



The Footprint Report

A community story & impact report



ACC
NEW SOUTH WALES & ACT

**Presented by
Australian Christian
Churches NSW & ACT**

From churches serving
metropolitan, regional, rural
and coastal communities
across NSW and the ACT.

137 Survey responses

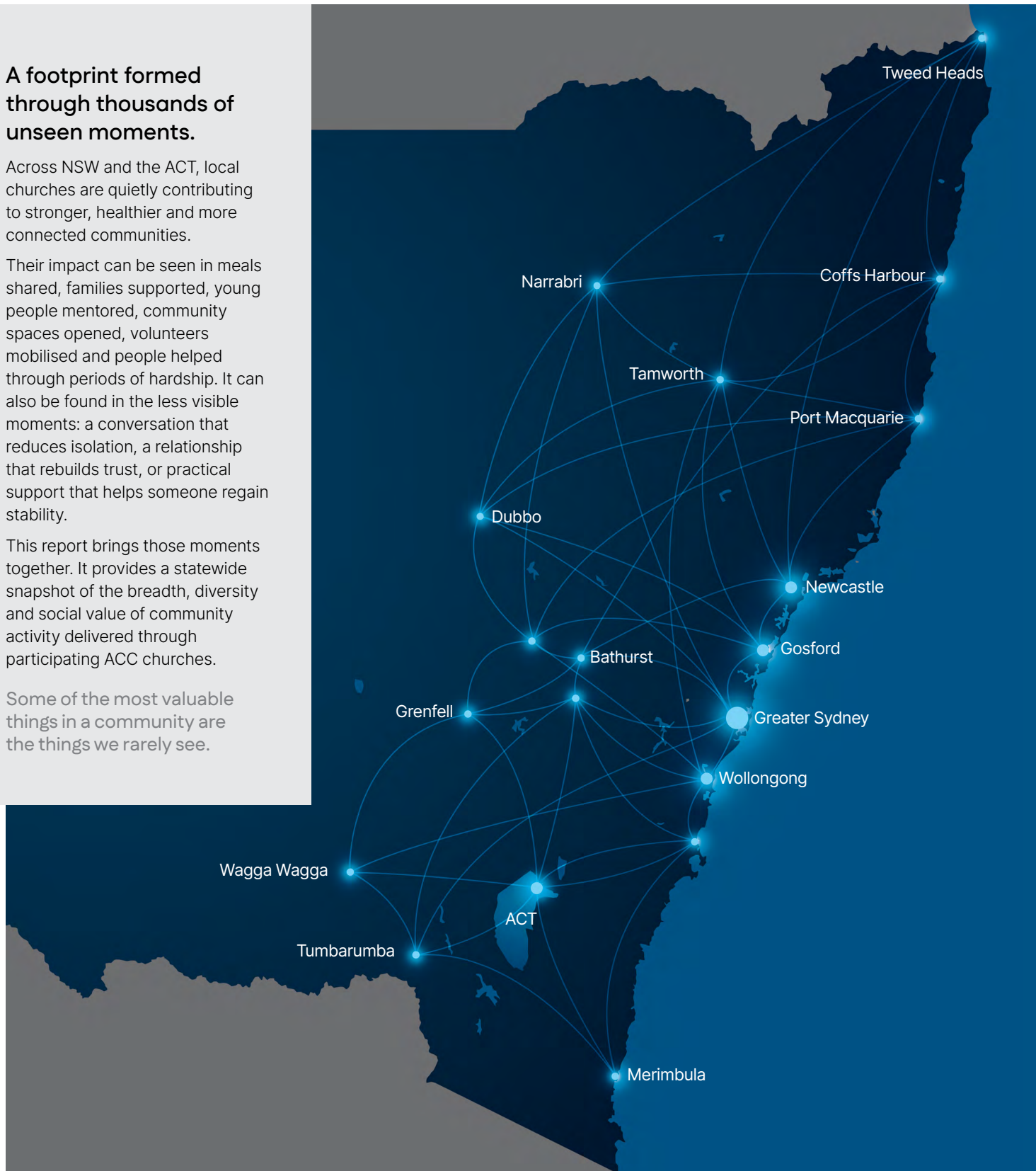
A footprint formed through thousands of unseen moments.

Across NSW and the ACT, local churches are quietly contributing to stronger, healthier and more connected communities.

Their impact can be seen in meals shared, families supported, young people mentored, community spaces opened, volunteers mobilised and people helped through periods of hardship. It can also be found in the less visible moments: a conversation that reduces isolation, a relationship that rebuilds trust, or practical support that helps someone regain stability.

This report brings those moments together. It provides a statewide snapshot of the breadth, diversity and social value of community activity delivered through participating ACC churches.

Some of the most valuable things in a community are the things we rarely see.



Executive Summary

The Footprint Report presents findings from 137 survey responses received from churches and church locations across New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. Respondents represent metropolitan, regional, rural and coastal communities, demonstrating the reach of a highly distributed network of local churches.

The findings show that community engagement is not limited to a small number of large or highly resourced churches. Most participating churches are small or medium-sized congregations, yet almost nine in ten reported providing community-focused activities outside their regular church services. Approximately two-thirds do so regularly.

The most common areas of response are food insecurity and support for families, children and young people. Churches also report responding to social isolation, mental health and wellbeing, homelessness, housing stress, domestic and family violence, financial hardship, migrant and refugee settlement, relationship health and natural disasters.

This support is delivered through both small relational initiatives and larger community-service operations. Participating churches reported programs ranging from seasonal hampers and local events to weekly food services, school breakfast programs, playgroups, community cafés, counselling, chaplaincy, mentoring, emergency relief and large-scale services reaching thousands of people each year.

Volunteer mobilisation is central to this contribution. Around seven in ten respondents involve more than ten volunteers in their community initiatives, while approximately one-quarter involve more than 50. Churches also contribute facilities, with most property-owning respondents appearing to make their premises available to external community groups and organisations.

Community engagement is overwhelmingly collaborative. Respondents reported strong partnerships with charities,

not-for-profits, other churches, schools, businesses, councils and government services. These relationships enable churches to act as trusted local connectors, helping residents access practical assistance, relationships and referral pathways.

The outcomes reported are both practical and relational. Churches identify stronger community relationships, immediate needs being met, reduced isolation, improved wellbeing and increased trust as some of the clearest results of their engagement. The written stories reveal that impact often extends beyond short-term relief: people move from crisis to stability, from isolation to belonging and, in some cases, from receiving support to volunteering, employment and community leadership.

The survey also identifies significant unmet need. Housing insecurity, homelessness, mental health challenges, food insecurity, domestic violence, youth disengagement and social isolation are recurring concerns across diverse communities. Respondents report that their ability to respond is most commonly limited by volunteer capacity, funding, leadership time and access to suitable facilities.

Together, the findings position ACC NSW & ACT churches as a significant community-impact network. Their contribution is grounded in local knowledge, trusted relationships, practical care, volunteerism and collaboration. With stronger partnerships and targeted investment, this existing network has the potential to expand its contribution to community wellbeing across NSW and the ACT.



Four ways our footprint is felt.



Strengthening Communities

Healthy communities are built through relationships.

Churches create welcoming spaces where people can belong, connect and participate through community meals, cafés, playgroups, seniors groups, parenting programs, neighbourhood events, chaplaincy, wellbeing initiatives and local partnerships.

These activities reduce social isolation, build trust and strengthen community connectedness.

Creating places where people know they belong.

Belonging · Events · Mental wellbeing



Supporting Vulnerable People

Churches provide practical assistance that helps people navigate periods of hardship and crisis.

This includes food relief, emergency assistance, homelessness support, financial aid, domestic and family violence referrals, migrant and refugee support, counselling, community kitchens and other initiatives that respond directly to immediate needs.

Meeting people where they are, with dignity, compassion and practical care.

Food relief · Housing · Crisis assistance



Investing in Future Generations

Strong communities invest in children and young people.

Across the survey, churches reported supporting families through youth programs, children's activities, mentoring, school partnerships, breakfast programs, homework clubs, leadership development and opportunities that help young people thrive.

Many churches also provide safe environments where children and young people develop confidence, resilience and meaningful relationships.

Creating brighter futures for the next generation.

Children · Youth · Schools · Families



Building Community Capacity

Churches strengthen communities by mobilising people, partnerships and resources.

This includes recruiting volunteers, sharing facilities, collaborating with schools, charities, councils and businesses, developing local leaders and providing community infrastructure that enables others to serve.

Rather than replacing existing services, churches often act as trusted connectors that bring people and organisations together.

Multiplying the capacity of communities to care for one another.

Volunteers · Facilities · Partnerships

We have our ear to the ground.

So we respond where our community needs us most.

Churches are embedded in the communities they serve. Through regular interaction with families, schools, local organisations and residents, they often become aware of emerging needs before those needs are visible through formal systems.

Survey respondents reported addressing a diverse range of social and community needs. The most common were food insecurity and support for families, children and young people. Significant activity was also reported in mental health and wellbeing, social isolation, homelessness, support for seniors, migrant and refugee settlement, domestic and family violence, financial hardship and emergency relief. (See graph below right)

These programs range from small volunteer-led initiatives to substantial services operating throughout the week. Together, they demonstrate a flexible and locally responsive network of community support.

Food and essential needs

Food insecurity is the most commonly reported area of community response, delivered through food pantries, hampers, community kitchens, school breakfasts and emergency relief.

Children, young people and families

Churches invest in playgroups, mentoring, homework support, youth activities, school partnerships, parenting programs and practical assistance for families experiencing hardship.

Connection and wellbeing

Community meals, cafés, seniors groups, mental health initiatives and neighbourhood events create opportunities for belonging, reduce isolation and strengthen local relationships.

The breadth of these programs reflects the diversity of the communities represented in the survey. A regional church may respond to transport, isolation and disaster recovery, while a metropolitan church may focus on housing pressure, migrant settlement, food insecurity or youth disengagement.



Community needs addressed by participating churches



We voluntarily invest in our communities.

So the social fabric grows stronger.

Every year, churches across NSW and the ACT invest their own finances, facilities and people into responding to local community needs.

From community kitchens and school breakfast programs to youth mentoring, emergency relief, playgroups and support for vulnerable families, these initiatives are largely funded through the generosity of local church communities and delivered by volunteers.

This investment represents a significant contribution to the social infrastructure of NSW and the ACT, complementing government and community services while expanding the capacity of local communities to care for their people.



This investment represents a significant contribution to the social infrastructure of NSW and the ACT.

\$12.2 Million⁺

Invested each year into communities across NSW & ACT



\$5.2 Million

Thousands of volunteer hours donated annually
(74,129 activity hrs × 2 volunteers × \$35/hr)

(A conservative estimate of the economic value of volunteer contributions, calculated using reported volunteer activity hours and replacement labour costs.)



\$7 Million+

Directly invested each year by participating churches into community programs

(A conservative estimate based on the minimum value of reported expenditure ranges.)

Methodology Footnote: The volunteer contribution is an estimate based on reported annual program operating hours. As the survey did not collect total volunteer person-hours, a conservative assumption of two volunteers per operating hour has been applied. Many programs including community kitchens, food relief, youth programs and community events typically involve more than two volunteers, meaning the actual volunteer contribution is likely higher.

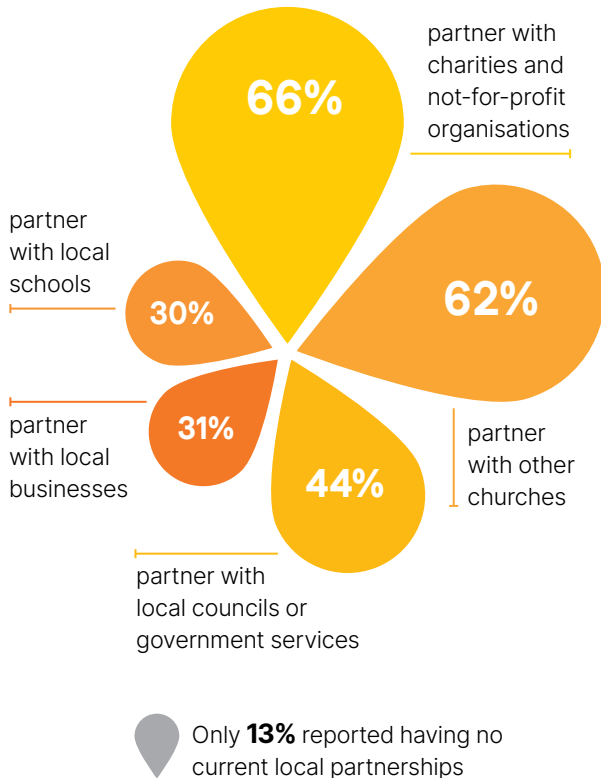
We earn trust through consistent service.

So communities have a reliable partner.

Churches are woven into the fabric of local communities. Every day, they work alongside councils, schools, charities, health providers, businesses and community organisations to respond to local needs.

Rather than working in isolation, churches actively seek partnerships that strengthen existing services, create new opportunities and make better use of community resources. They bring people, places, volunteers and relationships together around a shared goal of helping communities flourish. For many organisations, churches have become the community partner that is always willing to say, "How can we help?"

Who churches partner with locally



Collaboration is the norm

Nearly 9 in 10 churches are already working alongside at least one other organisation to strengthen their local community. Churches see partnership as a natural way to maximise community impact rather than working independently.

A trusted partner for business

Almost one in three churches already partner with local businesses, creating opportunities for businesses to contribute through sponsorship, donated goods, employee volunteering and community initiatives that deliver tangible local impact.

Community infrastructure

Many churches extend their partnership beyond programs by making their buildings available for community use by hosting support groups, schools, charities, recovery programs, playgroups and neighbourhood organisations. Churches provide not only people and volunteers, but also welcoming spaces where communities can gather and thrive.

Churches don't seek to replace community services, they seek to strengthen them. Across NSW and the ACT, local churches are trusted collaborators, bringing together volunteers, facilities, businesses, schools, councils and community organisations to achieve outcomes that no single organisation could deliver alone.

We share real stories.

So the numbers have meaning.

From needing support to serving thousands

Wollongong | Food security and employment

An unemployed single mother began attending a community program during a difficult season because she needed practical support and a place to belong.

As relationships formed, volunteers recognised her skills and encouraged her to use them. She later became the head chef of the same program, helping prepare and serve more than 10,000 meals each year to people experiencing hardship.

What began as receiving help became an opportunity to lead, contribute and restore dignity to others.



Impact | Belonging | Employment | Leadership | Food security



Language opening a pathway to belonging

Southern Highlands | Migrant support

A local church began an English-language class to help migrants prepare for the language requirements associated with Australian residency.

Five participants passed the required English test, helping them progress toward residency. The program also created friendships and a stronger sense of connection for migrant families establishing a new life in the community.

The program offered more than language skills, it provided confidence, relationships and a place to belong.



Impact | Education | Migrant settlement | Social connection | Community participation



Care at a critical moment

Regional NSW | Homelessness and crisis support

A hospital social worker contacted a local church when a patient experiencing homelessness was about to be discharged without food or shelter.

The church was able to provide a tent, food and immediate practical care. The following day, the social worker reported that the person had intended to end their life that night but changed their mind after experiencing the care and support they received.

A simple and immediate response became a reminder that someone cared and that life could continue.



Impact | Mental wellbeing | Crisis intervention | Homelessness support | Trusted partnership





From sleeping in a car to helping others

Hunter Region | Homelessness, recovery and employment

A man experiencing homelessness and addiction entered a church-run Car 2 Home program, where he was able to sleep safely in his vehicle while receiving ongoing support.

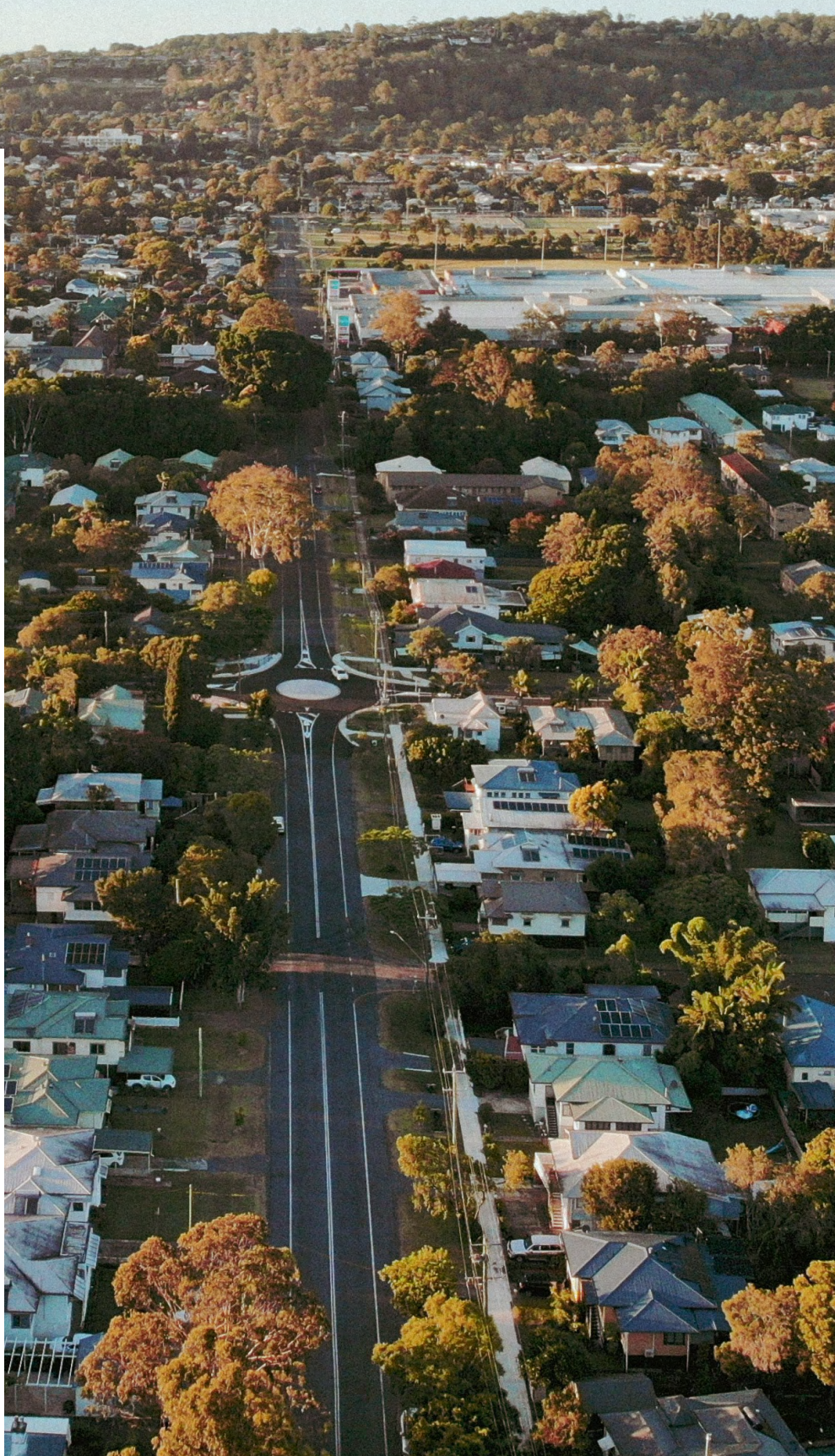
During this time, he remained sober, volunteered in the community food program and joined a recovery course. The church later helped him start a business and secure housing.

He now has regular employment, a stable home and a safe environment for his teenage son. He continues to volunteer, participate in recovery programs and support other people who are sleeping in their vehicles.

What began as emergency support became a pathway to recovery, employment, stable housing and renewed purpose.



Impact | Housing stability
Addiction recovery |
Employment | Family
wellbeing | Volunteering



We are ready for what's next.

So no community has to face challenges alone.

The survey highlights both the strengths churches already bring to their communities and the opportunities that exist to deepen collaboration with government, business and the community sector. It also identifies several challenges that continue to affect the ability of churches to expand their community impact.



Strengths

Trusted community presence

Churches are deeply embedded within local communities and are often among the first to recognise emerging needs.

Volunteer mobilisation

Thousands of volunteers contribute their time, skills and experience each year, creating significant social value.

Established partnerships

Churches already work alongside charities, schools, councils and community organisations across NSW and the ACT.

Local knowledge and trusted relationships

Churches understand the unique strengths and challenges of their neighbourhoods and are well placed to respond.

Flexible and responsive

Churches can adapt quickly to emerging community issues and mobilise people and resources when needed.



Opportunities

Stronger government partnerships

Collaborate more closely with local and state government to deliver preventative, place-based community initiatives.

Business engagement

Provide businesses with meaningful opportunities to invest in their local communities through volunteering, sponsorship and shared initiatives.

Shared community facilities

Expand the use of church buildings as accessible community hubs for local organisations, support groups and services.

Investing in the next generation

Strengthen partnerships with schools, universities and youth organisations to support children, young people and families.

Earlier intervention

Work collaboratively to identify and respond to social issues before they become crisis situations.



Next steps

The greatest opportunity identified through this report is not for churches to do more alone, it is for churches, government, business and community organisations to work more closely together.

Partner More

Strengthen collaboration with councils, government agencies, businesses and community organisations.

Share More

Unlock the potential of church facilities as community spaces that support local services and initiatives.

Invest Earlier

Support preventative programs that strengthen families, young people and community wellbeing before crisis occurs.

Measure Better

Improve impact measurement to demonstrate the social and economic value churches contribute to Australian communities.



Challenges

Increasing demand

Growing requests for food relief, housing assistance, mental health support and family services are placing pressure on existing programs.

Volunteer sustainability

Many programs rely on a relatively small number of committed volunteers, creating challenges for long-term sustainability.

Funding certainty

Many initiatives depend on donations, fundraising and grants, making long-term planning difficult.

Measuring impact

Many churches have limited systems for measuring and communicating the full value of their community contribution.

Increasing governance requirements

Community programs require growing levels of compliance, safeguarding, reporting and organisational capability.



Emerging Risks

Growing social isolation

Without stronger local connections, loneliness and social isolation are likely to continue increasing across many communities.

Reduced community capacity

If volunteer participation declines, communities may lose significant local support and preventative services.

Cost-of-living pressures

Financial pressures may simultaneously increase demand for assistance while reducing the resources available to meet those needs.

Missed partnership opportunities

Without stronger collaboration between churches, government, business and community organisations, valuable local resources may remain underutilised.

Increasing complexity of community need

Issues such as homelessness, mental health, family violence and financial hardship are becoming more interconnected, requiring coordinated, cross-sector responses.



The footprints continue

Churches have long been places of hope, generosity and belonging. Their greatest strength lies not only in the programs they deliver, but in their ability to bring people together, mobilise volunteers, open their facilities and respond with compassion to local need.

The footprint of the Church is not measured by the size of its buildings or the number of people who gather each week. It is measured by the lives changed, the communities strengthened and the hope restored every day across New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.

Every church leaves a footprint. Together, those footprints are shaping stronger communities across New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.



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References

Data Sources

Australian Christian Churches NSW & ACT Footprint Survey (2026) completed April-July 2026.

Survey responses submitted by participating churches across NSW & ACT
Volunteer replacement value based on recognised Australian volunteer valuation methodology

Report Credits

Prepared for Australian Christian Churches NSW & ACT

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