

# NAB Special Report

## Wellbeing & the Importance of Community Connections

by NAB Behavioural & Industry Economics

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Through our research on wellbeing Australians have told us that they believe it is important for them to feel “connected” with their local community. But how connected do they really feel and what would they change within their communities to improve their sense of personal wellbeing if they could? In this special report, NAB addresses these two important questions.

Overall, Australians believe they are only “moderately” connected to their local communities. But, it is very clear that some people in society feel much more connected than others. While there is little difference between the sense of community connection between men & women, this masks notable differences by age, education, work, & relationship status.

Just as our personal wellbeing appears to increase with age so too does our feeling of community connection. Not only do **widows** have the highest level of personal wellbeing but they are also the most connected. Part of this may reflect widows being typically older but there is also evidence to suggest that older women are better able to re-establish relationships once their partner dies than men. Widows are joined by the **over 50s (particularly women), married couples**, Australians with a **higher education & professional workers**.

Similarly, there appears to be a relationship between low levels of personal wellbeing and weak community connections, with **young women (18 to 29)** and **labourers** the least connected groups.

Income typically does not appear to play a significant role when it comes to community connectedness, except for the very **lowest income** earners (who typically also have lower levels of personal wellbeing).

The things that define our sense of community can cut across a range of social, economic, environmental, cultural and political factors. And as with connectedness, what we value most varies depending on our age and gender.

**So what matters most?** Both women & men believe improving community **safety/law & order** would contribute most to improving their personal wellbeing, followed by **housing affordability, local jobs & health services**.

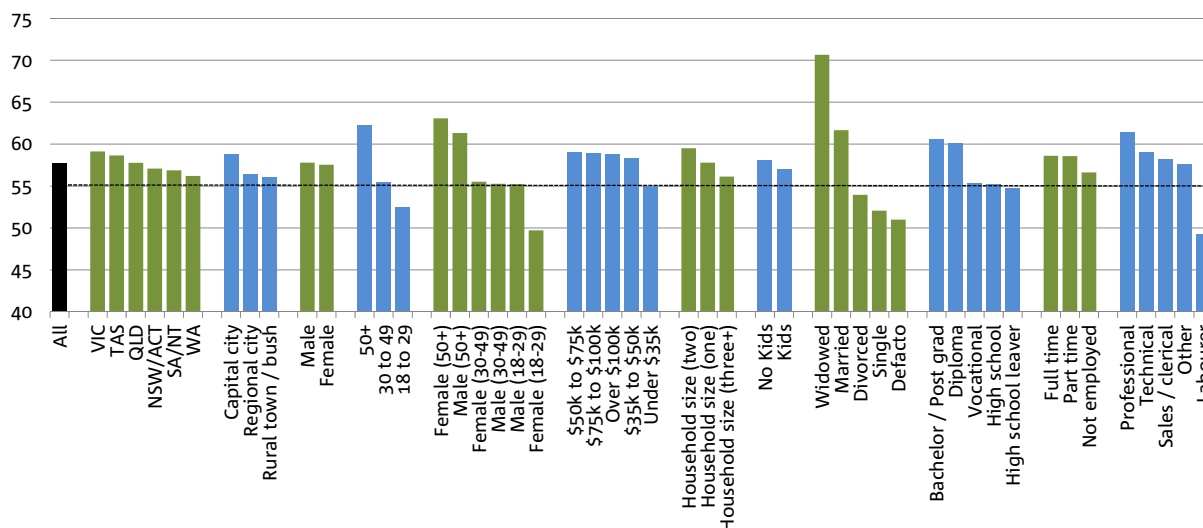
For **young Australians**, housing affordability and local jobs sit on top of the wish list of things they would change in their community to improve their wellbeing - and are more important than for any other age group. But both these factors would add significantly more to the wellbeing of young women than men.

**Young women** also value local health services much more highly than do young men. In contrast, more young men would improve local internet quality and sporting facilities than young women. For **30-49 year olds**, it is also jobs (albeit less so), safety & law and order. For **older Australians**, safety & law and order, local health services aged care facilities are by far the most important.

**Income** clearly plays a role when it comes to what people would change in their community to improve their wellbeing. For those on the **lowest incomes**, safety, local health services, jobs and housing are most important. And for this group **health services** is a much bigger priority than for any other income group.

**The message is clear.** Those who feel more connected within their local communities typically have higher levels of personal wellbeing. While there is **much that individuals can do themselves** (volunteering, getting to know their neighbours, etc.) there is also a **clear role for government & business**, particularly in regards to issues such as safety, housing & employment.

**Feeling Connected to Your Community**  
(where 0 = "not at all" and 100 = "completely")



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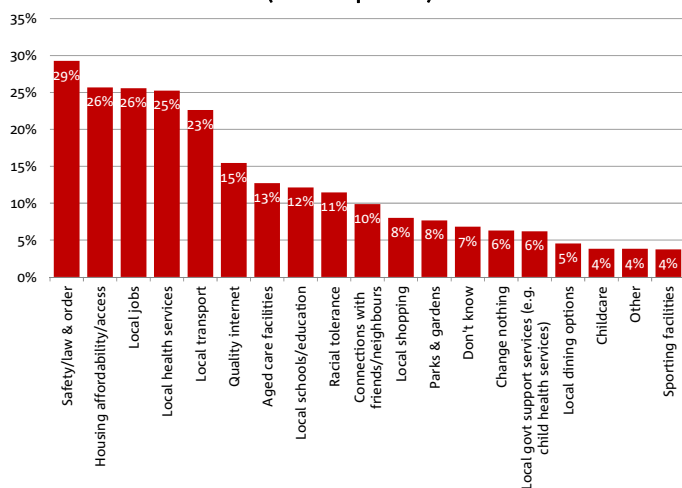
Over 2,000 Australians were asked to rate how connected they felt to their local community. Based on a scale of 0 to 100 (ranging from not all connected to completely connected), Australians on average believe they are only “moderately” connected (58 out of 100).

However, this masks some big differences for various Australians. Widows clearly felt the most connected to their community, and considerably more so than any other group (71 out of 100). Over 50s (particularly women), married couples, Australians with a higher education and professional workers also rated their connections somewhat above the Australian average. In contrast, young women (18 to 29) and labourers indicated they were the least connected groups, along with defactos and singles.

Among some other notable observations, Australians living in Victoria felt the most connected to their local communities, with those in WA the least connected. Also interesting was the fact that income did not appear to play a significant role, except for the very lowest income earners.

*Australians believe improving safety & law and order in their communities would contribute most to an improvement in their personal wellbeing...*

**What would you change to improve your personal wellbeing & connectedness in your local community? (% of responses)**



In order to understand what community factors add most to their personal wellbeing, Australians were also asked to nominate three key areas they would change if they could in order to improve their personal wellbeing and connectedness.

The majority of Australians - around 29% - said that improving safety/law and order would be their main priority.

Improving housing affordability and access to homes (26%), local jobs (25%), local health services (25%) and local transport (23%) were identified by around 1 in 4 Australians as the next biggest areas they would change in order to derive greater wellbeing benefits from the community in which they live.

In contrast, local dining options (5%), childcare (4%) and sporting facilities (4%) were seen as the least important community factors requiring change to improve personal wellbeing.

Our research also suggests that there are some very notable differences in the importance of how community factors contribute to the personal wellbeing of women and men in Australia. The majority of women (30%) and men (28%) both indicated they would improve safety/law and order if they could.

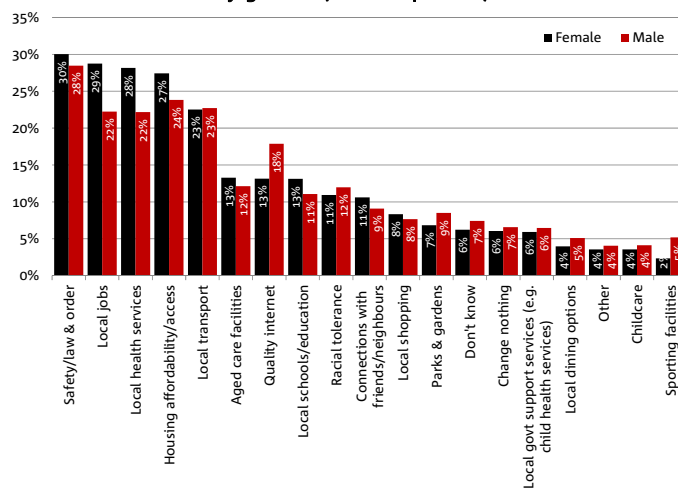
But, improving access to and quality of local jobs was the next biggest issue facing women (29%), followed by health services (28%), housing affordability and access (27%) and local transport (23%).

For men, housing affordability and access (24%) and local transport (23%) were the next most important areas they would change to improve their wellbeing. Jobs (22%) and health services (22%) were the next most important factors, but for much less so than for women.

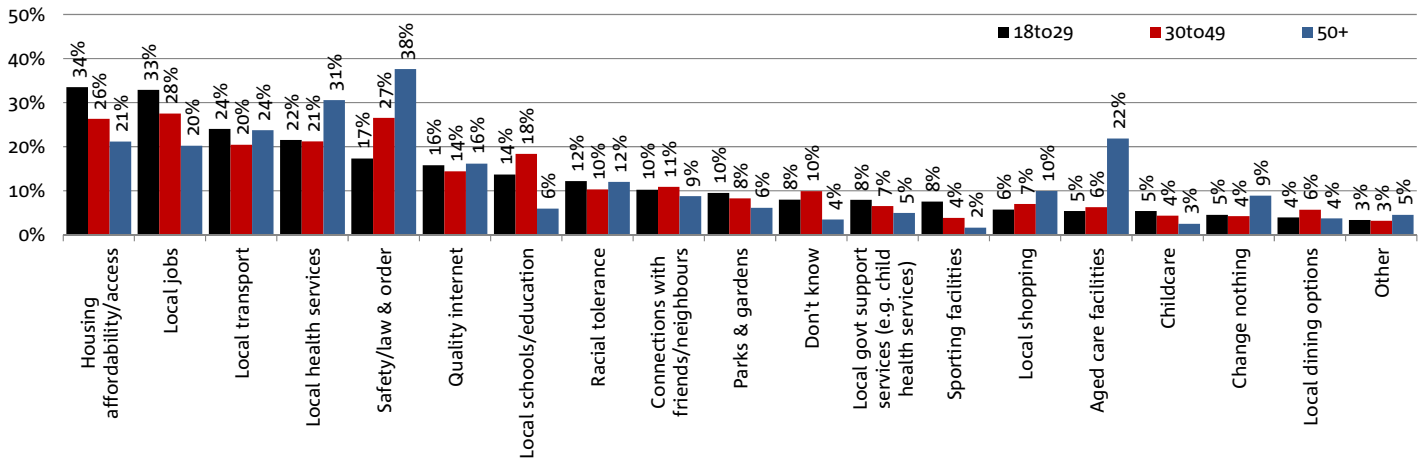
One area where men stood out was in regards to improving the quality and access to internet (18% compared to 13% of women).

*And this is true for both women and men!*

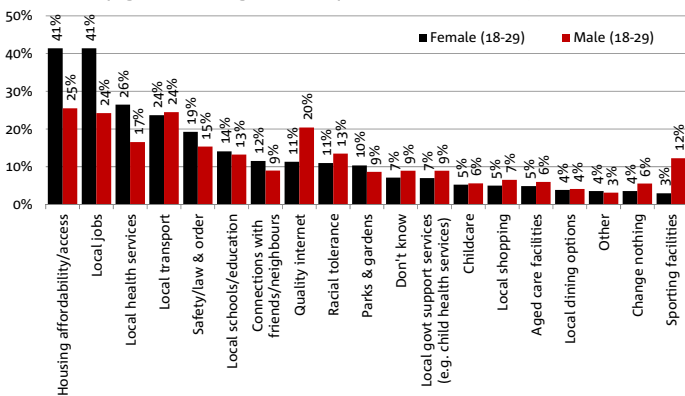
**What would you change to improve your personal wellbeing & connectedness in your local community by gender (% of responses)**



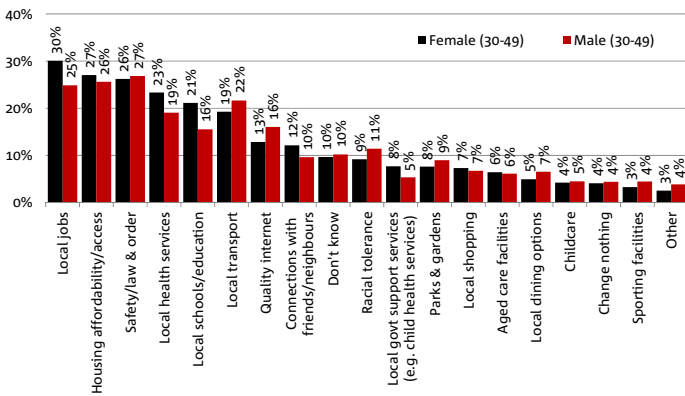
### What would you change to improve your personal wellbeing & connectedness in your local community by age (% of responses)



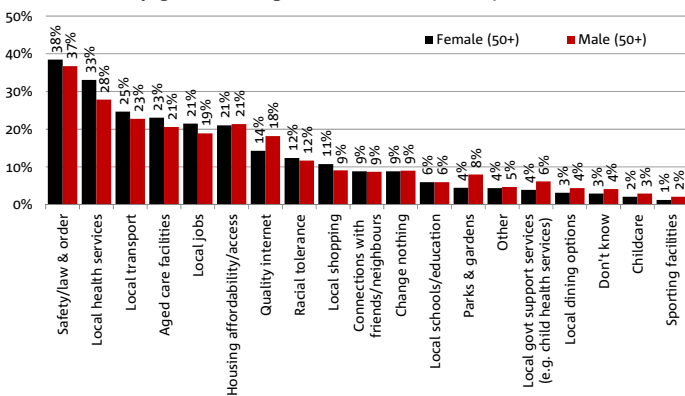
#### By gender & age: 18-29 year olds (% of responses)



#### By gender & age: 30-49 year olds (% of responses)



#### By gender & age: over 50s (% of responses)



*For young Australians, housing affordability and local jobs sit well on top of the wish list of things they would change in their community. For 30-49 year olds, it is also jobs (but less so), safety & law and order. For older Australians, safety & law and order, local health services and aged care facilities are much more important.*

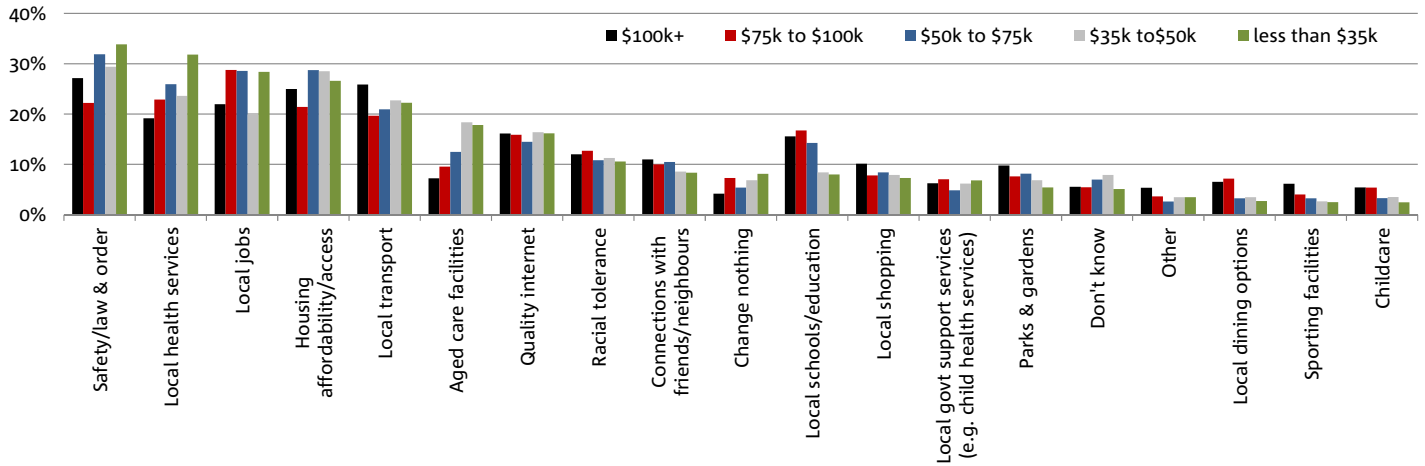
It is clear that age plays a very important role in determining which community factors would enhance personal wellbeing and connectedness if they could be improved.

For young Australians, the most important factors are housing affordability and access (34%) and local jobs (33%) - and more important than for any other age group. Interestingly however, both these factors would add significantly more to the wellbeing of young women than men. Young women (25%) also value local health services much more highly than young men. In contrast, more young men would improve local internet quality (20% vs. 11%) and sporting facilities (12% vs. 3%) than young women.

Australians aged 30-49 (18%) valued local education much higher than any other age group, with middle-aged women leading the charge (21%). There was also a degree of consensus between middle age women and men with regards to the importance of local jobs, housing affordability and safety & law order as drivers of personal wellbeing.

The majority of older Australians (38%) agreed that an improvement in safety & law order would contribute most to higher personal wellbeing - significantly higher than for any other age group. Not surprisingly, older Australians were also the most inclined to appreciate the personal wellbeing benefits associated with improvements to local health services (31%) and aged care facilities (22%) than any other group. Also notable was the very high degree of consensus between older women and men when it came to the importance of almost all community factors in driving personal wellbeing.

### What would you change to improve your personal wellbeing & connectedness in your local community by income (% of responses)



Although income does not appear to play a significant role when it comes to community connectedness (except for the very lowest income earners), there is much greater difference of opinion when it comes to what people would change in their community to improve their wellbeing.

For example, for those on the highest income (over \$100,000), safety/law and order, transport and housing affordability top their wish list. But for those earning between \$75-100,000 it is local jobs and health services that are most important. For those on the lowest incomes (below \$35,000), safety, improvements to local health services, jobs and housing are viewed as the most important that would enhance their personal wellbeing. And for this group health services is a much bigger priority than for any other income group.

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