Western Sydney Health Alliance

For healthy communities in the Western Parkland City
An initiative of the Western Sydney City Deal

Social connectedness framework

Acknowledgement of Country

I acknowledge Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognise the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. I pay my respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures; and to Elders past and present.

Bundjalung Nation

Gadigal land

Western Sydney Health Alliance

📍 **Who We Are:**

A regional partnership under the Western Sydney City Deal, uniting local councils, local health districts, and primary health networks to improve health outcomes.

🌏 **Our Region:**

Covers 8,000+ km², supporting a growing population across the Western Parkland City including Penrith, Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury, Liverpool, Camden, Campbelltown, Wollondilly

Our priorities

Access to health information and Services

- Health access and equity
- Healthcare capacity and infrastructure
- Culturally inclusive care

Livability and Connections

- Digital Access
- Urban Planning
- Active Transport

Healthy Lifestyles

- Disaster and Climate Resilience
- Healthy Eating
- Physical Exercise

LINKED TO 50% HIGHER DEMENTIA RISK

32% HIGHER STROKE RISK
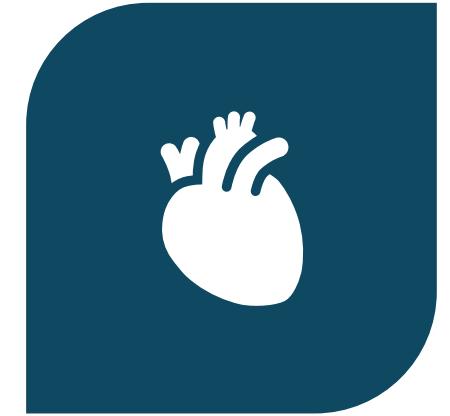
29% HIGHER HEART DISEASE RISK

Why social connectedness matters

Household type
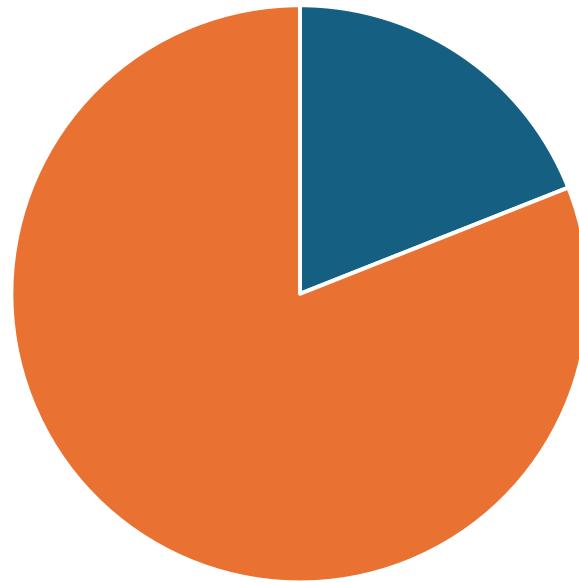
■ Lone household   ■ Other household

1 in 5 people live alone

1 in 5 people are over 60

- Empty nesters and retirees
- Seniors
- Elderly aged

3 in 10 people are digitally excluded 💻
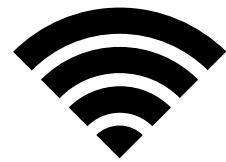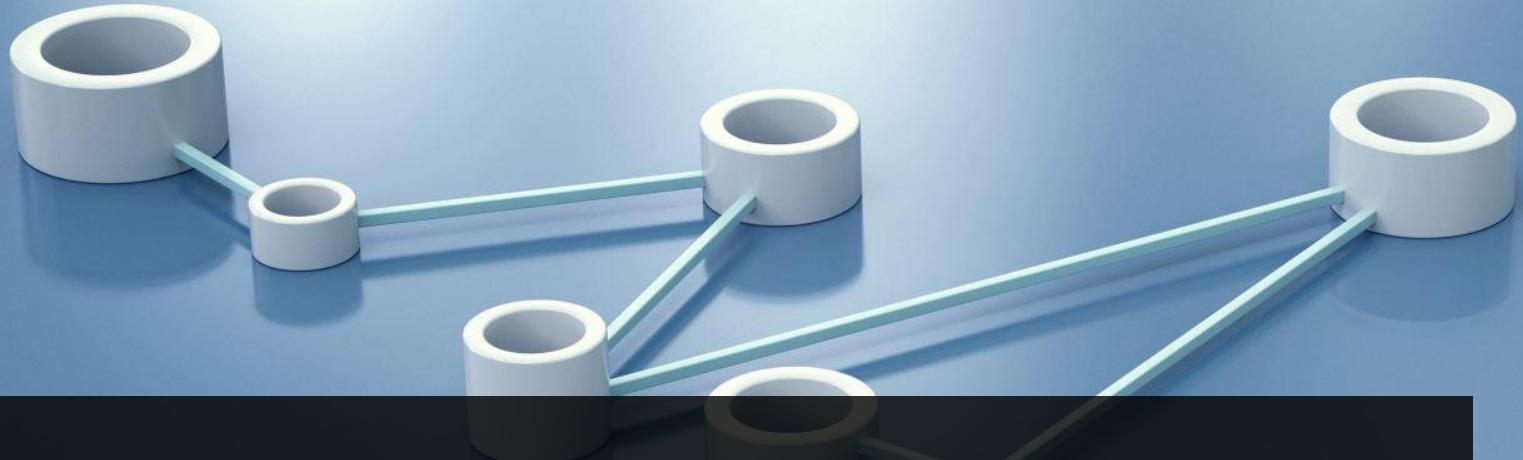
The Social Connectedness Framework
Western Sydney Health Alliance (WSHA)
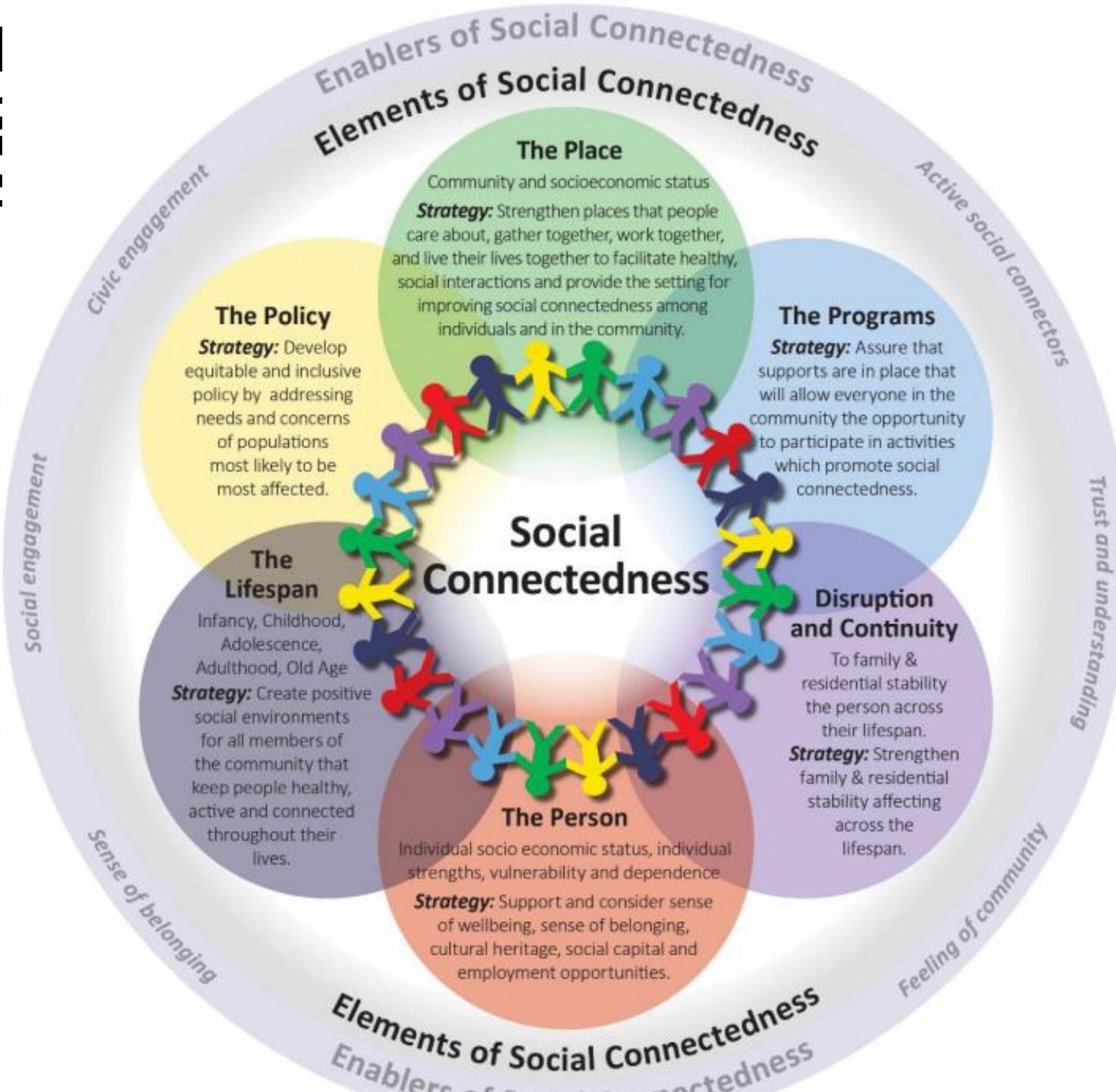
The Toolkit: Key Assessments

Assess the place

 Built environment

 Strengthen the places where people gather, collaborate and feeling belonging

 Enable healthy, everyday social interactions that enhance wellbeing and connectedness.

Assess the Place

Goal: Assess how the physical environment enables or limits social connection.

How to do it:

- Conduct walking catchment analysis
- Talk to community
- Map social infrastructure and destinations
- Assess inclusivity

Factors to consider:

- Shade and microclimate
- Connectivity and permeability
- Diversity of housing and land use
- Walkable access to daily needs
- Safety and comfort for all users

Case example: 15 minute neighbourhood

The *Western Sydney Planning Partnership* tested how new suburbs could become walkable, vibrant, and socially connected communities.

Key Design Principles (with WSHA relevance):

🏡 Proximity to Daily Needs

🌳 Continuous Tree Canopy (≈ 40%)

🚶 Fine-Grain Street Networks (80–150 m blocks)

Case example continued

- 🏪 Mixed-Use Centres
- 🏫 Co-Location of Services and Transport Nodes
- 🏡 Diverse and Affordable Housing
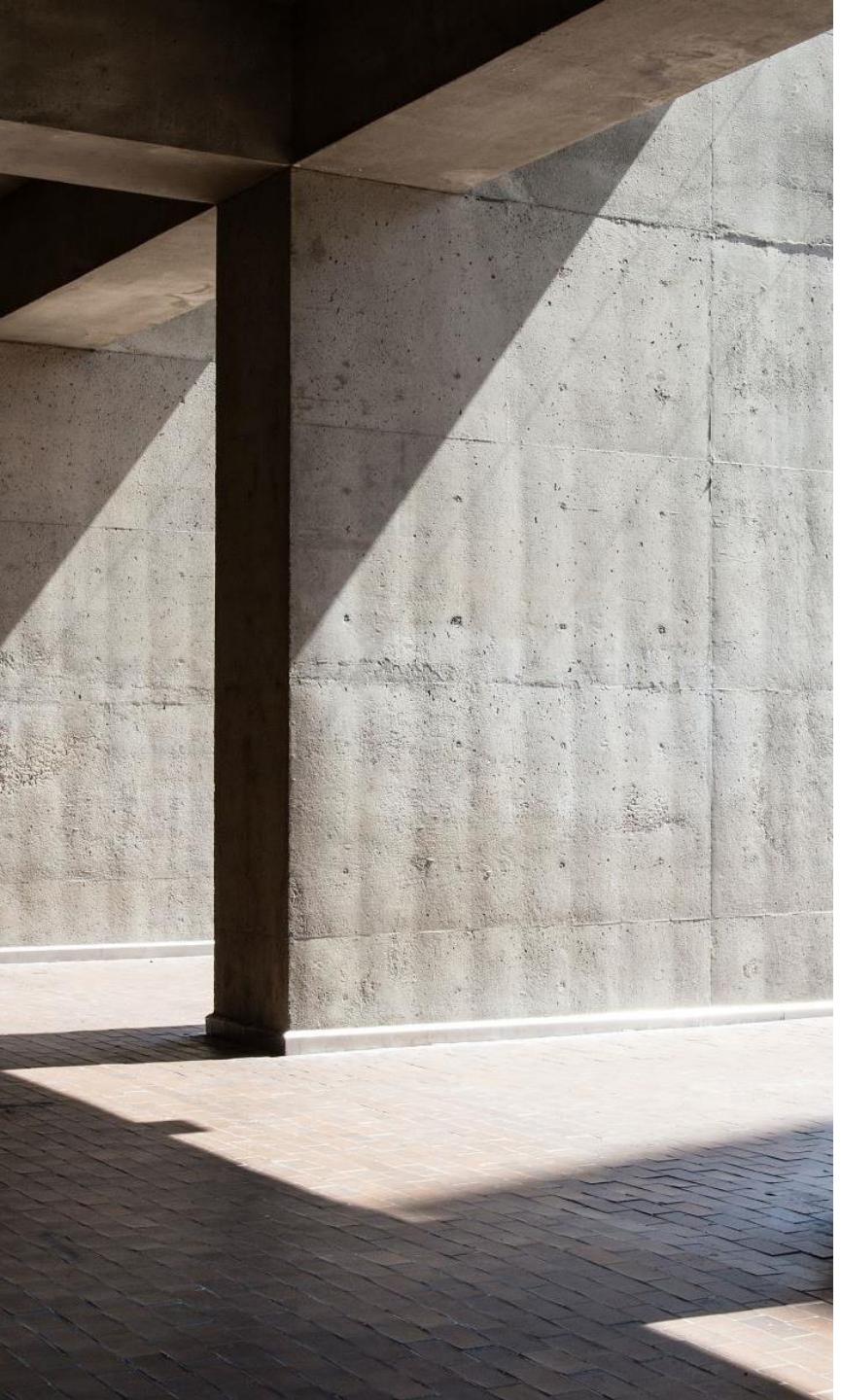
Impact

Walkable, shaded neighbourhoods build **belonging and resilience**.

Shows how WSHA councils can design environments that naturally foster **daily connection and wellbeing**.

Assess the person

Goal:
Identify the strengths, vulnerabilities, and needs of individuals in relation to social connectedness.

How to Do It:

- Ask and listen
- Map strengths and vulnerabilities
- Use inclusive tools
- Collaborate across sectors

Factors to Consider:

- Confidence and motivation
- Accessibility
- Cultural inclusion
- Digital access
- Support network

Case example: Social Prescribing

Overview

Participants are referred by GPs, community workers, or self-referral to a trained Link Worker based at a local hub.

The Link Worker helps identify each person's interests, barriers, and goals, then connects them with community activities

How It Works

🧭 **Personalised 1:1 support** – explores each person's social and wellbeing needs

💬 **Builds confidence and purpose** – helping people re-engage with community life

🤝 **Creates safe, welcoming pathways** – linking individuals to inclusive local spaces where they can participate and belong

Case example continued

What We've Learnt

🌱 Volunteer model = sustainability

👥 Supervision & boundaries matter

💬 Follow-up builds trust

🧭 Wayfinding ≠ Social Prescribing

🎯 Focus improves impact

🤝 Partnerships strengthen outcomes

Impact

☑ Reduces loneliness and improves mental wellbeing.

☑ Strengthens informal support networks and trust in local services.

☑ Demonstrates how community-based referral systems **turn awareness into action.**

Assess disruption and continuity

Goal:
Identify how life transitions — such as moving house, retirement, illness, loss, or disasters — can disrupt people's social connections, and ensure systems are in place to help them stay connected.

How to Do It:

🗺️ Map disruptions

💬 Ask about change

♣️ Strengthen safety nets

🏗️ Plan for stability

Factors to Consider:

Housing and employment stability

Family and caregiver transitions

Access to community services during emergencies

Coordination across agencies

Communication and trust during disruption

Case example: WSHA Disaster Handbook

Overview:
The WSHA Disaster Handbook was developed to strengthen community continuity — ensuring people can stay healthy, informed, and connected during and after disasters.

How It Reflects This Assessment:

📖 Assesses and addresses key disruption points.

🌍 Co-designed with councils, health districts, and community organisations, identifying where existing communication and service pathways failed in past events.

💬 Builds continuity systems by providing multilingual information, verified contact details, and clear steps for accessing care.

💪 Assesses equity in preparedness, ensuring CALD and vulnerable residents can navigate crises independently and safely.

Why It Matters:

Demonstrates how assessing continuity of connection leads to a practical, community-facing tool.

Moves beyond emergency response — focusing on prevention, preparedness, and inclusion.

Embeds *social connectedness* directly into disaster planning and health communication
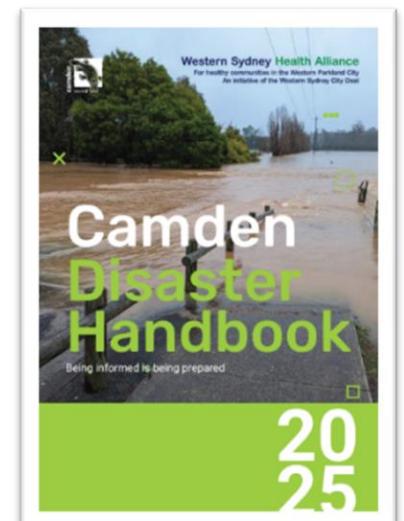
Assess the lifespan

Goal:

Support connection, participation, and wellbeing across all life stages.

How to Do It:

🧭 Map age-based participation

🌱 Strengthen lifelong learning opportunities

🤝 Co-design with diverse age groups

🧩 Promote inclusive participation

Factors to Consider:

Digital inclusion and confidence across generations

Accessibility and transport for older residents

Availability of affordable and age-friendly programs

Intergenerational learning and volunteering

Emotional wellbeing and purpose through contribution

Case example: Adult digital education

Overview:
The Adult Digital Education Sessions at Hawkesbury Library were co-delivered to strengthen digital inclusion and social connection among residents aged 45+.

How It Works:
💻 Free community sessions on technology basics, apps, and cyber safety.
🤓 Focused on building confidence and independence with digital tools — helping residents access health information, connect online, and engage socially.
📍 Hosted in a trusted, local community setting — the library — encouraging regular attendance and new friendships.

Outcomes:
Participants gained digital and social confidence.
Strengthened lifelong learning pathways for older adults.
Reinforced the library's role as a *lifespan connection hub.*

Case example: Pick and Mix project

- Engaged 160 young people (12–18) across two schools through workshops, surveys, and group discussions on online experiences and digital equity.

- Culminated in a peer-led digital inclusion tool promoting safer online practices, digital literacy, and stronger social connections.

Learnings

💻 DIGITAL SKILLS = SOCIAL CONNECTION

📚 LIBRARIES ARE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOCIAL CONNECTION

🤝 PARTNERSHIPS AMPLIFY REACH

🧭 CONTINUITY OF SUPPORT MATTERS

Assess the program

Goal:
Identify and strengthen community programs that foster connection, participation, and wellbeing — ensuring they are inclusive, accessible, and responsive to diverse needs.

How to Do It:

🔍 Map existing programs

👥 Assess accessibility

🧩 Engage participants

🧭 Build sustainability

Case Example: WSHA Digital Inclusion Sessions

Overview:
Delivered in partnership with Community First Step (CFS), these sessions supported Vietnamese women in Fairfield to develop digital skills and confidence while building social connection and community belonging.

How It Worked:

💻 Co-designed with CFS to ensure sessions were culturally appropriate and delivered in Vietnamese.

🌸 Focused on practical skills

👭 Created a safe, women-only learning environment led by bilingual facilitators.

📈 Supported by WSHA's broader *Digital Equity* priority to reduce barriers for CALD communities.

Outcomes:

Increased participants' confidence using digital tools.

Strengthened social networks and peer relationships.

Improved ability to access health, education, and social supports online.

Created a model for scaling CALD-focused digital inclusion across Western Sydney.

Learnings

🌍 Language access builds trust

💬 Connection is as valuable as skills

👭 Cultural safety matters

🤝 Partnerships create reach

📱 Digital confidence = independence

Assess the policies

Purpose
Recognise that public policies and programs impact health and wellbeing, even when they do not have explicit health objectives.

Assess the policies

Goal:
Ensure that public policies — whether in planning, housing, transport, or health — promote equity, stability, and social connectedness, even when their main objective isn't "health."

How to Do It:

🧭 Integrate social connectedness into policy assessments

✖️ Analyse equity and access

🗣️ Engage affected communities

🤝 Collaborate across sectors

Factors to Consider:

Housing affordability and residential stability

Access to community facilities and transport

Economic inclusion and employment proximity

Cultural safety and diversity

Health and wellbeing implications of policy design

Case Example: Western Sydney Regional Affordable Rental Housing Contribution

Overview:
The Western Sydney Planning Partnership (WSPP) developed this regional affordable rental housing contribution scheme to increase the supply of affordable rental homes across the Western Parkland City.

How It Works:

🏡 Introduces a consistent regional framework for funding and delivering affordable rental housing.

💰 Allows councils to collect contributions from new developments, ensuring long-term investment in affordable homes.

🤝 Designed collaboratively with local councils to create fairness, equity, and consistency across LGAs.

🌍 Focuses on enabling key workers and low-income families to live close to where they work, learn, and access community.

Why It Matters:

Prevents displacement and strengthens social continuity — families can stay within their local networks.

Reduces housing stress, supporting mental and social wellbeing.

Demonstrates how planning and housing policy can actively shape connected, healthy communities.

Learnings

🏠 Stability strengthens connection

⚖️ Equity must be built in

🤝 Collaboration drives long-term change

💬 Policy can be a connector

🌱 Prevention is better than response
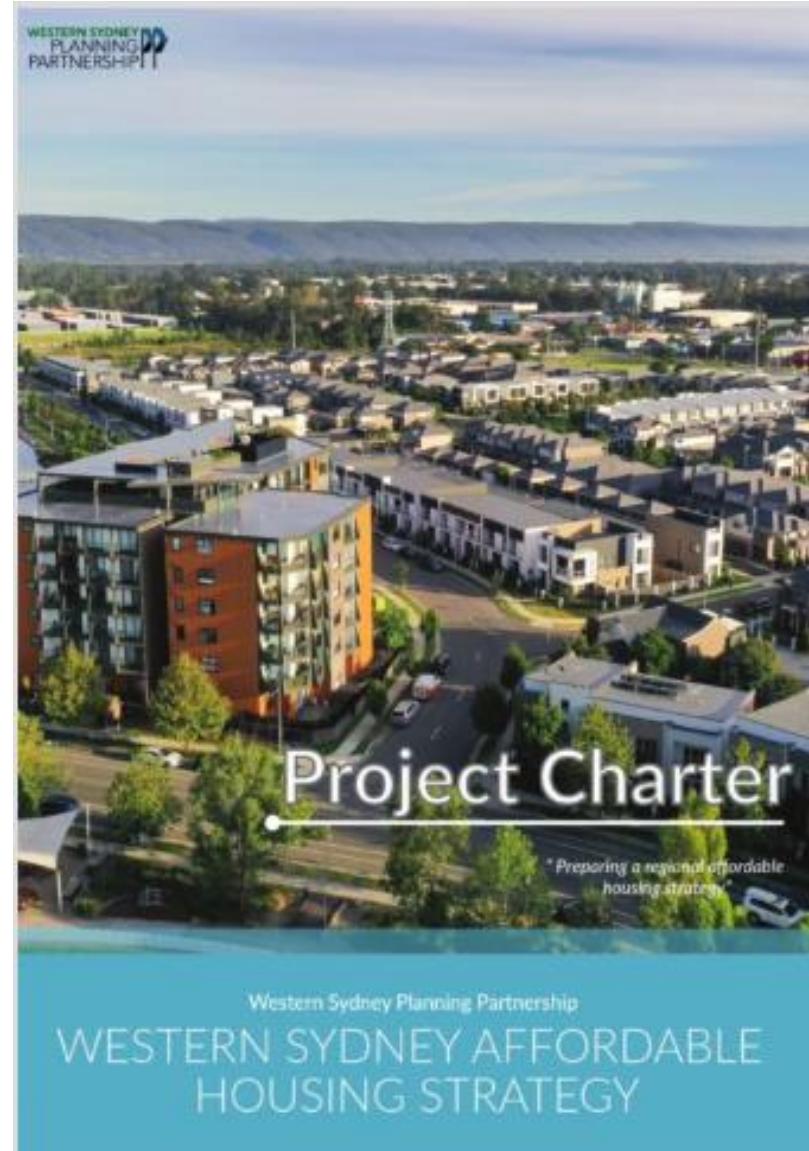
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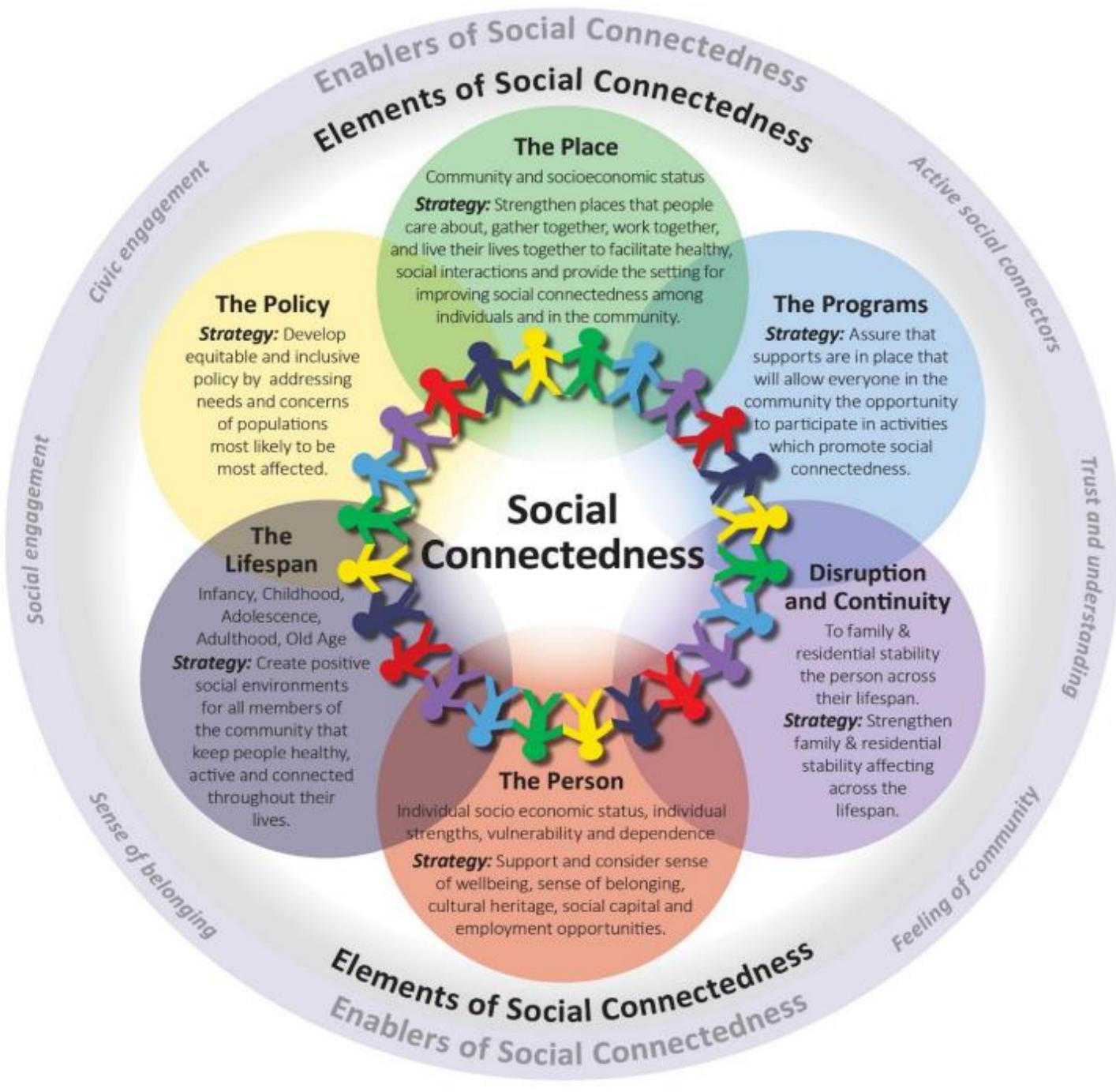
What Are the Enablers?

Goal:
Strengthen the conditions that allow individuals and communities to form, maintain, and grow meaningful social connections across Western Sydney.

Key Enablers:

🤝 Active social connectors

🤝 Trust and understanding

🏠 Feeling of community

✖️ Sense of Belonging

🌍 Social Engagement

🗳️ Civic Engagement

Call to Action

Social connectedness = powerful determinant of health

Framework = practical tool for **places, programs, policies**

- **Call to action:**
- Policymakers: ask not just *'how many houses?'* but *'where will people connect?'*
- Practitioners: consider *'how could your program strengthen social connection?'*

Thank you