



SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND REGIONS

10 year strategy to enable
urban systems transformation

2024 Update to the 2019 Strategy

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

FUTURE EARTH AUSTRALIA ACKNOWLEDGES AND PAYS RESPECTS TO ALL ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER FIRST NATIONS, TRADITIONAL OWNERS OF THE COUNTRY ON WHICH WE ALL RESIDE, AND WHO HOLD ENDURING CONNECTIONS TO LAND, WATERS, SEAS, AND CULTURE. WE ALSO ACKNOWLEDGE AND PAY OUR RESPECTS TO ELDERS PAST AND PRESENT THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA, WHO HOLD THE MEMORIES, TRADITIONS, CULTURES AND HOPES OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF AUSTRALIA. WE CELEBRATE THE WORLD'S OLDEST CONTINUOUS CULTURE AND THE ONGOING CONTRIBUTIONS TO AUSTRALIAN LIFE, IDENTITY AND CULTURE.

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Particular individuals who contributed to this process from within the Future Earth network warrant specific mention: Bob Webb, Jago Dodson, Wendy Steele, and Mark Stafford-Smith.

The Secretariat thanks the Expert Reference Group who provided direction for this Update, as well as those who provided written input during the consultation phase. A Future Earth Australia convened Early Career Urban Research Working Group also provided valuable insights.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This updated decadal *Sustainable Cities and Regions Strategy* for Australia proposes an agenda for federal, state, territory, and local governments to partner with stakeholders, communities and researchers on urban systems transformation. It is grounded in extensive consultation that included cross-sector workshops in diverse cities around the country including most capital cities, as well as input from many national and regional bodies. This update is consistent with the initial 2019 Strategy, but enhanced through a fresh round of 2023-24 consultations (Section 1).

There is a consensus that Australia's urban challenges have only increased since 2019 (Section 2). Climate change, decarbonisation, social inequities, housing, transport, employment and industry changes, digitalisation, education and health services, nature loss and degradation, pollution and other challenges – they all meet in the local urban places where 90 per cent of Australians live. While affecting everyone, they currently most often deprive the already disadvantaged. The challenges (some of which also open up transformational opportunities) are increasingly interdependent and point to multiple necessary transitions to meet desired urban outcomes.

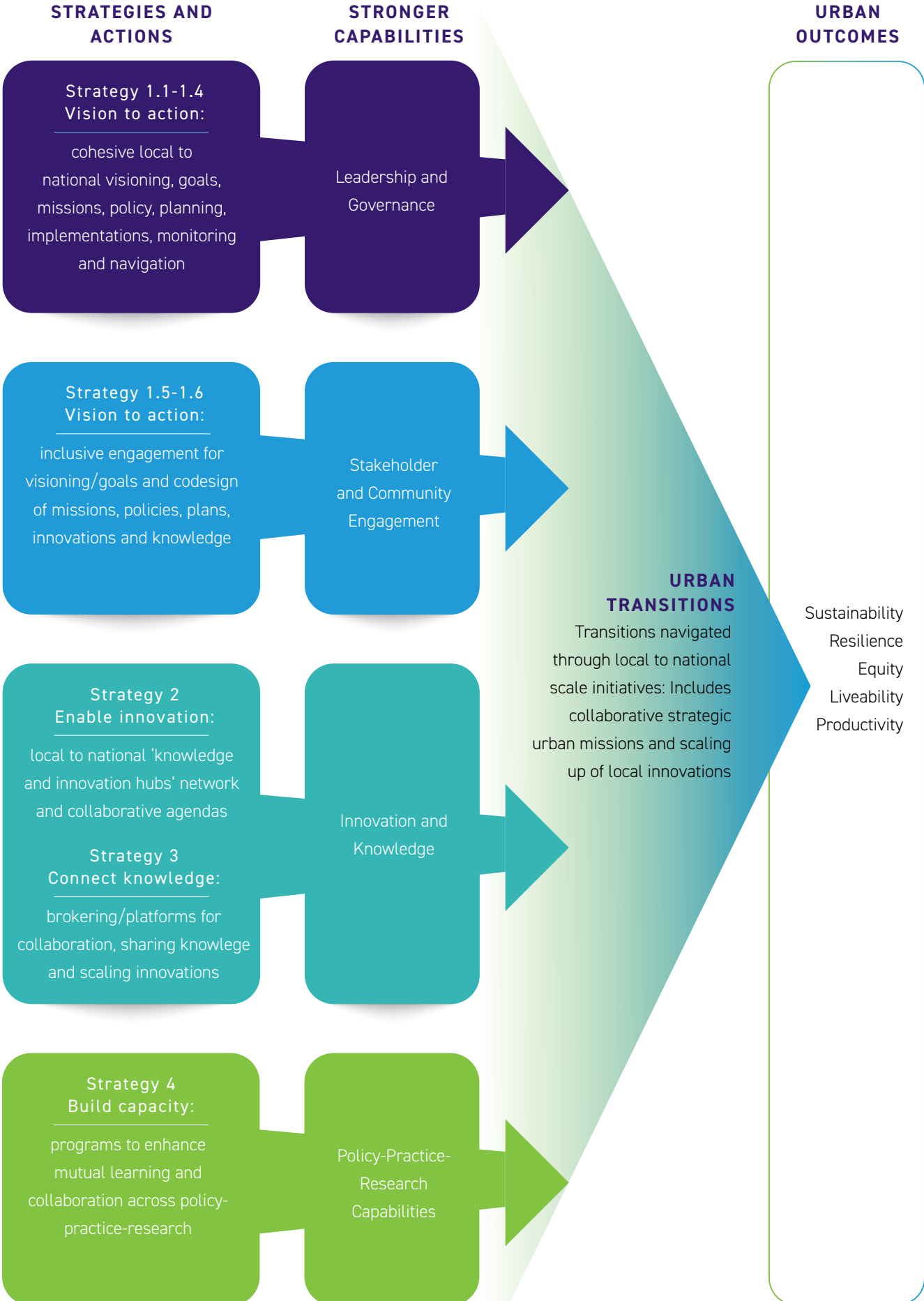
The national urban policy landscape has also changed considerably in the last few years including federal government commitment to develop a National Urban Policy, which remains central to this Strategy. There have been recent developments in many other federal policy areas that will affect urban settlements. As with the challenges, these interdependencies need to be taken into account (Section 3).

The recent consultations confirmed that the essence of this national Strategy should be to transform a range of national to local capabilities to help drive and navigate urban transitions in the short, medium and long term (Section 4). As shown on the next page the updated Strategy comprises four component strategies and related actions, to significantly strengthen the following key capabilities:

- Consistent and sustained urban *leadership and governance* across sectors and levels
- More inclusive and effective *stakeholder and community engagement*
- Extensive urban *innovation and knowledge co-development*, sharing and uptake
- Enhanced *policy-practice-research* collaborations and capabilities

Collectively these support the transitions to desired urban outcomes. A Roadmap for Implementation and summary of primary federal and state/territory government leadership roles (Section 4) is supported by detailed actions and multi-sector responsibilities (Appendix). They provide a concrete basis for moving forward. A more systemic, collaborative and community-engaged approach to urban development has never been more important.

OVERVIEW OF SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND REGIONS STRATEGY



1. A DECADAL STRATEGY FOR CITIES AND REGIONS

This is a critical moment in the critical decade to deliver on a united vision for Australia's cities and regions. Concurrent crises across social, environmental, and economic domains have sharpened the need for a cohesive national strategy for our urban and regional centres. This update to *Future Earth Australia's decadal Sustainable Cities and Regions Strategy*, takes account of changes impacting the urban landscape since the Strategy's publication in 2019. With updated recommendations and roadmap, this is a renewed urban agenda for local, state, territory, and federal governments to partner with all urban stakeholders (public, private and NGO sectors), communities and researchers on urban systems transformation. It is also complemented by Future Earth Australia's 2021 Sustainable Oceans and Coasts and 2022 Just Adaptation strategies, both relevant in an urban context.

Australia has a history of disconnected and intermittent urban policy, with disagreement over the appropriate federal role, frequent politicisation of policies and investments at all levels, and siloed decisions often disconnected from leading research, which itself has been overly fragmented. Mounting pressures on urban environments, economies and communities, including escalating risks and opportunities, require

new approaches to achieve sustainable long-term development of Australia's cities and regions. Such transformative change needs significantly strengthened urban capabilities across the board.

The Covid pandemic started a month after the 2019 Strategy launch, deferring any serious consideration. Therefore *Future Earth Australia* (FEA) has consulted extensively with urban stakeholders, communities and experts, asking 400 organisational and individual participants in the 2019 Strategy development to update their views on current and emerging challenges, opportunities, barriers, and enablers to urban transformation. These wide and expert reviews have been used as the basis of this update.

There is clear consensus that Australia's urban challenges are only increasing (Section 2). After summarising relevant changes to recent Federal Government policies (Section 3), this Strategy identifies the transformative capabilities that are critical to help policy developers, decision-makers, stakeholders and communities at all levels address the issues and opportunities they face (Section 4). The updated Strategies and Actions now proposed to develop those capabilities are summarised at Section 4 with the detail at the Appendix.



2. URBAN CHALLENGES ARE INTENSIFYING

Because 90 per cent of Australians live in urban settlements, most systemic challenges facing Australia are also urban challenges. The range, intensity and interdependencies of such issues are only growing.

The climate crisis is intensifying, with the compounding and cascading impacts of heatwaves, fires, storms, floods, and the prospect of worsening droughts, being felt across Australia. Climate risks vary by region, and responses to these risks need to be translated to local place-based conditions. The 2023 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report emphasised the significance of urban responses to these climate risks through adaptation measures and rapid decarbonisation. Similarly, the 2022 Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) report confirmed the importance of urban centres in confronting nature and biodiversity loss, and the potential for nature-based solutions in managing urban issues, and improving community wellbeing. Cities are central to the United Nations 2030 sustainable development agenda and the focus of the upcoming IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Cities.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted multiple health, social, and economic vulnerabilities. Coupled with geopolitical tensions, supply chain, international trade, inflationary and cost-of-living vulnerabilities are exposed. Decarbonisation, circular economies, digitalisation, artificial intelligence and other technology drivers bring increasing industry, employment and sustainable urban development opportunities, alongside some industry disruption and risks for major and regional cities.

Renewed migration dynamics, changing settlement and working preferences, and urban expansion require better understanding of alternative population distribution and density options. Demographic changes need coordinated national, regional and local settlement planning and infrastructure responses, as well as attention to knock-on effects on construction industry capacity and trade skills. There is a current housing availability, affordability, rental and homelessness crisis throughout the country, which has highlighted the important nexus between the location of housing, jobs and services and options to transform public and private transport. Complex housing supply and demand impacts interplay with fiscal, taxation, regulatory and monetary policy settings at federal, state and local scale.



In parallel with these broader factors, speculative developments and vested interests too often trump public good in individual places. Peri-urban expansion continues in many cities along with infrastructure deficits. Densification is often poorly located and executed with insufficient housing diversity and green space. The natural environment and biodiversity continue to deteriorate, and land use planning is not adequately taking new risk profiles or ecological priorities into account.

All these urban disruptions have a disproportionate negative impact on systemically marginalised and disadvantaged communities, including on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples where there is the additional need to address the long-term consequences of dispossession. Moreover, urban policy, practice and research has become increasingly concerned with achieving more just and equitable outcomes, pursuing inclusive and meaningful engagement methods, as well as recognising diverse values, needs, and different forms of knowledge.

Many of these challenges intersect in complex ways that require more sophisticated policy and community-based understanding, including evidence-informed practices and translation to particular places and communities. However, decision making is often siloed and disconnected while investment in urban research and knowledge remains limited and fragmented.

Urban research projects represent minor proportions of Australian Research Council funding, and there are also no structures to enable sharing or consolidation of knowledge across multiple research institutions. Investment in 'data and analytics' platforms such as AURIN and the Australian Climate Service (currently under review) is important, but not matched by investment in shared urban 'knowledge' platforms and brokering for policy and practitioners. In addition, over the past four years universities have suffered major disruptions which have constrained their capacity to pro-actively invest in urban knowledge capabilities.

The above issues pose urgent, multidimensional and interconnected challenges for urban strategies. Their outcomes in urban settings have direct implications for the natural environment, social wellbeing and national productivity.



3. RECENT FEDERAL GOVERNMENT POLICIES

The national urban policy landscape has also changed considerably during 2022-23. The Federal government has committed to **a national approach to sustainable urban development** including:

- development of a National Urban Policy, a national Urban Policy Forum expert advisory panel, and a regular State of the Cities report, to be coordinated by a Cities and Suburbs Unit;
- new funding and partnership programs for city, suburban and regional precincts' liveability and local improvement while maintaining existing City and Regional Deals; and
- reforming the role of Infrastructure Australia on infrastructure investments.

New climate policy mechanisms relevant to sustainable cities and regions include commitment to Australia's first National Climate Risk Assessment, a National Adaptation Plan, a Net Zero Authority, and more ambitious greenhouse gas emissions and renewable energy targets which are to be supported by six sector decarbonisation plans. The associated transitions will have ramifications across cities and regions.

Other relevant new policies include:

- **The National Housing Accord with states and territories and other stakeholders, the Housing Australia Future Fund and the proposed 10-year National Housing and Homelessness Plan.** How states and territories implement these initiatives, which include densification and social housing elements, will be crucial.
- **A National Electric Vehicle Strategy, and a Transport and Infrastructure Net Zero Roadmap and Action Plan which began consultation in late-2023.** Both of these are relevant to urban transport systems.
- **The Future Made in Australia strategy and National Reconstruction Fund to help diversify and transform Australia's industry in areas such as renewables and low emissions technologies; transport; value adding in primary industries; and high tech and enabling capabilities.** Successful urban and regional planning is essential to attract and accommodate local and international investment.

- **A Nature Positive Plan, Nature Repair Market, and formative circular economy strategies.** Nature based solutions and circular economies can meet multiple urban objectives.
- **A place-based, whole-of-government and community-led approach to designing and delivering community services where there is entrenched disadvantage.** This will often be in urban environments.
- **An initial national wellbeing framework developed by Treasury to provide more balanced 'measure what matters' reporting to Australians.** This should influence urban performance assessment frameworks.

The Referendum 'No' vote on an Indigenous Voice to Parliament only reemphasises the continuing imperative to find ways to meet national 'Closing the Gap' targets, signifying broader and sustained attention to First Nations' rights, justice and reform. This will necessarily play out in our urban environments (approximately 38 per cent of Indigenous Australians live in major cities, 44 per cent in regional areas and 17 per cent in remote areas).

The review of Australia's higher education system through the Australian Universities Accord has also acknowledged the spatial dimensions of national education policy development. The Accord aims to increase participation in higher education by low-socio-economic status, regional and Indigenous students through Regional University Centres and Tertiary Study Hubs, redressing the concentration of universities in the central areas of the major cities. The Accord is also relevant to the spatial distribution of research activity as a state-funded source of high-skill jobs.

Success in the above will depend on the detail, and on the leadership, institutional, governance and supporting capabilities to deliver, including connections to urban and regional policy and planning. At the current time there seems to be support from state and territory governments for most if not all of these policy directions, which is important given their responsibility for urban strategy, planning and implementation.

4. UPDATED STRATEGY - BUILDING AUSTRALIA'S URBAN CAPABILITIES

The recent consultations confirmed the core 2019 finding that the essence of a National Strategy should be to transform a range of national, regional and local capabilities to help drive and navigate urban transitions in the short, medium and long term. The required capabilities and proposed strategic responses identified are summarised below and in the Roadmap at Figure 1. Detail of the proposed Strategies, Actions and Responsibilities forms the Appendix.



CONSISTENT AND SUSTAINED URBAN LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

VISION FOR ACTION: STRATEGY 1.1-1.4

International and domestic pressures for sustainable development will continue to build. Urban leaders and decision-makers need to reflect newer values in sustainability, resilience and equity as well as liveability and productivity. More public and private sector funding and investment will be needed to address social, economic and environmental transformations. Consistent and sustained leadership and governance are required to engage the community, shape the long-term transition pathways, respond to current priorities, negotiate differences, challenge the status quo where necessary, and navigate the inevitable change and uncertainty as new urban issues emerge. Leadership is needed from all sectors but especially now from governments at all levels to provide a sense of direction and stability.

The Strategy seeks leadership and more coordinated governance of urban and regional systems through National Cabinet, state, territory and local governments, acting at multiple scales and supported by a collaborative National Urban Policy. This includes a line of sight from visioning to action between governance levels; effective ways of working across multi-agency silos, private sector, and community interests; and catalysing development of the other urban capabilities. It also proposes a national urban research program to support the visioning, policy, planning and implementation, including a much-improved understanding of interactions across sectors and between policy areas at various levels.

INCLUSIVE AND EFFECTIVE STAKEHOLDER AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

VISION FOR ACTION: STRATEGY 1.5-1.6

The consultations emphasised that urban environments are embedded within wider cultures, histories and geographies and that urban governance, knowledge production and innovation, should reflect diverse interests with all people potentially being both providers and users of relevant knowledge. This is consistent with a community-centred, place-based and culturally-aware delivery of programs and services, and greater empowerment of communities. Because all Australian cities sit on Country, First Nations knowledges need to be recovered, recognised and incorporated in urban policy.

The Strategy addresses these needs initially by focusing on the National Urban Policy development and implementation processes at all levels, as key opportunities to demonstrate inclusive and effective engagement. It then proposes development and promulgation of proven good practices through a national engagement knowledge platform. One aim is to assist with meaningful co-design of urban decisions that impact stakeholders and communities, and especially traditionally marginalised and disadvantaged peoples. The proposed National Urban Knowledge and Innovation Forum (NUKIF) and Urban Knowledge and Innovation Hub Network (see below) provide complementary vehicles for promoting engagement from national to local scales.

EXTENSIVE INNOVATION AND KNOWLEDGE-INFORMED DECISIONS

ENABLE INNOVATION: STRATEGY 2 AND CONNECT KNOWLEDGE: STRATEGY 3

The federal government has indicated a desire for more evidence-based policy and investments, and for greater innovation and productivity. Consultations indicated that urban knowledge, research, and innovation is extremely siloed, fragmented, and under-resourced, which limits access to the useful evidence government is calling for. The challenge is accentuated by the wider hollowing-out of public sector knowledge capacity, and increasingly complex interdependencies of urban-related policies and decisions.

Our urban environments are linked not only spatially but also by diverse and interdependent systems and processes. A common nexus is that between transport, housing, employment and services, but there are many other urban interdependencies involving elements of (for example) environment, water, food, energy, industry, education and health systems. A systems approach will also identify co-benefits (e.g. private and public investment for climate and technology-driven transitions can also be shaped to support related urban objectives).

The Strategy introduces a National Urban Knowledge and Innovation Forum (NUKIF) comprising key research, policy, practice, stakeholder and community representatives. This will provide input to the other knowledge and innovation initiatives and propose a national mission-based urban research and innovation agenda to guide future investments. Innovation may be environmental, social, technological and in governance. The Strategy also introduces a national network of local Knowledge and Innovation Hubs to encourage local innovation and transdisciplinary practices and (assisted by a National Urban Knowledge and Innovation Platform) improve the cross-systems brokering and sharing of existing knowledge and scaling potential of innovation. The Hubs will work locally and nationally with existing local or issue-based networks and provide a bridge between national/state/territory policies and on the ground implementation. They will be complemented by a program to further enhance Australia's international research connections in this critical period.

POLICY-PRACTICE-RESEARCH (P-P-R) COLLABORATIONS

BUILD CAPACITY: STRATEGY 4

The consultations found that the strategies for building Australia's urban capabilities could be enhanced by stronger collaborations between policy-makers, practitioners and researchers. This would lead to collective understanding of shared missions, and opportunities to improve each-others' as well as their own skills and practices.

The Strategy aims to produce new cohorts of urban researchers, practitioners and policy-makers with the advanced skills to better frame, co-develop and apply new knowledge that serves emerging national and local urban goals. It includes fully resourced programs for policy, practice and research institutions to provide practical experiences to each other, backed by scholarships, fellowships, secondments and complementary activities.



ROADMAP FOR IMPLEMENTATION

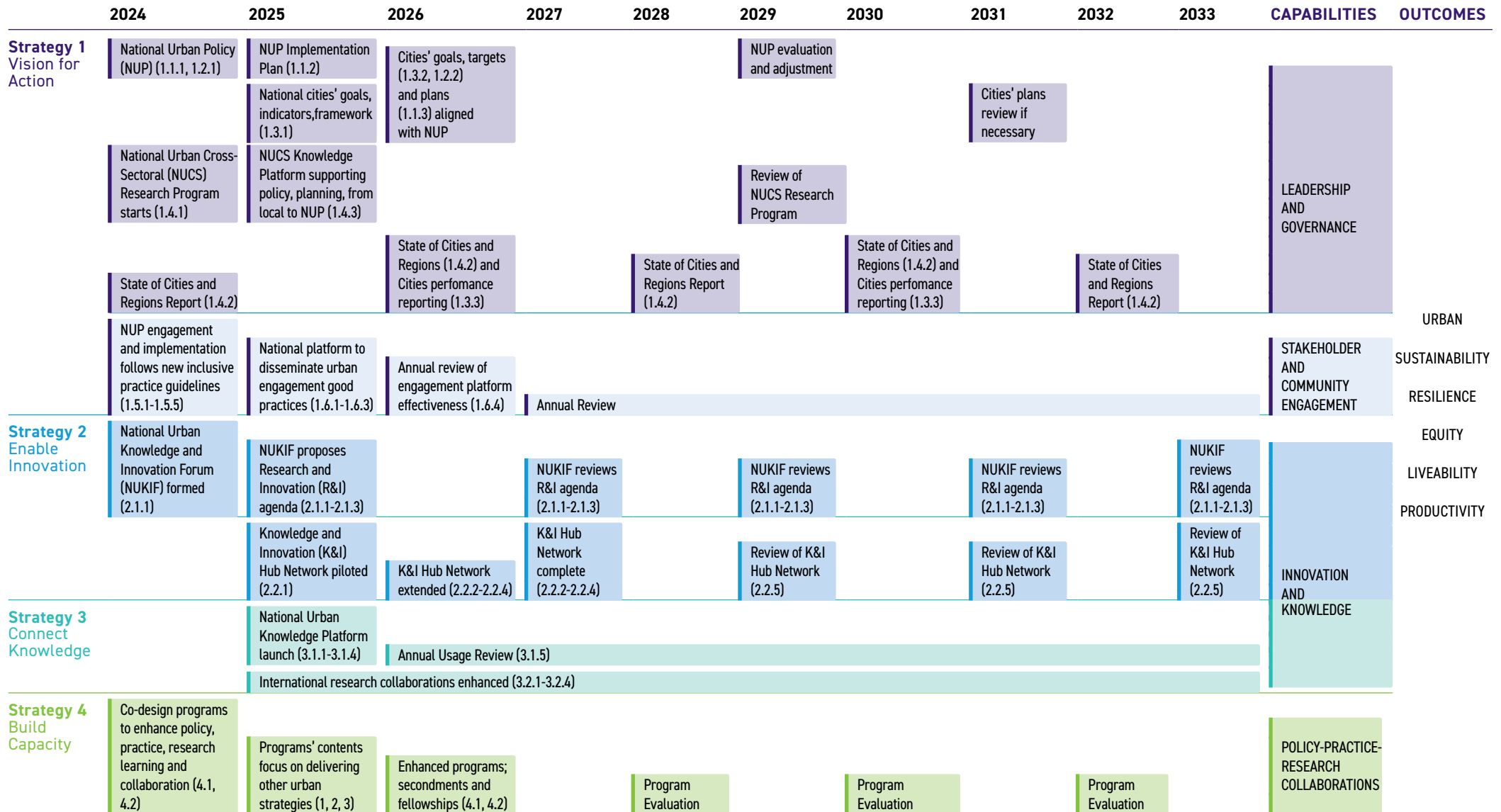


Figure 1
ROADMAP - URBAN STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

MOVING FORWARD – THE ROADMAP AND GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP ROLES

The Roadmap for Implementation (Fig 1) summarises the updated strategies, actions and timelines and the urban capabilities and outcomes they target. The detail of the updated Strategies and Actions, Performance Indicators and Responsibilities is at the Appendix.

To maximise their transformative potential, the strategies need to be implemented in a coordinated manner. As well as the main links from strategies to capabilities shown in Figure 1, there are many other synergies within and between the four strategies. Benefits will increase exponentially if all are undertaken as a package.

In particular two complementary proposals – the National Urban Policy (Action 1.1) and the local-to-national Knowledge and Innovation Hubs Network (Action 2.2) – are seen as cornerstones. A next step includes their more detailed framing and co-design. Our consultation processes, combined with international experience and guidance, have provided scoping ideas for each of these initiatives, indicating

a need to learn from but also move beyond previous approaches. We can share these ideas into next step co-design processes.

While it is critical that a National Strategy has buy in from all governments, private sector, other stakeholders and community representatives, such as those we have consulted, it is also the case that the Federal Government should have a primary leadership role for some initiatives and State/Territory Governments for others. These are summarised in Figure 2.

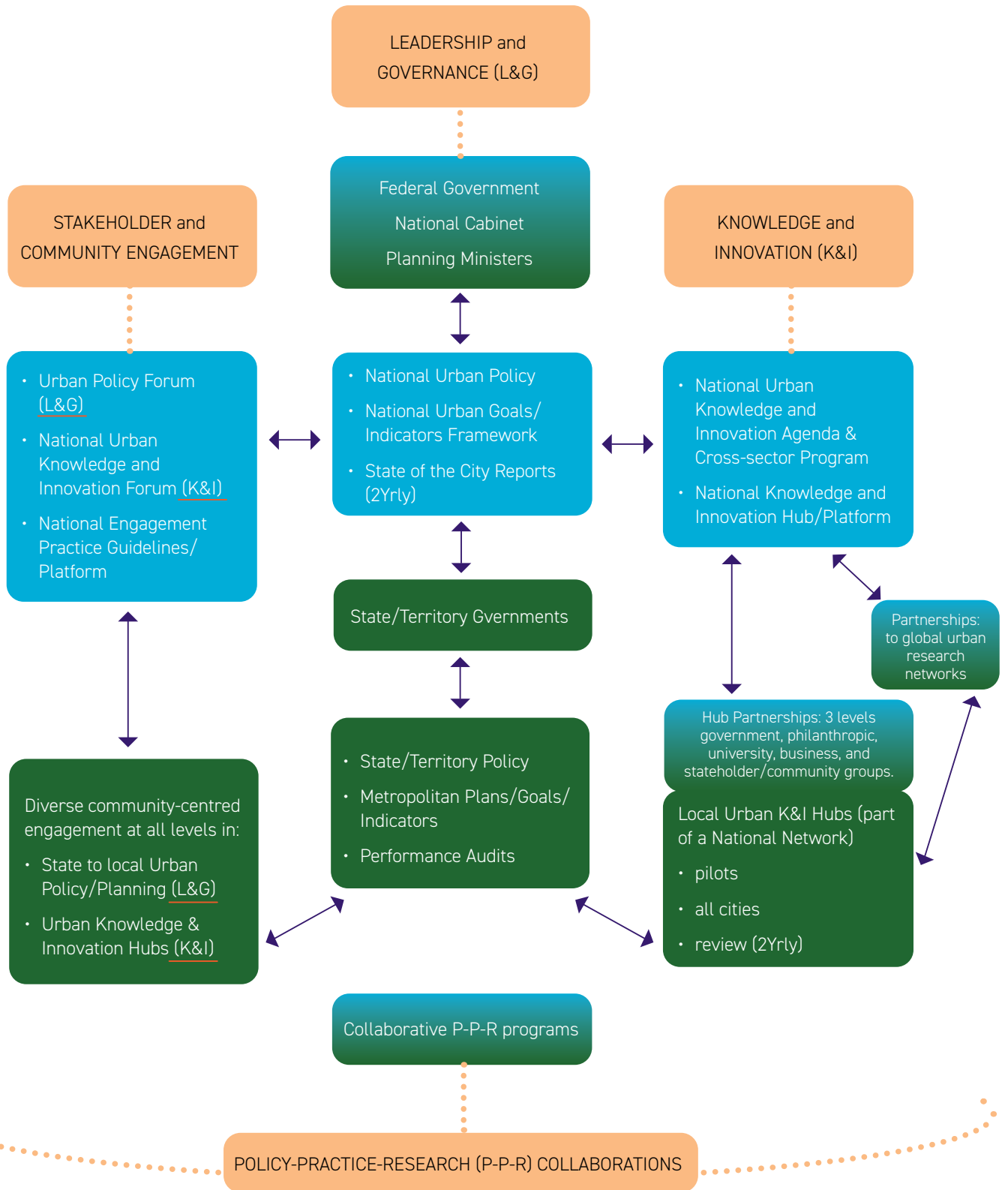
The capabilities, strategies and roles identified in this Strategy are necessary to address the multi-dimensional urban challenges, missions and innovations within and across policy areas, and the desired sustainability, resilience, liveability, equity and productivity outcomes. A more integrated, collaborative and community-engaged approach to urban policy, planning, implementation, innovation and knowledge is critical. This Strategy has been co-developed with the initial (2018-19) inputs of stakeholder interviews and workshops around Australia, and recent updates from those participants. It is ready to support delivery of a revitalised forward-looking national urban agenda.



Figure 2

PRIMARY LEADERSHIP ROLES - FEDERAL AND STATE/TERRITORY GOVERNMENTS

National Strategy Actions with primary **Federal** and **State/Territory** leadership roles; mapped to **related Urban Capabilities**



Shows National Strategy Actions contributing to key capabilities, with primary federal and state/territory leadership roles. Note that this does not include all National Strategy Actions and responsibilities. The detail is at the Appendix where responsibilities have been deliberately designed so that multiple entities and communities can 'own' various parts of the coordinated whole.

APPENDIX

10 YEAR STRATEGIES, ACTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

STRATEGY 1: VISION FOR ACTION

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Establish a national framework and process to achieve the SDGs, national and local goals in cities and regions.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Embed stakeholder and civil society participation in urban and regional knowledge, policy, and practice.

Issues	Actions	Performance indicators	Who is responsible
Escalating and increasingly interconnected urban and regional challenges require urgent transformational change.	Action 1.1 Establish a collaborative visioning framework to inform an evolving National Urban Policy that reflects international best practice, and guides planning and decision-making for Australian cities and regions. <i>The Policy to at least include approaches to:</i> Urban visioning, goals, missions, planning, design, performance monitoring and navigation; horizontal and vertical policy coordination; national settlement strategies; stakeholder and community engagement; knowledge and innovation capabilities; finance, investment and resourcing principles.	Performance indicator 1.1.1 National Urban Policy, reflecting the UN Habitat Program and OECD principles and guidance, released during 2024; full review and adjustment in 2029 Performance indicator 1.1.2 Implementation plan agreed by National Cabinet in 2024, launched in 2025 Performance indicator 1.1.3 Cities greater than 50,000 population (approx. 30 cities), and any additional regional cities undergoing net zero transformation, to establish or progressively revise metropolitan plans by 2026 to reflect the National Urban Policy as well as their local and regional challenges and opportunities	Who is responsible 1.1.1 Federal government to lead in collaboration with State/Territory governments via National Cabinet, including input from the Urban Policy Forum Who is responsible 1.1.2 National Cabinet Who is responsible 1.1.3 State/Territory and local governments working in consultation with regional development organisations (including Regional Development Australia), the private sector, communities, and (for regional cities undergoing net zero transformation) the Net Zero Authority
Australia lacks a national strategy and vision for the role that cities and regional urban areas play in our economic, social, and environmental future.	Action 1.2 Embed the Sustainable Development Goals and related national goals across all actions and related policy activity within this <i>Ten-Year Strategy to enable Urban Systems Transformation</i> and the National Urban Policy	Performance indicator 1.2.1 The National Urban Policy addresses the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and related national goals and considers how strategies and resources primarily for non-urban goals can also contribute to urban and regional outcomes (2024) Performance indicator 1.2.2 Metropolitan plans include appropriate translation of SDGs and national goals into the local and regional context (2026)	Who is responsible 1.2.1 Federal government to lead in collaboration with State/Territory and local governments and urban stakeholders and communities. Who is responsible 1.2.2 State/Territory and local governments to lead with stakeholder and community engagement
The role that individual cities play in fulfilling such a strategy is unclear. There is some localisation of SDGs by local governments but no national guidance on implementing SDGs and national goals.	Action 1.3 Establish a national <i>cities goals, indicators and targets framework</i> aligned with the National Urban Policy, the National Wellbeing Framework, and with learning from the previous National Cities Performance Framework (NCPF). This should show what success looks like.	Performance indicator 1.3.1 Establish a national <i>cities goals, indicators and targets framework</i> by mid-2025 Performance indicator 1.3.2 Goals and targets for all cities, aligned with the National Urban Policy while also reflecting our urban diversity and local priorities, to be established by 2026 Performance indicator 1.3.3 Undertake performance audit for all cities, aligned with the National Urban Policy and alternate State of the Environment 2 yearly reporting mechanisms ie 4 yearly from 2026.	Who is responsible 1.3.1 Federal government to lead in collaboration with State/Territory governments via National Cabinet Who is responsible 1.3.2 State/Territory and local governments with regional development organisations, urban stakeholder groups and peak bodies. Who is responsible 1.3.3 An independent body comprising a range of interests informed by science, appointed and resourced by Federal and State/Territory governments; supplemented by ongoing assessment by the research community
Governments, businesses, civil society, and researchers do not have a consistent framework and guiding national strategy and outcomes to which they can orient their effort and investment.			

Issues	Actions	Performance indicators	Who is responsible
Policies, investments and research have been siloed and fragmented, whereas the simultaneous changes in many areas at once requires a more integrated 'urban systems' and 'urban science' perspective.	Action 1.4 Build knowledge of interactions, synergies and trade-offs within and between urban and regional systems to support National Urban Policy implementation, including cross-sector goals, mission-development, policy, planning and review, from local to national scales	Performance indicator 1.4.1 Urban research recognised as a national priority in 2024, and a national urban cross-sectoral (NUCS) research program established by Q4 2024	Who is responsible 1.4.1 Federal government to lead in collaboration with State and Territory governments via National Cabinet
		Performance indicator 1.4.2 Fund and deliver the State of the Cities and Regions assessment report on conditions and dynamics in Australian cities and regions, led by the research community in consultation with urban stakeholders, by end of 2024, and two-yearly thereafter	Who is responsible 1.4.2 Federal Government, with support from the State and Territory governments via National Cabinet, commissioning research community to coordinate inputs including from private and public sector stakeholders
		Performance indicator 1.4.3 Provide a national platform to consolidate knowledge on cross-sectoral urban systems issues and innovation by 2025 (see also Actions 2.2 and 3.1)	Who is responsible 1.4.3 Federal government to lead in collaboration with State and Territory governments via National Cabinet with input from the Urban Knowledge and Innovation Hub Network (Action 2.2)
Stakeholder and civil society inclusion in urban strategy and planning is irregular and fragmented, with limited opportunity to contribute to the design of higher-level and place-based local strategy and implementation. Current engagement practices often exclude disadvantaged and marginalised citizens and communities.	Action 1.5 Embed inclusive transdisciplinary participation, meaningful engagement, and co-design between researchers, policy makers, practitioners, business, and communities in development and ongoing implementation of the National Urban Policy from local place-based to national levels	Performance indicator 1.5.1 Establish new practice guidelines for inclusion of diverse stakeholders in urban policy formulation, implementation and bridging of current disconnects between stakeholders (in 2024)	Who is responsible 1.5.1 A partnership between the scientific community, Federal, State/Territory and local governments, and business and community peak bodies to lead the process, engaging widely
		Performance indicator 1.5.2 Institute national arrangements to enable engaged and participatory urban policy formulation, including the Urban Policy Forum at the federal level (from 2023-2024)	Who is responsible 1.5.2 Federal, State and Territory and local governments
		Performance indicator 1.5.3 Ensure engagement includes participation recognising the rights and knowledge of First Nations people (from 2024)	Who is responsible 1.5.3 All levels of government and private sector decision-makers with First Nations communities
		Performance indicator 1.5.4 Ensure engagement includes other traditionally marginalised and disadvantaged groups (from 2024)	Who is responsible 1.5.4 All levels of government and private sector decision-makers with diverse and marginalised communities
	Action 1.6 Build a national platform and supporting processes to enhance, curate, and disseminate knowledge of how to undertake and apply effective engagement, participation, co-design and negotiated practices and outcomes in urban contexts	Performance indicator 1.6.1 Platform established by 2025	Who is responsible 1.6.1-1.6.2 Federal Government to lead, in concert with the State and Territory governments
		Performance indicator 1.6.2 Platform to apply principles of open access	Who is responsible 1.6.3 Dissemination led by governments at all levels supported by research communities
		Performance indicator 1.6.3 Wide dissemination and uptake of platform	Who is responsible 1.6.4 Independent monitoring and evaluation to occur via the scientific and research communities, with supplementary evaluation procured by governments
		Performance indicator 1.6.4 Monitor and evaluate platform uptake annually starting 2026	

STRATEGY 2: ENABLE INNOVATION

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Create a national institutional framework to link urban research, policy, and practice communities and innovation and knowledge initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Establish a national network of knowledge and innovation hubs to empower local urban and regional innovation across Australia

Issues	Actions	Performance indicators	Who is responsible
Those working on issues related to sustainable cities and regions ('Urban Systems') are disconnected from each other, across sectors, scales and disciplines.	Action 2.1 Establish a National Urban Knowledge and Innovation Forum alongside the biennial 'State of Australasian Cities' conference to drive a national mission-based urban research and innovation agenda-setting process and provide advice to other knowledge and innovation initiatives. Innovations may be environmental, social, technological and in governance.	Performance indicator 2.1.1 A National Urban Knowledge and Innovation Forum (NUKIF) established by 2024 which operates as a multi-sector, multi-stakeholder forum to guide <i>knowledge and innovation co-production and sharing</i> agenda setting every two years, starting in 2025 (aligned with SOAC conference) Performance indicator 2.1.2 Existing scientific institutional arrangements leveraged to support the National Urban Knowledge and Innovation Forum agenda-setting process Performance indicator 2.1.3 National Urban Knowledge and Innovation Forum aligned with the Australasian Cities Research Network (ACRN) as the formally established urban research network in Australia	Who is responsible 2.1.1 Federal government to lead in collaboration with State and Territory governments, and the University and research sector, including CSIRO and other publicly funded research organisations, and the Knowledge and Innovation Network (see Action 2.2); Forum to include key policy, practice, stakeholder and community as well as research representatives Who is responsible 2.1.2 National scientific bodies and funding agencies Who is responsible 2.1.3 Federal government and Australasian Cities Research Network (ACRN)
There is no formalised common ground or structure to facilitate existing and new knowledge transfer and learning.			
Network building between different parts of the urban community of practice lacks consistency and common purpose.			
Wide adoption of useful research and innovation is obstructed by this lack of structure for collaboration, and ultra-competitive funding.	Action 2.2 Establish a network of cross-sector local Knowledge and Innovation Hubs at city and regional scales across Australia to facilitate local innovation and learning; cross-sector knowledge sharing, co-production and uptake; and building of local relationships, capabilities and trust.	Performance indicator 2.2.1 National Urban Knowledge and Innovation Hub established and first set of Knowledge and Innovation Hubs piloted in selected cities by 2025 Performance indicator 2.2.2 Access to Knowledge and Innovation Hubs established for all cities and regions by 2027 with clear governance frameworks Performance indicator 2.2.3 The hubs to be formally linked to the National Urban Knowledge and Innovation Forum and knowledge sharing platforms (Actions 2.1 and 3.1) Performance indicator 2.2.4 The hubs demonstrate wide stakeholder involvement including private sector, professions, innovators and start-ups, communities and civil society, industry, governments, philanthropies and the research sector. This could include participants in the Federal Governments Urban and Regional Precincts and Partnerships Programs, and remaining City and Regional Deals Performance indicator 2.2.5 Formal evaluation and impact reviews every two years commencing 2029	Who is responsible 2.2.1-2.2.5 Led by the Federal government/ National Cabinet, with innovative Knowledge and Innovation Hub partnerships to be developed and co-funded/resourced by Federal, State and Territory governments with local governments, the philanthropic sector, universities and other research bodies, business, and other stakeholder groups.
Sharing governance, engagement and societal innovation is even more scarce than for technical innovation	Establish a National Urban Knowledge and Innovation Hub to coordinate and facilitate the nationally networked knowledge transfer and brokering, and scaling of innovations.		
Silos are further entrenched by geography, culture, and jurisdictional scale.			
Disconnect slows progress to achieving progress on the Sustainable Development Goals.			

STRATEGY 3: CONNECT KNOWLEDGE

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Establish and sustain integrated national and regional platforms for knowledge and data brokering and sharing across the research, policy, and practice communities.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

Develop new capability to connect diverse knowledge across sectors, disciplines, and professions, and internationally, to achieve urban and regional visions.

Issues	Actions	Performance indicators	Who is responsible
<p>Knowledge and data created across Australian research, industry, government, and civil society communities needs to be available and accessible.</p> <p>Connected knowledge and data is requisite for economic and scientific productivity.</p> <p>Data, modelling, and other critical knowledge sets are often not easily accessible or discoverable for those working in urban systems, particularly between sectors.</p> <p>Urban science to develop urban knowledge is increasingly being seen as a sustainable development priority internationally. Australian researchers and practitioners are often individually well-connected internationally, but more systemic engagement could better bring good practices to the country.</p> <p>Barriers to information sharing can have a significant negative effect on collaboration and mainstreaming of integrated work on urban systems.</p>	<p>Action 3.1 Co-develop an open access urban knowledge platform supported by governments and industry or sector partners for a minimum of ten years</p> <p>Action 3.2 Link Australian researchers and institutions into international urban research networks</p>	<p>Performance indicator 3.1.1 Launch and promote a national open access (but where necessary secure) knowledge platform for collating, indexing, hosting/linking, translating and disseminating Australian urban research, innovation and policy material, by 2025</p> <p>Performance indicator 3.1.2 Knowledge platform to be complementary to the urban data and analytics platforms provided by AURIN, also helping prioritise need for, access to, and use of rapidly increasing digital data sources.</p> <p>Performance indicator 3.1.3 Platform strategy linked to stakeholders via the National Urban Knowledge and Innovation Forum and Hub Network (Actions 2.1, 2.2), and National Urban Policy processes (Actions 1.1-1.6)</p> <p>Performance indicator 3.1.4 Track and report publicly the use of the platform by number of site visits, length of stay, and modes of digital sharing, annually</p> <p>Performance indicator 3.2.1 New arrangements established for collaboration on urban research between Australian and overseas researchers and institutions by 2025</p> <p>Performance indicator 3.2.2 Australian urban researchers and institutions supported and enabled to participate in overseas research and policy collaborations, including via dedicated funding programs</p> <p>Performance indicator 3.2.3 Researcher and practitioner fellowships funded for short-term travel and study activities linked to globally significant urban research and training hubs (see the Australia Awards program)</p> <p>Performance indicator 3.2.4 Urban researchers and policy institutions encouraged and funded to collaborate with major international urban research and policy agencies, forums, and networks</p>	<p>Who is responsible 3.1.1-3.1.3 Federal government and proposed National Urban Knowledge and Innovation Hub (Action 2.1.1) in clearly role-defined partnerships with existing platforms including: AURIN, CSIRO/BOM, Geoscience Australia initiatives, the ABS, NCRIS, relevant initiatives of universities, CRCs and other research institutions and publicly funded consultancies; with urban policy, practice, stakeholder and community input</p> <p>Who is responsible 3.1.4 Tracking to be the responsibility of the hosting platform</p> <p>Who is responsible 3.2.1-3.2.3 Federal and State and Territory governments, national scientific peak and disciplinary bodies, and universities in partnership</p> <p>Who is responsible 3.2.4 Drawing on the Knowledge and Innovation Hubs Network (Action 2.2), and a dedicated partnership funding pool between federal government and universities</p>

STRATEGY 4: BUILD CAPACITY

RECOMMENDATION 7:

Establish a national program to expand researcher and policy-maker/practitioner capability for knowledge exchange across urban and regional research, policy and practice communities.

RECOMMENDATION 8:

Fund a national program to embed researchers and policy-makers/practitioners within relevant organisations linked to knowledge co-production for urban and regional goals.

Issues	Actions	Performance indicators	Who is responsible
<p>Work in urban systems is often siloed between researchers, practitioners and policy and across sectors and locations; this impedes implementation of a National Urban Policy.</p> <p>Many actors lack appreciation of others' diverse expertise, methodologies, applications, and the strategies needed for networked collaboration.</p> <p>Current research and professional institutions are mostly not equipped or resourced to undertake necessary training and apply learnings in practice.</p>	<p>Action 4.1 Build the capability and capacity of urban researchers to engage with policymakers and practitioners to deliver practicable knowledge linked to the National Urban Policy implementation at all levels and the SDGs, and to connect them to the Knowledge and Innovation Hubs</p>	<p>Performance indicator 4.1.1 Policy engagement skills incorporated into university teaching and higher degree research programs to improve the policy relevance and translation of research and its applicability</p>	<p>Who is responsible 4.1.1 Universities, in coordination with peak professional bodies, supported by relevant governments</p>
		<p>Performance indicator 4.1.2 A national program of PhD Scholarships for a new trans-disciplinary cross-institutional PhD program linked to the National Urban Policy, with 50 funded annually by 2026 and 100 annually by 2029</p>	<p>Who is responsible 4.1.2 Federal and State and Territory governments, coordinated with the Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) scheme</p>
		<p>Performance indicator 4.1.3 A national program of funded secondments across early, mid, and senior career levels established for urban researchers to embed within policy and practice organisations, by 2026, to occur annually, and evaluated every two years</p>	<p>Who is responsible 4.1.3 Federal and State and Territory governments and universities</p>
		<p>Performance indicator 4.1.4 Fellowship program established for researchers to undertake policy-related research in collaboration with policy and practice organisations, by 2026, to occur annually, and evaluated every two years</p>	<p>Who is responsible 4.1.4 Federal and State and Territory governments and universities</p>
		<p>Performance indicator 4.1.5 Establish and fund a national PhD training network via residential intensive symposia in urban theory methodology and research-to-policy translation, by 2026, to occur annually, and evaluated every two years</p>	<p>Who is responsible 4.1.5 Federal and State and Territory governments for funding; universities for delivery</p>
	<p>Action 4.2 Build the capability and capacity of urban policy, planning and other practitioners to engage with researchers to apply research in policy and practice linked to the National Urban Policy implementation at all levels and the SDGs</p>	<p>Performance indicator 4.2.1 Dedicated scholarships funded for policy and practice professionals to undertake research Masters and PhD programs aligned to the National Urban Policy by 2026</p>	<p>Who is responsible 4.2.1 Incorporated into Graduate and Professional Development Programs throughout relevant government departments and the private sector</p>
		<p>Performance indicator 4.2.2 Fund dedicated secondments and fellowships for policy and practice professionals within urban research sector institutions by 2026</p>	<p>Who is responsible 4.2.2 A State and Territory government led initiative</p>
		<p>Performance indicator 4.2.3 Professional bodies supported to strengthen practitioner capability in framing, procuring, guiding, and appraising research in policy and practice formulation, implementation, and review</p>	<p>Who is responsible 4.2.3 Federal and State and Territory governments, professional peak bodies, and universities</p>
		<p>Performance indicator 4.2.4 Urban professional accreditation bodies to require a research component within professional degree qualifications and continuing professional development (e.g. through modular short-term training programs)</p>	<p>Who is responsible 4.2.4 Professional peak bodies</p>
		<p>Performance indicator 4.2.5 Investigate extent of, and reasons for, workforce shortages and skills depletion in urban planning and in construction trades, and recommend any actions further to those already underway</p>	<p>Who is responsible 4.2.5 Federal and State/Territory Governments, Professional and trades peak bodies with university and TAFE sector representatives.</p>

EXPERT REFERENCE GROUP

The development of the 2019 Strategy was overseen by a group of leading experts (listed below) across urban research, practice and policy, representing

cities from around Australia, and participating in the local workshops. They also contributed to this 2024 Updated Strategy.

Professor Jago Dodson	Chair - Expert Reference Group Director of the Urban Futures Enabling Impact Platform, RMIT University
Dr Tayanah O'Donnell	National Lead Partner for Climate Adaptation, Risk and Resilience, Deloitte Australia
Professor Bob Webb	Honorary Associate Professor, Institute for Climate, Energy and Disaster Solutions - Australian National University
Professor Kate Auty	Professorial Fellow – University of Melbourne
Distinguished Professor Xuemei Bai	Professor of Urban Environment and Human Ecology – Australian National University Co-Chair – Future Earth Urban Knowledge-Action Network
Mr Guy Barnett	Coordinator, Future Cities Initiative – CSIRO
Professor Paul Burton	Director – Cities Research Institute, Griffith University
Professor Anthony Capon	Director – Monash Sustainable Development Institute, Monash University
Professor Robert Costanza	Professor of Ecological Economics at the Institute for Global Prosperity - University College London
Dr Michael Fotheringham	Executive Director – Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
Dr Steve Hill	Chief Scientist – Geoscience Australia Fellow – Australasian Institute for Mining and Metallurgy
Professor Tom Kvan	Founding Director – Australian Urban Research Infrastructure Network (AURIN) Honorary Fellow – Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, University of Melbourne Fellow – Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors
Professor Ken Maher AO	Honorary Professor, School of Built Environment - University of New South Wales Life Fellow – Australian Institute of Architects Fellow – Australian Institute of Landscape Architects
Professor Nicky Morrison*	Director – Urban Transformations Research Centre and Leader of the Urban and Regional Research Program - Western Sydney University
Distinguished Professor Peter Newman AO	Professor of Sustainability – Curtin University
Distinguished Professor Peter W. Newton FASSA	Emeritus Professor of Sustainable Built Environments – Swinburne University of Technology
Professor Barbara Norman	Emeritus Professor of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Canberra Honorary Professor, Institute for Climate, Energy and Disaster Solutions - Australian National University
Professor Christopher Pettit	Director – City Analytics Program, University of New South Wales Director – City Futures Research Centre, University of New South Wales Fellow – PluS Alliance Chair – Computers in Urban Planning and Urban Management Board
Distinguished Professor Deo Prasad AO FTSE	Scientia Professor, University of New South Wales, CEO - New South Wales Decarbonisation Hub, University of New South Wales
Professor Rob Raven	Deputy Director (Research) and Professor of Sustainability Transitions – Monash Sustainable Development Institute, Monash University
Professor Christopher Ryan	Emeritus Professor, Design and Sustainable Futures, RMIT University
Professor Juan Francisco Salazar Sutil	Professor, School of Humanities and Communication Arts, University of Western Sydney Fellow, Institute for Culture and Society University of Western Sydney
Professor Neil Sipe	Honorary Professor of Planning – University of Queensland
Dr Mark Stafford-Smith	Honorary Fellow – CSIRO Land & Water

*Joined in 2023

