



HEALTH SNAPSHOT

PENRITH

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CITY COUNCIL

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INTRODUCTION

Penrith City Council is committed to the health and wellbeing of our communities. Sustaining good health comes from a range of factors including being physically active, eating fresh healthy food, staying socially connected and knowing how to maintain good mental health.

This Health Snapshot sits alongside and builds on the Penrith Community Profile 2018, highlighting and elaborating on emerging health issues and providing further data and analysis, particularly in relation to our social and physical environment to help guide how government, local service providers and the community can continue to work together to make informed decisions about services and infrastructure.

The three case studies in this snapshot, the Village Café, FoodREDI and Nepean Food Services, provide examples of local activities that are having a positive effect on residents' well-being. Council is proud of its work in supporting these activities.

This Health Snapshot is a valuable tool aimed at informing policy makers, researchers, community organisations and students in the region. We understand that health and wellbeing are complex issues and that by emphasising environmental issues we can influence decision making in this area where we can make a positive impact. Council is

well positioned to work with other levels of government and non-government organisations to create opportunities to improve the health and well-being of people in our communities.

Information in this snapshot has been sourced from community surveys and research in local suburbs as well as data from a broader Local Health District level, which includes other Council areas. Sharing the data and case studies will create a better understanding of factors that contribute to people's health. Together, we can use the information to improve service delivery, advocate and create project opportunities. The snapshot focuses on the following issues, to highlight recent research:

- healthy built environments
- mental health and alcohol consumption, and
- health literacy, including food literacy.

Council created its Penrith Community Profile 2018 and the summary document, the Community Snapshot 2018, to provide a 'one-stop shop' source of demographic, social, health and sustainability data specifically related to the City of Penrith and its suburbs. For further information about Penrith's communities, including the Community Profile, Community Snapshot and the Snapshot of the Ageing Population, visit <https://www.penrithcity.nsw.gov.au/>.

HEALTHY BUILT ENVIRONMENTS

The built environment refers to the human-made environment, including shared pathways, parks, shops, playgrounds and much more. These are the places in which we live, work and play and they have a significant impact on our social, emotional and physical health. There is growing evidence that our built environments are crucial in enabling a healthy lifestyle.

THE HEALTH OF A COMMUNITY IS DETERMINED BY THREE MAIN INDICATORS (UNSW, 2016)

- social connection
- access to physical activity
- access to healthy eating.



To determine how well our city and its suburbs currently support people's healthy lifestyles we developed a Healthy Built Environment (HBE) audit tool. The HBE tool includes observation in suburbs, analysis of data from a variety of sources and wellbeing surveys.

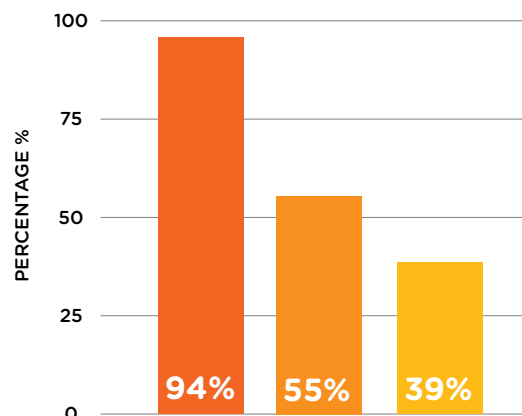
In 2019 the wellbeing survey was completed by a sample of residents in two Penrith suburbs. The two suburbs were chosen to compare and contrast similarities and differences with each other - one suburb was an older established area, while the other was a more recently planned suburb with a newer community. The survey explored social connection, healthy eating, how perceptions of safety effect physical activity levels and use of public transport. The responses provide a local insight we haven't previously had, such as people's levels of knowledge about healthy eating and their participation in local activities and community groups. The information gained highlights opportunities for changes in the way we can support health and wellbeing across different suburbs.

Social Connection

Loneliness is a major indicator of a person's physical and mental wellbeing, and we know that both the social and physical environment influence the way we connect with others. The Penrith HBE wellbeing survey asked residents if what happens in their neighbourhood matters to them and 94% agreed or strongly agreed. However, when asked if they felt connected to their neighbourhood only 55% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed.

Finally, when we asked residents if they had engaged in a local activity or group in the past year, only 39% responded in the positive. There could be several reasons for this, including poor knowledge of local activities, lack of time to participate due to competing priorities or no interest in the activities offered. With this information, we now have an opportunity to work with the community to understand what helps people feel connected and identify and promote activities they enjoy.

HBE SURVEY SOCIAL CONNECTION



- AGREED WHAT HAPPENS IN THEIR COMMUNITY MATTERS TO THEM
- AGREED TO FEELING COMMUNITY CONNECTION
- ENGAGED IN LOCAL OR GROUP ACTIVITY

Physical Activity

NIGHT TIME SAFETY

The perceived safety of our environment plays a role in whether residents feel they get outside and can take part in physical activity. An individual's perception of safety can be influenced by the time of day, lighting levels and the general amenity, or the number of other people purposefully moving around in their neighbourhood. If a resident feels a place or space is unsafe, they are less likely to engage with it. This may reduce their ability to exercise in a local park or use public transport.

In the Penrith HBE wellbeing survey all respondents felt safe in their neighbourhoods during the day, but 21% felt unsafe at night. Although most respondents were older residents, there are lessons that can be learnt from these results for the whole community. Places perceived as safe at night will not only benefit older people but people of all ages.

WALKING AND CYCLING TO GET AROUND

The built environment dictates the types of transport that are more accessible and convenient for people. Although Penrith is fairly flat and the network of walking and cycling paths is increasing, residents find it more convenient to drive for most day-to-day trips, such as work and shopping. This means residents have less opportunity to benefit from the incidental exercise associated with other modes of transport, including walking to public transport nodes.

When surveyed, 70% of residents said they would not cycle even with safe cycle ways available to them. The Penrith climate may be a contributing factor as well as cultural attitudes towards cycling. This will likely shift in coming years with an increase in public transport options and greater acceptance of cycling as a means of getting around.

If taking public transport was quicker than driving, 70% of residents surveyed said they would use public transport. This shows that current forms of public transport, especially for older people, may be inconvenient compared to driving and this is probably also a factor in the high rates of car dependency.

Healthy Eating

COST OF HEALTHY FOOD

Access to fresh fruit, vegetables, dairy and meat can be a challenge for some residents and reduced access can have the effect of driving up costs. Added to this is the perception that foods labelled as "healthy alternatives", such as "organic" or "low carb" can carry a higher price tag.

This perception was reflected in the responses from residents in the Penrith HBE wellbeing survey, with nearly 60% saying they felt healthy food was more expensive. However, fresh and healthy foods can be less expensive than most high fat, high salt or high sugar processed foods.

Home cooked meals generally contain less salt, sugar and fat, and smaller portion sizes mean you are consuming less energy. Eating meals at home, rather than buying takeaway or dining out, is generally healthier and less expensive per serve. In the HBE wellbeing survey, we asked residents how many times they ate takeaway in a normal week. Nearly half the respondents said they do not normally buy takeaway, while 15% bought takeaway two or more times a week. This can have a big impact on the weekly budget and we know that residents in some suburbs have better access to supermarkets than others, making it more convenient for these residents to access healthy food options, as indicated in the Penrith Community Profile 2018.

MENTAL HEALTH

In recent decades there has been increased awareness, and discussion, of mental health in Australia and around the world. An increased number of people being able to identify symptoms of depression, anxiety and other mental health issues has resulted in an increase in initiatives to respond to people's needs.

Like physical health, a person's mental health is something that needs to be looked after to lower the risk of issues. This can be done through balancing stress with, play and relaxation, and connecting with others. Our physical and social environments effect how we do this and there can be a strong link between physical and mental health.

Some people can be more susceptible to mental health issues, such as younger and older people who may not have access to the activities that keep us well and socially connected. In addition, those for whom English is not their first language, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people who identify as LGBTQTI+ can be more vulnerable to mental health issues, which can be related to experiences of stigma, prejudice, and discrimination and/or barriers to accessing mental health services.

One of the indicators for a person's capacity to look after their mental health can be the amount of time spent travelling to work. Longer commute times, that increase the amount of time spent in a sedentary position, can increase stress and take away from other activities that we know assist with maintaining good mental health - relaxation, being active and connecting with family and community.

Residents of Penrith City generally travel further than other areas of Sydney. The average commuting distance for Sydney residents is

14.22km whereas in Penrith City the average commute distance is 20.81km. There was some variation among the Penrith suburbs: Cambridge Park and North St Marys/ St Marys had the shortest commute distance with 19.42 km and 19.46 km respectively. The longer commutes were found in Glenmore Park and Regentville (23.17km) and Mulgoa, Luddenham and Orchard Hills (22.45km).

This snapshot was written at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic and restrictions related to managing it may have lasting impacts for many people in our community. Those who were already experiencing difficulties such as existing mental health issues, social isolation, homelessness or financial difficulty will be at greater risk. Knowing the groups of people who may be more vulnerable to the negative effects gives us the opportunity to refocus services to meet their needs.

Conversely, there are also learnings from the positive effects that social distancing restrictions has had on communities. With noticeably more people using their leisure time to walk, cycle and use open space, the importance of shared pathways and the walkability from people's homes to parks and other places of interest has been highlighted.

Moving into recovery from the pandemic, there will be opportunities for collaboration on innovative programs that will offer residents ways to look after themselves and each other.

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

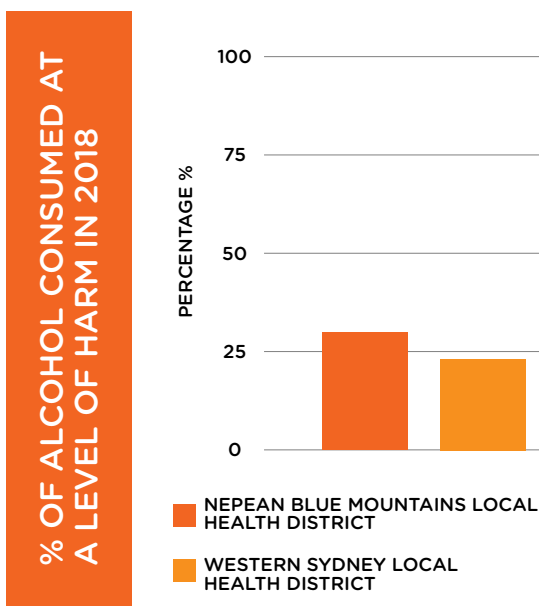
Across Penrith, most residents' pattern of alcohol consumption fits within guidelines for healthy and safe behaviours. For a minority of people, alcohol can have negative health consequences, both short and long-term. In the short term, it can cause dizziness, vomiting and confusion and lead to risk-taking behaviour. In the long term, it can increase the risk of stroke, heart attack, diabetes and some cancers. As the effects of alcohol change the way your body and brain function, it can also contribute to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, and make recovery from mental health issues more difficult.

Despite these negative effects and for a variety of reasons including addiction, some individuals continue to consume alcohol at risky levels. In 2018, 30.9% of people over the age of 16 in Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District were consuming alcohol at a level that could cause harm. By comparison, nearby in Western Sydney Local Health District, 23.9% of people over 16 years consumed alcohol that could cause harm in 2018. This difference is significant and this rate of harmful drinking is a challenge for our community.

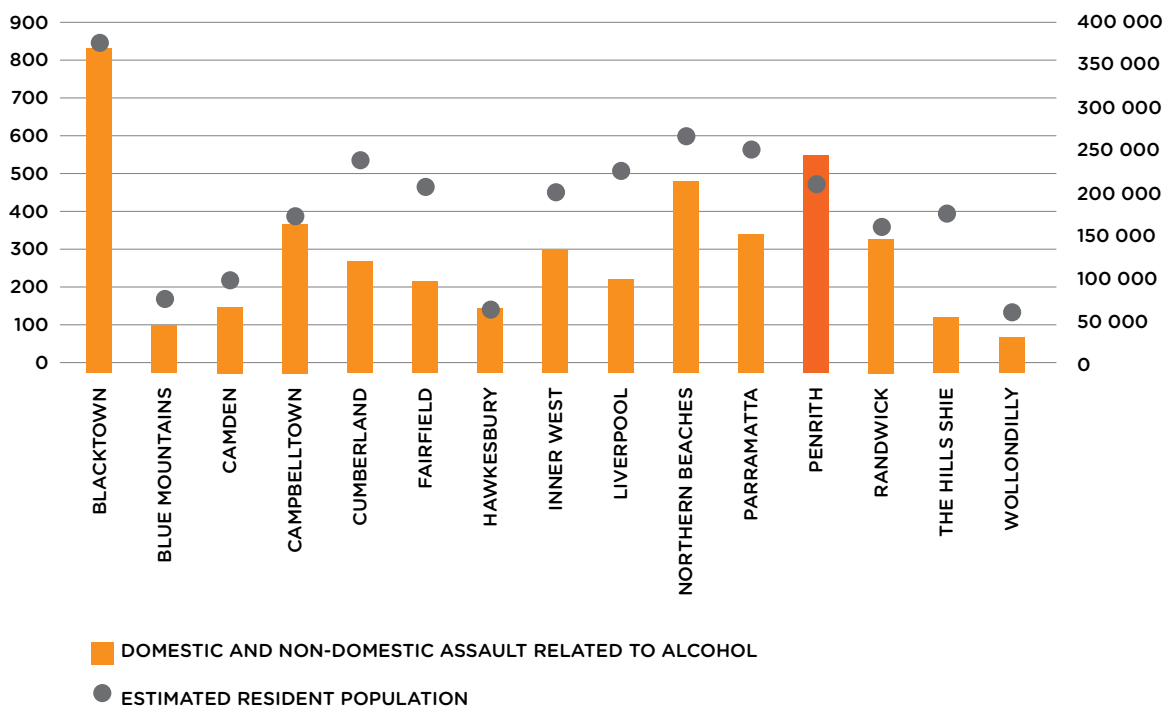
Aside from the physical effects, excessive alcohol consumption can also contribute to harm in our community with increased rates of domestic violence and alcohol fuelled violence in public places. Comparing a range of Local Government Areas across Greater Sydney, the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOSCAR) statistics on assaults recorded by Police shows that the number of alcohol related assaults (both domestic and non-domestic) in 2019 are relatively high in Penrith at 562, compared to areas such as Parramatta (340), Liverpool (234) and Campbelltown (360).

The table below shows that relative to population, Penrith has a much higher rate of alcohol related assaults than the other local government areas. Under the Community Safety Plan 2018-22, Council is working closely with local police and other key community stakeholders to help minimise alcohol-related offences. Measures such as the establishment of Alcohol Free Zones, participation in the local Liquor Accord and local planning and design controls are some of the strategies Council implements to promote safer venues and public spaces.

City of Sydney is not included in the table below as, relative to other areas, it has a very high number of alcohol related domestic and non-domestic assaults (1856) as it services a much larger population than its own, including a large number of visitors and tourists.



NUMBER OF INCIDENTS OF DOMESTIC AND NON-DOMESTIC ASSAULT RELATED TO ALCOHOL, AND ESTIMATED RESIDENT POPULATION, BY LGA 2019



Young people are especially vulnerable to the risks of alcohol because of the effect it has on developing brains and because it can cause risk taking behaviour.

Rates of alcohol consumption can also be connected to the wider environment. An analysis of the liquor licences in Penrith showed that 33 suburbs had alcohol outlets, while only seven did not. Penrith and St Marys, unsurprisingly offered the most opportunity for residents to access alcohol as these city centres are where people go for the range of restaurants, cafes, bars and entertainment. However, the prominence of alcohol stores in some places can contribute to ongoing disadvantage and risk of alcohol dependence.

Penrith LGA Liquor Licences July 2019

- 82 on premise (some include sport venues for one off events, most are general restaurants, bars and pubs)
- 50 packaged (take-away only)
- 10 limited (one off event licences)
- 1 small bar (on premise, only up to 100 patrons)
- 16 club (consumption on and off premise)
- 17 hotel (consumption on and off premise)

HEALTH LITERACY AND FOOD LITERACY

Health literacy can be defined as the level at which a person understands and applies health information and their ability to navigate appropriate services. Health literacy is about utilising the medical system, knowing your medications, managing a health condition and understanding the factors that contribute to good health. A subset of health literacy is food literacy. Food literacy can be described as the skills and knowledge required to eat in a way that contributes to good health. It is the ability to read, understand and apply the information that relates to food, such as the recommendations on maintaining health, recipes and deciphering food labels. A person's access to health education and the environment in which they live and work, can contribute to a person's food literacy.

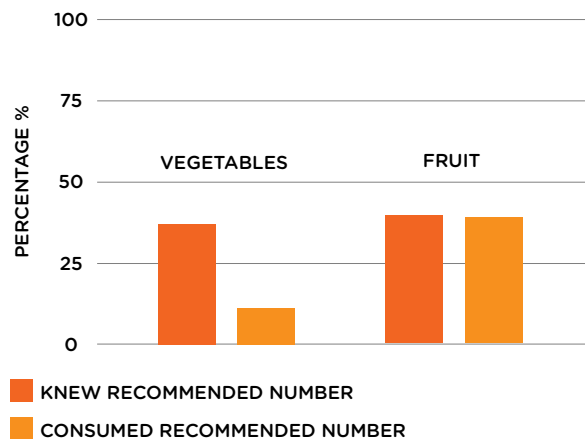
Fruit and vegetable consumption

According to the Australian Dietary Guidelines, the expert advice is for most of us to consume 5 serves of vegetables and 2 serves of fruit every day. However, consistent with other research, the results of the Penrith HBE wellbeing survey suggested residents are consuming well below this. Only 36% of respondents knew the recommended number of vegetable servings and only 10% consumed that amount. In terms of fruit consumption, 41% of respondents knew the recommended servings and 41% consumed the correct amount on any given day. This is a low number of people meeting the recommended serving numbers and is in line with the low numbers NSW-wide. In 2017-18, the NSW rate of adults eating the recommended servings of fruit is 52.4%, and the rate of adults eating the recommended servings of vegetables is 7%. These low consumption rates may be attributed to difficulty accessing a range of food options, time constraints for shopping and cooking, or cultural learnings.

RECOMMENDED DAILY SERVES OF FRUIT AND VEGETABLES



PENRITH HBE WELLBEING SURVEY



Schools in proximity to fast food outlets

There is growing concern about the strong links between obesity in children and adolescents and the proximity of fast food stores to schools, as a high exposure to fast food outlets contributes to an obesogenic environment – an environment which promotes the consumption of calorie dense food but has limited opportunities for physical activity.

Using the HBE audit tool we found that across the two suburbs surveyed 76% of schools were within 1.5kms of a fast food store. In one of these suburbs all schools were within a 1km radius of a fast food store. The presence of these stores near schools contributes to an environment that can greatly influence a person's food choices. Mapping of food outlets is included in the Penrith Community Profile 2018.



CASE STUDIES

Social connection: Meals on Wheels

Working and raising families keeps us involved in community activities for many years. It's very important to stay involved as we get older, and volunteering is one way to do that. There are many opportunities to volunteer depending on your interests and availability.

Nepean Food Services offers home delivered meals (Meals on Wheels) and social support to residents, helping them to remain independent. But it's as much about the volunteers as it is about the clients. Peter, who volunteers with Meals on wheels, said that he finds his role of delivering meals to people rewarding. Peter not only helps isolated residents feel connected to their community, but volunteering helps him feel connected too. Peter said he is pleased to be able to 'give back' to the community.



Mental Health: The Village Café

The Village Café is an innovative project empowering people to improve their physical and mental health, wellbeing and happiness. Currently operating in North St Marys, Kingswood and Llandilo, the Village Café regularly pops-up in these open air settings, offering residents a unique opportunity to connect socially, share their experiences of staying well, enjoy a free coffee and informally access health and community services.

The project brings together all three levels of government, community services, and local residents to collaboratively improve wellbeing outcomes for people in these Penrith neighbourhoods. The project was designed with a 'relationship first' engagement approach to build genuine connections between residents and health and community service providers and Council. This specialised engagement process has supported residents to guide the delivery and direction of the project based on their needs and strengths.

Feedback from participants across the sessions continues to be overwhelmingly positive, with many residents citing the Village Café as a life changing opportunity for them as the project continues to support their health, happiness, and wellbeing. Residents report feeling significantly less socially isolated, more mentally resilient, and more supported and engaged in their overall wellness and feeling of community belonging.

Food Literacy: Red Cross FoodRedi

Food Redi is a six-week health education and cooking program developed by The Australian Red Cross. The program aims to reach vulnerable communities that may have difficulty accessing and utilising fresh food such as young people, those with mental health issues and those for whom English is not their first language. The program focuses on offering free simple recipes and hints and tips that can be used by participants and their family in the home. At each cooking session participants share the food prepared with each other.

Feedback from participants in FoodRedi indicates that most of them change some aspects of their meals, make other positive lifestyle changes and feel more confident reading food labels. Participants also really enjoy trying new recipes of easy, tasty and nutritious meals and snacks. Council has supported three programs with various community organisations across the city and more are planned.



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For further information please contact
Penrith City Council's Social Planning team on
4732 7943 or SocialPlanning@penrith.city