religious affiliation



The largest growth in religious affiliation 2016-2021 was Hinduism up 386

Religions ranked by size

Anglican	10,750
Roman Catholic	10,723
Uniting Church	4,535
Christian (other)	1,307
Presbyterian Reformed	1,225
Hinduism	695
Baptist	521
Buddhism	496
Pentecostal	333
Greek Orthodox	305



# Education and Employment

## EDUCATION



54.9% of people have finished year 12 compared to 58.9% in NSW



37.8% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have completed Year 12 compared to 35% in NSW

51.3% — GOVT  
48.7% — PRIVATE

51.3% of children attend Govt schools and 48.7% attend private schools.

Children enrolled in pre-school 2017-2020

**Decreased** in Bowral, Hill Top, Colo Vale, Bundanoon & Sutton Forrest

**Increased** in Mittagong, Robertson & Fitzroy Falls

**Stayed the same** in Moss Vale & Berrima

## NAPLAN



89% of all 9 High Schools and 19 Primary schools performed within 2% above or below schools in NSW. The remainder were within 5% less



Higher rate of development vulnerability than the NSW average in the AEDC domain of physical health and well-being at 10.3% compared to 9.4% in NSW



All other domains, communication skills and general knowledge, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills and social competence had lower rates of development vulnerability compared to NSW



From 2018-2021 the areas in which rates of vulnerability on two or more AEDC domains has:

**Improved** in Bowral, Moss Vale, Berrima, Robertson, Fitzroy Falls, Bundanoon & Sutton Forest

**Not improved** Hill Top, Colo Vale and Mittagong

## EMPLOYMENT



Total workers in area 23,968



52.3% are in employment compared with 55.5% in NSW



55% were in full time employment  
37% were in part time employment

## BUSINESS TYPES

6,039 local businesses  
645 new business entries  
626 business exits

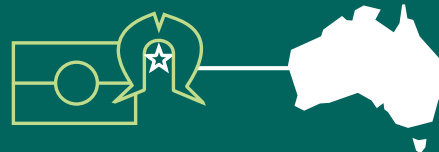
The three most common industries of employment are:

Health Care and Social Assistance, Construction and Education and Training

## GROWTH & DECLINE



12 month average unemployment is below NSW and Australia at 2.7% compared to 5.4% in NSW



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment rate compares to that of NSW and Australia



Largest growth industry in employment since 2015/6

Health Care and Social Assistance up 648

Largest decline 13 was Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services



## WORKER PRODUCTIVITY



Highest: Rental Hiring and Real Estate Services generating \$313,540 per worker



Lowest: The Arts and Recreation at \$42,777



\$103,391

Total worker productivity was \$103,391 compared to NSW average of \$127,679

## EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY

Health Care Social Assistance	3,230	13.5%
Construction	2,547	10.6%
Education and Training	2,274	9.5%
Retail	2,128	8.9%
Accom and Food Service	1,918	8.0%
Professional Scientific Technical Services	1,855	7.7%
Manufacturing	1,566	6.5%
Agriculture and Forestry	718	3.0%
Arts and Recreation	395	1.6%

## BUSINESSES

Sole traders	61.4%
1- 4 employees	28%
5-19 employees	9.6%
20+ employees	1.3%

## JOBS

821

JOB SEEKER

YOUTH ALLOWANCE

821 job seekers and youth allowance recipients were 3% of the 15-64 age population, the same as NSW. The largest number were in Moss Vale Berrima where 221 resided

Jobs to resident ratio is 0.88 i.e., there are fewer jobs than resident workers

## LEVELS OF DISADVANTAGE



In the last 12 months 8% asked for financial help, 10% could not pay bills on time



4% went without medication



22% had to delay or cancel non-essential purchases



33% didn't think living was affordable in the Highlands



4% were unable to heat and cool their homes



A higher proportion of the population lived in areas with a SEIFA IRSD above 1,000 (more advantaged) at 75.14% compared with NSW at 58.16%

## INCOME AND MONEY



\$2,096  
PER WEEK

Median total family weekly income \$2,096  
Highest Robertson-Fitzroy Falls at \$2,283  
NSW \$2,185



12.8%



31.2%

\$500  
PER WEEK

12.8% earned income of \$2000 or more a week. 31.2% earned a low income of fewer than \$500 per week



73%

73% said they were comfortably off  
23% said they were just getting along  
2% described themselves as poor



2%

POOR

All median weekly incomes are less than NSW

	Highlands	NSW
Personal	\$794	\$813
Family	\$2,096	\$2,185
Household	\$1,673	\$1,829



There are more residents in the high income group and less in the low income group than regional NSW



\$500-\$649  
PER WEEK



\$800-\$999  
PER WEEK

Median income bracket  
Females \$500-\$649 per week  
Males \$800-\$999 per week  
Gap in line with NSW



# Health

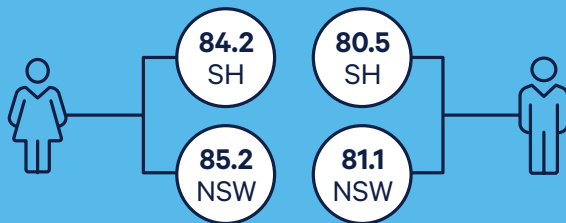
## GENERAL HEALTH



72%

- ✓ GOOD
- ✓ VERY GOOD
- ✓ EXCELLENT

72% rated their health good, very good or excellent in the previous 4 weeks



Life expectancy at birth

## HEALTH CONDITIONS

Of the six major long-term health conditions we had higher incidences than the NSW averages in 5

		Highlands	NSW
Arthritis	6,488	12.3%	8.4%
Asthma	4,553	8.3%	7.8%
Cancer	2,219	4.2%	2.8%
Dementia	426	0.8%	0.8%
Diabetes	2,567	4.9%	4.8%
Heart Disease	2,570	4.9%	3.9%



New cases of cancer diagnosed 439 in 2021 up from 392 in 2016

## DRUGS & ALCOHOL

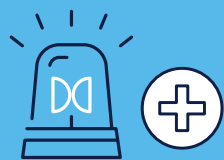
People aged 18yrs and over who consumed more than two standard drinks per day on average

	Highlands	NSW	AUS
Female	11.2	8.5	8.8
Male	29.7	22.7	23.6

## OBESITY

Obesity per 100 adults over 18

	Highlands	NSW
Female	30.9	29.9
Male	33.27	32.1



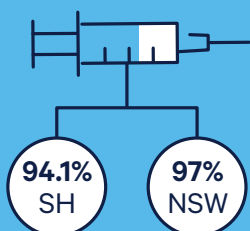
Overnight hospitalisation related to drug and alcohol consumption 26 per 10,000 National average 20



19%  
3+ HOURS

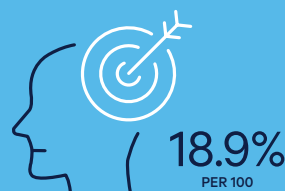
19% did 3 or more hours of physical activity excluding walking in the last week

## IMMUNISATION RATES



Fully immunised at 5 years of age 94.1% NSW 97%

## DISCRIMINATION



18.9 per 100 people over 18 years felt in the 12 months prior they had experienced discrimination or have been treated unfairly by others. This was less than the NSW average of 19.4 per 100

## DISABILITY



20.1% of people have a disability

Moss Vale Berrima	23.7%
Hill Top - Colo Vale	17.8%



5.4% have a profound disability compared to 4.5% in NSW

5,485 or 12.5% aged over 15 were providing unpaid assistance to a person with a disability, long-term illness or old age. In NSW it was 11.5%. 61.6% were females and 56% are over the age of 55 compared to 44% in NSW

2,940 people or 5.6% reported needing help in their day to day lives due to disability. This is similar to 2016 results. NSW 5.8%



## MENTAL HEALTH

Those over 18 years with a high or very high psychological distress per 100 was

	Highlands	NSW	AUS
Female	12.9	14	14.5
Male	10	10.8	11.3



Hospitalisation for mental health 139 per 10,000 National average 102 per 10,000

Avoidable deaths from suicide and self-inflicted injuries in people aged 0-74 13.4 per 100,000 compared to NSW 10.5 AUST 12.2



Overnight hospitalisation for self-harm per 10,000 is 30 National average 17

## CARE

10,770 people or 24.5% over 15 provided unpaid care to children. Of these 2843 were caring for children other than their own



30.3% of parents caring for their own children were in the age bracket 45-54 yrs compared to 25.6% in NSW



Bowral has the highest proportion of parents caring for their own children in age bracket 45-54 at 40%



## HEALTH SERVICES



There are 20 General Medical Practices with 80 GP's. There is one GP per 656 residents in line with the Australian average of 1 per 662



There are 1.46 hospital beds per 1000 compared to Australian ratio of 3.84 beds per 1,000. The district hospital has the equivalent of 13 doctors, 140 nursing staff and 21 allied health workers



27% of the population over 15 did more than 14hrs housework each week



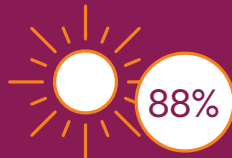
# Belonging



84% were satisfied with their life as a whole



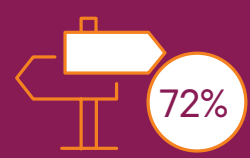
81% were satisfied with their personal relationships



88% were satisfied with their standard of living



78% were satisfied with what they were achieving in life



72% would recommend the region to others as a good place to live and 8% wouldn't



56% agree or strongly agree they feel part of their local community



93% strongly agree or agree they feel safe during the day. This drops to 85% at night



69% strongly agree or agree they feel they have the opportunity to participate in arts and related activities



67% feel they have the opportunity to participate in recreational and sporting activity



Only 43% felt that there are adequate support networks available to them

## BEST THINGS

Best 5 things about living in the Wingecarribee area in order of importance



Natural environment/  
open spaces



Country lifestyle



Friendly community



Proximity to Sydney



Fresh/clean air

## WORST THINGS

Worst 5 things about living in the Wingecarribee area in order of significance



Lack of transportation  
options



Lack of affordable rental  
accommodation



Lack of youth activities



Lack of diversity within  
community



Availability of medical  
services

## SATISFACTION

The 5 areas where residents are most satisfied with council in order of satisfaction are



Domestic garbage collection



Town drinking water



Access to fields and sporting facilities



Quality of parks



Support for Arts and culture

## DISSATISFACTION

The 5 areas where residents are most dissatisfied with council in order of dissatisfaction



Conditions of roads



Managing development and growth



Enforcement of development and building regulations



Addressing climate change



Provision of quality footpaths

## CRIME

In past 5 years increases in

**Sexual assault** up 18.5%  
NSW up 5.9%

**Domestic violence assault** up 8.6%  
NSW up 3.1%

**Breach of AVO** up 22.8%  
NSW up 8.5%

Most other offences with the exception of intimidation and stalking are trending down over last two years including drug offences.



Notable drops included:  
Drug offences down 20.1%  
Malicious damage to property down 23.5%  
Disorderly conduct down 22%

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



Domestic violence related assaults have increased year on year from 2018 to 2021. They rose from 109 incidents in 2020 to 123 incidents in 2021. The two year trend to Sept 2022 is stable

10% said they or a member of their family experienced domestic violence, abuse or coercive control over the last twelve months



The number of incidents of breaches of apprehended violence orders (AVO's) have been increasing from 36 incidents in 2017 to 66 incidents in 2021

## NATURAL DISASTERS



Over the last three years 48% were threatened or impacted by bush fires

33% were impacted by drought



60% were impacted by floods or severe rain events

70% were impacted by bushfire smoke

Of those impacted by disaster in last three years 37% said they felt supported by local organisations and 16% felt supported by council





# Housing

## HOMELESSNESS



19.5%

Homelessness rate was 19.5 per 10,000 compared with 50.5 per 10,000 in NSW

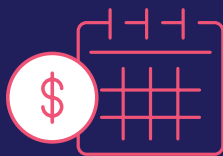
## MORTGAGES



32.7%  
\$2,600+  
PER MONTH

32.7% of households with a mortgage were making high loan repayments of \$2,600/mth or more. 6.2% were paying \$5000/mth or more compared to 2.1% in regional NSW

MEDIAN MORTGAGE  
\$2,167  
PER MONTH



71.1% of mortgage payments were less than 30% of household income



## LAND PRICE

The cost of land has risen 4.3% from July 2021 to July 2022



## RENTAL ASSISTANCE



4.33%  
receiving  
Commonwealth  
rental assistance.

4.33% receiving rental assistance compared to 5.5% in NSW. Highest % was in Moss Vale Berrima were 6.33% where receiving Commonwealth rental assistance lowest percentage was in Robertson Fitzroy Falls with 2.74%

## HOUSE PRICES



MEDIAN PRICE  
\$835,000

The median residential sale price was \$835,000 compared with \$680,000 in NSW



On average real estate house values increased about 40% between 2019 and July 2021 then fell back since then to 20% rise since 2019

## Median House prices

Bowral	\$1,618,000
Mittagong	\$1,150,000
Moss Vale	\$1,072,000
Burradoo	\$2,750,000

## HOME OWNERSHIP



77%

Mortgage or owned



19.3%

Renting



2.3%

Social Housing

77% of households were purchasing or fully owned their home, 19.3% were renting, 2.3% were in social housing

44.6% owned their dwelling as compared to 31.5% in NSW. 32.5% were purchasing as compared to 32.5% in NSW. 19.3% were renting compared to 32.6% in NSW

## DWELLINGS



90.1% of total dwellings were separate houses compared to 80.6% in regional NSW. 8.9% of dwellings were medium or high density compared to 17% in regional NSW



Dwellings increased 1,951 between 2016 and 2021 of these 1,730 were separate houses and 320 were medium density

## OCCUPATION RATES



UNOCCUPIED  
X 2,250

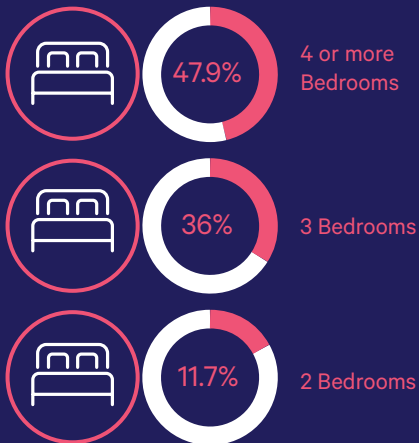
Of the 23,573 private dwellings 2,250 or 9% were unoccupied down from 12.9% in 2016. It is estimated approx 600 properties are available for short-term rental each week

## BUILDING APPROVALS



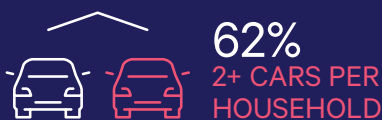
In 2021-22 there were 438 new residential approvals of which 337 were houses. This compares to an average annual residential approval level of 402 since 2016

## DWELLING SIZE



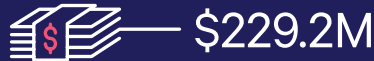
Dwellings with 4 or more bedrooms were most common at 47.9% and grew the most since 2016. 11.7% were dwellings with 2 bedrooms. 36% were dwellings with 3 bedrooms

## VEHICLES



62% of households had access to 2 or more cars and 23.5% had access to 3 or more vehicles. 33.4% had one vehicle and 3.3% had no motor vehicles

## TOURISM



Total tourism sales are \$229.2M and contribute a further value add to the community of \$142.7M



There are 1,357,074 domestic visitor nights up 12% from 1,197,777 in 2015/16



In the last 5 years there was an average of 9,669 international visitors per year with an average length of stay of 15.1 days



55.8% of international visitors were visiting friends and relatives - more than double the NSW state where 25.5% were visiting friends and relatives

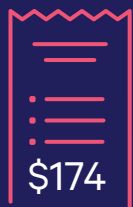
## GIVING



Volunteering rate, gift/donation rate and median gift size (The Seer Giving Index) for a region has Bowral in the 97th percentile. Hill Top - Colo Vale is in the 45th percentile



The median gift size was \$174 compared to \$150 in NSW. Bowral median gift size was \$250



Older cohort of volunteers compared to NSW. The median age of volunteers is 55-64 yrs compared to 45-54 in NSW



18% reported doing some form of voluntary work. This is a greater proportion than NSW. 45% volunteered at least monthly



The Southern Highlands Foundation would like to thank the many individuals and organisations who have participated, assisted and contributed to this report.

#### Source documents

ABS 2021 Census of Population and Housing	Torrens Social Health Atlas of Australia 2020	Seer Giving Index
ABS Labour Force Survey	Wingecarribee Shire Council Community Profile	Australia Early Development Census
ABS Building Approvals	National Institute of Economic and Industry Research 2021	myschool.edu.au
ABS Weekly Payroll Jobs and Wages	Home track Housing Valuation System	Small Area Labour Markets Unemployment Rates
ABS Retail Trade Australia	Core logic Suburb Profile Reports 2022	Department of Social Services Payment Data
ABS Consumer Price Index	Tourism Research Australia	NSW Recorded Crime by Offence
ABS Counts of Australian Businesses	forecast.id, profile.id	Wingecarribee 2040 Local strategic planning statement.
ABS Data by Region 2015-20	Department of Employment	
ABS Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas SEIFA	Department of Social Services-Job Seekers and Youth Allowance Recipients	<b>Special thanks to</b>
Commonwealth Dept of Health Primary Health Network Program Needs Assessment 2019-22	Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage	Seer Data & Analytics
South West Sydney Our Health in 2018	Southern Highlands Foundation Community Survey 2022	Hyper Hub and Margaux Everett
South West Sydney Local Health District		Hands Across Canberra and Peter Gordon
		Swell Design Group
		Wingecarribee Shire Council

**VitalSigns**<sup>®</sup>



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