

Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure

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Engagement Outcomes Report

A report which provides an overview of the feedback received on the discussion paper titled 'Shaping the Wollongong Health Precinct Strategy'.

November 2024





Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure acknowledges that it stands on Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land, and we show our respect for Elders past, present and emerging through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work, seeking to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing places in which Aboriginal people are included socially, culturally and economically.

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Introduction

The NSW Government is developing a place-based strategy to outline the future vision for the Wollongong Health Precinct and guide ongoing growth in the area. Place-based strategies are focused on protecting and enhancing the unique values of a place as it grows and changes. The goal is to create an attractive, people-focused neighbourhood that is a great place to live, work or visit.

When setting the vision and planning framework for a precinct, it is critical to understand how people use the area, the things they value (and those they don't), and their priorities for change. This will support development outcomes that align with the values and aspirations of the community.

In December 2023, *'Shaping the Wollongong Health Precinct Strategy'* was released as an important early step in developing the Wollongong Health Precinct Strategy. The discussion paper outlined some of the known strengths and challenges of the precinct, identified potential principles and directions, and posed a number of questions to encourage residents, workers and visitors to think about their experiences and suggestions for what should be saved and what should be improved.

The discussion paper was made available for comment from 15 December 2023 to 16 February 2024 which helped guide several community workshops and drop-in sessions. People were able to provide feedback by completing online surveys, making a submission, or by speaking with representatives from the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (the department) at community workshops and drop-in sessions.

This document provides a summary of the feedback received during this engagement period and will inform the preparation of the Wollongong Health Precinct Strategy which will be exhibited for public comment by the end of 2024.

How to read this report

This report outlines the feedback received by all engagement methods and is structured according to the structure of the discussion paper.

- Feedback provided on the **Strategic context**
- Feedback provided on the **Strengths, Challenges and Opportunities**
- Feedback provided on the **Core Principles**
- Feedback provided on the **Early Directions**

Summary of key findings

Parking and transport

A large proportion of community and stakeholder feedback identified parking and transport as significant issues for the strategy to address. They wished to see substantial improvements in the:

- 1**
 - ability to access the site via public transport or walking and cycling improvements,
 - optimisation of the existing parking options for private vehicles and bicycles, particularly as population pressure will only increase demand in the future.

Feedback also expressed desire for enhanced or new public transport options for residents, patients, staff and visitors to the area.

Public and community open space

- 2**

Feedback from community and stakeholder submissions valued the Discussion Paper's focus on public and community open space. They expressed a strong desire to improve public and community open space within the area. They also expressed a desire for communal places to eat and relax, particularly for residents and healthcare workers.
-

Key worker employment and housing

- 3**

Feedback received on the discussion paper recognised the need for the promotion of healthcare employment opportunities, supported by providing better amenities. An existing and future shortfall of staff was identified by some responses if strategies were not implemented to bring in more workers. Feedback also identified a need for more key worker housing within the area to enable staff to live close to their employment or for short term accommodation to support families or individuals receiving care.
-

Public safety

- 4**

Feedback from community workshops and surveys recognised the poor perception of safety experienced by residents and healthcare staff in certain areas of the precinct. Many submissions highlighted a need for improved amenities and revitalisation of existing infrastructure to improve perceived and actual safety, including in entrance areas to major destinations, such as Wollongong Train Station and Wollongong Public Hospital.
-

Health and community services

- 5**

Community feedback identified a desire for significant expansion of general and specialist healthcare services and supporting community services such as childcare and aged care facilities. Feedback identified barriers to healthcare access for certain user groups, such as culturally and linguistically diverse communities.
-

Part 1 Engagement approach

The following chapter provides an overview of the engagement program centred around the discussion paper.

Our engagement program

The discussion paper was released for public feedback for 42 days (excluding 21 days over the Christmas and New Year period) from 15 December 2023 to 16 February 2024. The engagement process aimed to:

- raise awareness about the development of the Wollongong Health Precinct Strategy
- provide opportunities to community and other stakeholders to have their say about what they value about precinct and how it should change over time, and
- provide opportunities to share the feedback to all those involved in its development.

Engagement was aimed at the people who live and work in the precinct, as well as individuals and communities who visit the precinct to access health and related services. The department also sought feedback from the development industry and held targeted sessions with culturally and linguistically diverse organisations, alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members.

The release of the discussion paper was supported by our wide-reaching engagement program, which involved:

- online content, including our online [engagement hub](#)
- a social media campaign
- an advertising and media campaign
- a mailout to residents
- online and face to face workshops and
- a survey to provide comments on the discussion paper.

This engagement program followed the release of an initial community survey in June 2023 which invited community members, landowners, businesses and other organisations to provide advice on what they view the strategy's focus should be.

The Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District (ISLHD) also undertook six consultation sessions for health staff in the district, and conducted a survey with 69 respondents. This engagement was to support the discussion paper and to inform advice provided back to the department on matters to be

considered in the strategy. Feedback from this engagement has also informed this report with matters relating to the precinct captured in the following sections.

The feedback received from the individuals engaged in the above tasks, including those who responded to the surveys will guide the development of the Wollongong Health Precinct Strategy. A summary of what we heard is provided in Part 2 of this report.

Figure 1 Snapshot of the engagement process



Part 2 What we heard

The following chapter provides an overview of the feedback received during the engagement period.

Feedback provided on the Strategic context

This section of the discussion paper identified the policies, plans and documents that are relevant to planning for the Wollongong Health Precinct, such as Illawarra Shoalhaven Regional Transport Plan, Illawarra Shoalhaven Regional Plan 2041, and the Illawarra Shoalhaven Healthcare Services Plan 2020-2030.

People were asked: Are there other documents we should also consider?

Overview of feedback

We heard that the strategic context and guiding documents identified were adequate. This was reflected in a low number of submissions responding in the affirmative to this question. The strategic importance of the precinct was highlighted in many submissions and community workshops.

Further information is provided below:

- Submissions and community workshops asked whether there was an opportunity to consider other locations for health services or the relationship between the future of this precinct, compared to other planned investments such as the New Shellharbour Hospital.
- We heard of the need for further detail to be provided as part of future masterplans for the area and how this area fits into the broader concept of 'Metro Wollongong' as articulated by Wollongong City Council's strategic plans.
- Some survey responses noted several additional documents to consider, including population health profiles, Wollongong police data and federal guidelines for helicopter operations.
- Community workshops noted that there are some local services located just outside of the precinct, including the Illawarra Shoalhaven Diabetes Service and the South Coast Private Mental Health Hospital.

The department's response

- The department will continue to work closely with NSW Health partners, among others, in developing the strategy. The strategy will be informed by key local, regional and state policy, including ISLHDs clinical Service planning which will guide what health services are required to support the Illawarra into the future.
- The strategy will include detailed planning of the precinct, which will be informed by key local, regional and state policies.
 - It is acknowledged that a master plan for the Wollongong Public Hospital, is being completed through a separate process led by NSW Health.
 - The department will continue to work closely with NSW Health partners to maintain consistency in processes.

Feedback provided on the strengths, challenges and opportunities

This section of the discussion paper outlined some of the known strengths and challenges of the precinct as we have observed from research and visiting the area. The purpose of this section is to discover the things that are working well and what is missing from the precinct or could be improved.

People were asked: What do you value about the precinct? What do you think could be improved?

Overview of feedback

A large proportion of submissions and those we engaged with strongly supported our challenge and opportunity identification, with health service growth, public open space enhancement, strategies to combat topographical issues, car parking and additional worker housing all resonating with the community. However, there were several additional opportunities noted by community and stakeholder submissions, including additional places to eat, improved ability to understand and navigate the precinct through better signage, increased amenity, and ease of walking.

Further information is provided below:

- A large proportion of submissions and those who attended community engagement sessions supported our identification of parking, transport services and general access as a major challenge.
 - Some feedback highlighted opportunities for more park and rides within the area as an opportunity to reduce parking demand within the precinct.
 - Some stakeholders suggested underground parking to combat parking shortages, which could enable redevelopment of existing open-air parking areas.
 - Specific parking for larger vehicles such as vans was also identified as a challenge.
- A significant number of submissions supported our identification of public open space as a major challenge within the precinct. Suggested improvements included:
 - Public drinking fountains, more trees and shaded areas, and other public amenities be included in the future precinct.
 - Local placemaking initiatives such as community gardens, signage and wayfinding. street libraries, etc.

- New developments could provide public spaces such as internal courtyards or gardens. They could also have rooftop green or garden areas for staff and patients.
- Facilities that promoted arts, music, culture and entertainment within the local area.
- Many community submissions identified transport challenges, specifically poor walking and cycling infrastructure, difficult walking distances between destinations, challenging topography and poor access for users those with low mobility (i.e. people using a wheelchair). Opportunities to address these issues included:
 - Increased frequency and diversity of public transport options, including increasing the free bus's servicing area and creating new shuttle routes from key hubs such as Wollongong train station.
 - Better walking and cycling connections to key localities close by the precinct, such as North Wollongong train station and Beaton Park. Some survey responses highlighted the lack of cycleways connecting the precinct westwards to the suburb of Figtree as an issue to be addressed.
 - Covered and/or raised walkways and enhanced public seating was raised as potential ways to address topographical and walkability challenges.
- Survey responses and community engagement sessions highlighted the area can feel unsafe at times, especially in certain areas such as the Wollongong Train Station and Piccadilly Centre. Opportunities to address these issues included:
 - Better street lighting and consistent footpaths could contribute to how 'safe' the area feels.
 - New development needs to have better design quality and consideration of passive surveillance to improve how they feel or look from the street.
 - The appearance, layout, and entrance of different facilities, particularly health services, could be upgraded as they were not inviting and discouraged people to go to or walk by these places.
 - The types of uses we promote in this area need to be carefully planned to ensure there are supportive networks for those visiting and to provide safe spaces for people to travel through and return home.
 - Higher density mixed use developments could provide a feeling of safety in the area surrounding the main health infrastructure as it brings more people to the area at the different times of the day, contributing to how the place 'feels'.
- Community and stakeholder responses identified opportunities for addressing housing challenges in the Illawarra-Shoalhaven. These included:

- Adjustments to local environmental planning Instruments to allow greater building height and density.
 - Promotion of high density living and encouragement of apartment style developments.
 - Importance of affordable and/or key worker housing provision, and identification of the most desirable housing for these target groups. Some stakeholder feedback identified smaller units as the most viable housing type, whilst others suggested we need to have larger unit sizes, including 3 or 4 bedroom units.
 - Exploring different housing models that enable the short term stay of patients transitioning out of care or for family visiting relatives undergoing treatment.
 - Expansion of the precinct boundary to increase capacity to support key worker accommodation.
- Community workshops and survey responses highlighted the need to protect important view lines and the cultural (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) heritage of the precinct.
 - Survey responses requested the department engage with and consider the future role of the services currently located outside the precinct, including Fire and Rescue NSW and NSW Ambulance.
 - Community and stakeholder submissions noted opportunities to expand both private and public health services, with specific note of improved emergency and specialist services, supported by a growth in the health workforce.
 - Some submissions highlighted that it is not essential to have all, or only health related services in the precinct, and by improving public transport access, a broader healthcare network could be supported to encourage people to use their cars less.
 - Community and key worker feedback identified the lack of places to shop and eat as a challenge of the area and noted this could be addressed in conjunction with additional public spaces (for example, a food plaza). Some community submissions noted shopping areas could help create a more inviting space for visitors.
 - Some stakeholder and survey responses noted the precinct is difficult to understand and navigate, with opportunities such as better signage or wider entry points suggested. Specific mention was made of the signage for the main entrance of the public hospital and the entrance to the precinct from Wollongong Train station as needing improvement.
 - Some feedback received through community workshops asked if we are considering other locations for Wollongong Public Hospital.

- Some submissions identified streets within the precinct as requiring significant amenity improvements. Crown Street was especially noted as unappealing and uncomfortable to walk along.

The department's response

- The department acknowledges the feedback provided relating to the availability of car parking and recognise that it is a multi-layered issue to resolved which is a common issue for 'health precincts'.
 - As part of the next stage of detailed planning, we will consider the needs for car parking to support the operations of the different services we are planning for. Car parking to support the public hospital will planned for during hospital master planning, which is a separate process.
 - We will also explore how to provide a diversity of options for people with consideration of why people are coming to the area.
 - Possible improvements to the existing public transport network will be considered as part of the development of the strategy in consultation with key stakeholders including Transport for NSW, Wollongong City Council and relevant service providers.
- The department will continue to work closely with its partners to undertake targeted research to inform the development of the strategy. Actions which have been identified and are aligned with community and stakeholder feedback include assessments of the current amenity and function of all streets and open space within the precinct.
 - The outcomes of these and other research tasks will inform the further planning of the precinct and identification of strategies to address key issues including public safety and new and enhanced public open space in the precinct and NSW Health's policies.
 - Planning for the precinct as a whole will consider opportunities for new housing in well suited locations, in the context of the department's other housing reforms.
- The department will continue to work closely with NSW Health partners and the Wollongong Private Hospital in developing the strategy.
- The strategy and Wollongong Public Hospital master planning will be informed by key NSW Health policies, including the public hospital's clinical service planning which will guide what health services are required to support the Illawarra into the future.

- The strategy will include an implementation plan which identifies what infrastructure and services will be required as the precinct transforms over time and who is responsible for implementing these initiatives.

Feedback provided on the Core Principles

This section of the discussion paper outlined three core principles that that will be instrumental in informing every aspect of the precinct's planning. The purpose of this section was to explain the principles that guide our thinking and future decisions when developing the place-based strategy.

People were asked: Are these core principles central to the health precinct's success into the future? Are there any gaps that are created?

Overview of feedback

We heard strong support on the importance of the three core principles for the health precincts' future success. Some community feedback called for greater emphasis on encouraging more healthcare workers and a better understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healthcare needs.

Further information is provided below:

- We heard that the principles should specifically encourage allied health and services to be close to existing health infrastructure.
- Community submissions emphasised supporting the ageing population of the Illawarra-Shoalhaven and noted there must be a focus on end-of-life care.
- We heard that connections and access should be enhanced, especially between the precinct and Wollongong CBD.
- Community and stakeholder submissions supported health service collaboration and continued focus on innovative healthcare. Some feedback stressed workforce attraction and retention as a core principle of the strategy. Survey responses highlighted the need for greater collaboration with, and physical spaces provided for education and research institutions, such as the University of Wollongong.
 - Establishment of a 'health and research hub' was suggested as a concept to provide physical teaching spaces within the precinct, but also to provide access to shared learning spaces for educators and clinicians.
- Survey feedback identified the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health needs, and a stronger understanding and valuation of what Country means for the region.

- Some survey feedback noted revitalisation of public assets in the precinct should be a core part of the strategy.

The department's response

- The Department will continue to engage with Aboriginal communities throughout the development of the strategy to better understand how we can develop a strategy for the precinct which acknowledges, celebrates and learns from Country.
- As noted in the sections above, the department will continue to work closely with NSW Health partners in developing the strategy.
- The department is working closely with a range of stakeholders to identify other organisations and institutions who can play a key role in transforming the precinct into the future. This includes research and education providers with existing physical and intellectual connections to the precinct such as the University of Wollongong and TAFE NSW.
 - Partnerships with these and other organisations will be explored as the strategy is developed where aligned with the vision for the future of the precinct.
- Possible improvements to infrastructure and services will be considered as part of the development of the strategy in consultation with key stakeholders. As noted in the sections above, the strategy, in coordination with NSW Health partners will include an implementation plan which identifies what infrastructure and services will be required as the precinct transforms over time and who is responsible for implementing these initiatives.

Feedback on the Early Directions

This section of the discussion provided paper outlined some early directions for developing a place-based strategy for the Wollongong Health Precinct, drawn from the core principles. The purpose of this section is to explain what directions are critical to the success of the precinct, and how they might be manifested.

People were asked: **What directions do you view as critical to the success of the precinct? Are there other directions which aren't listed and should be a priority?**

Overview of feedback

We heard that there was strong support for the early directions, particularly better patient experiences and transport connections, which resonated with the community and stakeholder submissions. However, some feedback called for the future uses of the surrounding area to be factored into the Strategy.

Further information is provided below:

- Many submissions strongly supported focusing on better patient care, with some noting additional health services and facilities may be required to achieve this. Survey submissions noted the need to attract more healthcare workers.
- Many submissions noted the importance of creating an inviting space for all users and improving key worker experiences through providing open space and places to eat. This was a direction that community and stakeholders wished to see prioritised. Feedback highlighted pedestrian access, green space, and topographical challenges with the current main hospital entrance as key issues.
- Survey submissions identified the need to attract more people to work in the precinct, to ensure health services keep pace with the demands placed on them by a growing and ageing population.
- Community and stakeholder submissions supported better pedestrian connections within the precinct, especially between existing health services and significant nearby infrastructure such as the Wollongong Train Station.
- We heard support from stakeholder and community submissions for increasing key worker housing, which was identified as vital for the future of the precinct. Some stakeholder submissions identified community housing providers and other housing providers could be

engaged to assist in this process. They also recommended investigations into the feasibility of a range of housing types.

- We heard from community workshops and submissions of the need for additional retail services and community services to support the 24-hour operation of the precinct's other services. This includes shops, supermarkets, food and dining options and childcare.
- Some survey feedback noted the importance of partnerships and collaboration between business, industry, research, and education institutes, particularly within the healthcare sector, to deliver high quality patient care. The co-operation of private and public health providers was specifically highlighted by survey submissions.
- Some submissions noted renewal of existing public infrastructure and services as key to creating spaces that will attract people.
- Some submissions suggested providing some health services in locations away from the precinct, such as aged care, virtual care, to improve patient experience and free up additional beds.
- Some survey feedback outlined the importance of patient involvement in their own recovery, and the importance of creating inviting spaces to achieve this.
- Some survey feedback noted new and existing health services should be sustainable and reduce waste and utilise natural heating and cooling.
- Some survey feedback identified a need to acquire private land early in the planning process.
- Some submissions suggested a future expansion of Wollongong Private Hospital should be considered as the strategy develops, particularly related to physical connections to the Wollongong Public Hospital.
- Some submissions recommended the precinct boundary be expanded to incorporate additional areas with obvious physical connections to land within the current precinct boundary or with the potential to build upon or create new partnerships into the future.
 - This was particularly called out with reference to the West Wollongong TAFE site being included in the precinct boundary and opportunities provided to better support the future ambitions of health and employment outcomes.

The department's response

- The department will continue to work closely with a range of stakeholders to undertake targeted research to inform the development of the strategy, including the identification of initiatives to implement the vision for the precinct.

- As part of the detailed planning for the precinct, the strategy will consider how to encourage the right mix of land uses that complement health services.
- Once the draft Strategy is released, the department will provide additional opportunities for engagement to answer specific questions related to land acquisition, renewal of public infrastructure, and how the strategy will be implemented.
- Community and stakeholder feedback has identified the need to do more to generate and retain key workers, particularly in the health care sector. The Department will work closely with NSW Health partners to better understand these issues and how the strategy can address them.
- The department has reviewed the precinct boundary in response to community feedback and in consultation with the project's steering committee and has developed a revised boundary for the precinct alongside this report. The revised boundary:
 - enhances the precinct's focus on health and education services that is reinforced by NSW Government assets in the area,
 - uses streets as the definitive edges of the precinct, and
 - emphasises a focus on connections to Wollongong Train Station and the Wollongong City Centre.

Part 3 Next steps

What we heard during the engagement on the discussion paper is informing the development of a draft strategy, which is anticipated to be available for community feedback in early 2025.

The first step in developing the strategy is defining the vision for the precinct. We have drawn on what we heard from community and stakeholders and our early research to prepare a vision and several 'big moves' for the precinct. This will be available for comment once the draft strategy is placed on exhibition.

Additional opportunities for engagement will be provided as we develop the strategy, and as part of the public exhibition of a draft strategy towards the end of the year.

To keep informed about when we will be holding the next round of community engagement, visit <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/plans-for-your-area/regional-plans/illawarra-shoalhaven-regional-plan-2041/making-it-happen/wollongong-health-precinct>.

Any additional questions relating to the content of this document or the process from here on out, can be directed to wollongong@planning.nsw.gov.au.

For information on the project, or to register your details to be informed of new project updates, visit <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/plans-for-your-area/regional-plans/illawarra-shoalhaven-regional-plan-2041/making-it-happen/wollongong-health-precinct>