PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES
THE 2014 REGIONAL WELLBEING SURVEY

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People and place in Australia: The 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey

Report 1 People and communities

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- Palerang Council
- Port Augusta City Council
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- RDA Central West
- RDA Far North
- RDA Far North Queensland and Torres Strait
- RDA Far South Coast
- RDA Far West NSW
- RDA Hunter
- RDA Limestone Coast
- RDA Murray
- RDA Murraylands and Riverland
• RDA Northern Inland
• RDA Northern Rivers
• RDA Orana
• RDA Riverina
• RDA South West
• RDA Southern Inland
• RDA Wheatbelt
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• Regional Arts NSW
• Regional Arts Victoria
• Regional Australia Institute
• Regional Development Victoria
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Executive Summary

Introduction
The idea of ‘wellbeing’ as a measure of progress is rapidly gaining support worldwide, with an increasing number of national and international organisations including indicators of wellbeing in their reporting. The word ‘wellbeing’ is used in different ways by different people, and is sometimes used interchangeably with related concepts such as ‘quality of life’, ‘life satisfaction’ or ‘wellness’, ‘health’ and ‘mental health’, to give just a few examples. Wellbeing is the outcome of many different influences which interact with each other in complex and dynamic ways. It is important to understand these multiple facets of wellbeing, and how they work to change a person’s overall quality of life, or a community’s liveability.

It is often difficult to find information on wellbeing, and particularly so for rural and regional communities. The Regional Wellbeing Survey helps address this gap, by examining the subjective wellbeing of people living in rural and regional areas of Australia, and how they are experiencing the many changes occurring in their communities. Two waves of the survey have been conducted, in 2013 and 2014. This report provides results for the 2014 survey, focusing on the theme of People and communities. Two further reports will be released from the 2014 survey, focusing on Farming and agriculture and Environment and natural resource management. In addition to the Regional Wellbeing Survey, two partner projects are also examining wellbeing: the Urban Wellbeing Survey (launched in 2014), and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing survey (data collection beginning in 2015).

The data produced from the Regional Wellbeing Survey is designed to complement information produced by other organisations such as the Regional Australia Institute and Australian Bureau of Statistics. Data from the survey are reported publicly, through reports such as this one, and tables of data available at www.regionalwellbeing.org.au. In-depth analyses of survey data are also produced for various organisations. Researchers interested in rural and regional wellbeing are also able to analyse data from the survey, subject to strict conditions on ethical use of the data.

Methods
A collaborative approach is used to design the Regional Wellbeing Survey and collect survey data. The 2014 survey asked participants about their own wellbeing and their community’s wellbeing, including their access to services and infrastructure, local environmental health, experience of extreme weather events, history of migration, participation in social and civic activities, volunteering, skills and education, health and health related behaviours. It also asked their views on environmental watering, the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, acceptability of land use change, climate change, mining and energy industries, controlled burning, and outdoor recreational activity. In addition, farmers were asked about their farm enterprise, irrigation and water trading, markets and the supply chain, access to grants and support, their on- and off-farm work and finances, farm management, future farming intentions, participation in natural resource management or regenerative farming, and barriers to farm development. This report examines a subset of these topics relevant to people and communities; additional survey results will be examined in subsequent reports.
Participants were able to complete the survey online or on paper, and were recruited to take part in the survey using multiple methods, including mailed flyers, email networks, and mailed paper surveys. In total, 12,125 people took part in the 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey, an increase of almost 3,000 compared to the 9,135 who took part in the 2013 survey.

Data presented in this report have, unless otherwise specified, been weighted to address biases in the survey sample, enabling the analysed data to be representative of the rural and regional Australian population. Like any survey, the data presented in this report has limitations and caveats. In particular, some groups may be under-represented even after weighting of data, and missing data have not been imputed.

This report compares the experiences of people living in different regions, and of people of different ages, gender, and who are and aren’t engaged in farming. These groups are compared because there are important differences between them, and because we have a large sample size for each. Many other groups could also be examined: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, migrants from other countries, and those identifying as ‘LGBTIQA’ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intergender, questioning or asexual), to name just a few. As the survey includes relatively small samples of each of these groups (100 to 300 people for each), more detailed analysis of the data for each of these groups is being conducted before producing findings for them.

Accessing data
In this report, we show results of the survey for people living in different states and regions. More detailed data for smaller regions is available at www.regionalwellbeing.org.au, where detailed tables of results can be downloaded for (i) local government areas (where enough responses were received), (ii) Regional Development Australia regions, and (iii) natural resource management regions (including catchment management authorities and Local Land Services regions).

Understanding wellbeing
The Regional Wellbeing Survey examines the wellbeing of individual people, and the wellbeing of the communities they live in. The wellbeing of a community is not simply the sum of the wellbeing of the individuals who make up that community, and the resources available in a community are not always shared equally with all the people within that community. Because of this, it is essential to examine the wellbeing of people and the wellbeing of communities, as well as the relationship between them.

Wellbeing of people
Wellbeing is about more than health: a person who has high levels of wellbeing is more broadly defined as someone who is able to realise their own potential and contribute to their community. The indicator used to analyse wellbeing outcomes for people was the Global Life Satisfaction measure, which is widely used in many surveys in Australia and internationally. A complex mix of factors influences the wellbeing of the people who live in any given region, and of different types of people. These include cultural, historical, social, economic, physical and health-related factors.

Between 2013 and 2014, the average wellbeing of rural and regional Australians did not change significantly. In 2014, at the population level there were no significant differences in the wellbeing of rural and regional Australians living in different states. However, the distribution of wellbeing differed: lower levels of wellbeing were more commonly reported in Queensland and Western
Australia than other states, and Queenslanders were less likely than those in other states to report higher levels of wellbeing. Those living in New South Wales and Tasmania were more likely to report high levels of wellbeing compared to those in other states. Wellbeing varied much more at the regional level. Average wellbeing scores were consistently lower in areas experiencing drought and rainfall deficiency, but were also low in several regions not experiencing drought.

Women, those aged 65 and older, and dryland farmers were more likely to report high levels of wellbeing compared to the national average. Men and those aged 30 to 49 were more likely to report low levels of wellbeing.

**Wellbeing of communities**

The future of Australia’s rural and regional communities is often a subject of debate, with concerns about loss of population in some communities, rapid influx of population in others, and a desire to maintain or increase the overall wellbeing of many communities. Communities with higher wellbeing, sometimes called high ‘liveability’, are those which function successfully to provide a high quality of life for all their residents. A community with high liveability, it is argued, is more likely to retain its existing residents, and to attract new people to live in it. It is also more likely to support high levels of wellbeing for its residents.

The indicator of overall community wellbeing used was the Community Wellbeing Index, which asks residents the extent to which they feel their community is a great place to live, copes well with challenges, has a bright future, has good community spirit, and is a place they are proud to live in.

People living in Queensland reported lower levels of community wellbeing compared to those living in other states. At the regional scale, there was more variability in community wellbeing. Men and women reported similar levels of community wellbeing, while farmers reported slightly higher community wellbeing compared to non-farmers.

Young people often experiencing living in rural and regional communities in very different ways to older people. Those aged under 30 years were most likely to report low community wellbeing: younger people had less pride in, and less confidence in the future of, their community, and were less likely to feel it was a great place to live or coped well with change.

**Wellbeing determinants**

Many factors influence the wellbeing of people and places, and the capacity of those people and places to adapt successfully to change. At the community scale, communities are commonly argued to be more resilient, adaptive and healthy if they have a strong economy, good access to services and infrastructure, aesthetically pleasing landscapes, low crime, positive social interaction and inclusion, strong institutions and governance, and positive leadership.

At the personal level, people with high levels of wellbeing who cope well with change often have high confidence in their skills and resources, low household financial stress, strong involvement in the community, good relationships with family and friends, good health, and are included in local decision making processes, amongst other things.

These factors are sometimes referred to as ‘determinants of wellbeing’, although in many cases available evidence is not definitive about when, how or the extent to which each of the factors examined in this report actually influences, or ‘determines’ wellbeing. Determinants of wellbeing are
not necessarily the same for all regions or types of people. This means that not all of the wellbeing determinants examined in this report will be important to all rural and regional Australians, or to all of the communities they live in.

Several wellbeing determinants were examined in the 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey, focusing on access to:

- Financial capital, in the form of (i) household financial wellbeing and (ii) local economic wellbeing
- Human capital, focusing on (i) confidence in skills and education, (ii) health and (iii) community leadership and collaboration
- Institutional capital, in the form of (i) having a say and being heard, and (ii) equity and inclusion
- Social capital, focusing on (i) spending time with friends and family, (ii) getting involved in the local community, and (iii) sense of belonging
- Physical capital, including (i) access to services and infrastructure, (ii) access to telecommunications, (iii) crime and safety, and (iv) landscape and aesthetics
- Natural capital, in the form of perceived environmental health.

Financial capital

‘Financial capital’ refers to the access of households and communities to financial resources that support their wellbeing.

Household financial wellbeing was measured by examining both household income, and self-rated household prosperity. When different states were compared, rural and regional residents living in Western Australian reported the highest average household financial wellbeing, and those in Tasmania the lowest. When different groups were compared, those aged 65 and older reported the lowest household financial wellbeing, and those aged 30 to 49, together with dryland farmers, the highest levels.

Community economic wellbeing was measured by asking survey participants to rate their local economy, jobs, and living costs. Victorian and New South Wales residents felt most positive about the economic wellbeing of their local economy. Queensland residents felt most negative, particularly in central and northern parts of the state. People living in areas affected by drought or downturn in the mining industry were particularly likely to rate the health of their local economy poorly. When different groups were compared, those aged 65 and older were more positive about their local economy compared to younger people. Dryland farmers were, on average, slightly more positive than non-farmers or irrigators.

Human capital

For individual people, human capital refers to the skills, resources and resilience a person can draw on to help achieve the things they want to in life. For communities, it can be thought of as the processes of leadership and collaboration in which people’s skills and resources are brought together to help ensure the future of a community. Three aspects of human capital were examined: (i) health, (ii) confidence in skills and education, and (iii) community leadership and collaboration.
When asked about their general health, people living in New South Wales and Western Australia were slightly more likely to report having very good or excellent health, and those in Queensland and South Australia less likely to. Younger people, women and dryland farmers on average reported better general health compared to older people, men, non-farmers and irrigators. Those aged under 30 reported better general health, but higher levels of psychological distress compared to other groups. Average distress levels fell as age increased, and were lowest for those aged 65 and over, and for dryland farmers. Average distress levels were slightly higher for men compared to women.

People living in Western Australia were more likely to report having high confidence in their skills and education compared to those in other states. Those in Victoria, and to a lesser extent Queensland and Tasmania, were less likely to feel confident in their skills and education. Those aged under 30 were more likely to report having low confidence in their skills and education compared to those in older age groups, while farmers were less likely to feel confident compared to non-farmers.

When community leadership and collaboration was examined, people living in Western Australia were most likely to report strong levels of leadership and collaboration in their local communities, and those in living in Queensland and Tasmania least likely to. Men, younger people and non-farmers reported lower confidence in the level of leadership and collaboration in their local communities; while women, older people and farmers reported higher confidence.

Overall, human capital was highest for older people and farmers, however the results show different aspects of human capital are stronger and poorer for different groups and in different regions. Farmers, for example, report better health, and stronger confidence in community leadership and collaboration, but lower confidence in their skills and education, compared to other groups. Younger people had lower than average scores for almost all dimensions of human capital.

Institutional capital

Institutional capital examines how well formal and informal organisations, rules and decision making processes operate in rural and regional communities. Local organisations and processes can be considered effective if they are fair, representative and achieve outcomes. Two aspects of institutional capital were examined: the ability of rural and regional Australians to have a say and be heard in local decision making processes, and the extent to which they felt every group in their community was included and fairly treated in that community’s day to day life (equity and inclusion).

There were few differences between states in the ability of rural and regional Australians to have a say and being heard, but substantial differences between regions within most states. People aged under 50 were less confident they could have a say and be heard in their local community, while older people and farmers were more confident.

People living in Victoria and Western Australia were more likely to feel their community was inclusive and equitable, and those in Tasmania, Queensland and South Australia less likely to. Younger people were least likely to feel their community was equitable and inclusive, and older people, dryland farmers, and irrigators were most likely to.

Social capital

Social capital refers to the social interactions between people, and the trust, reciprocity and social cohesion generated as a consequence of these interactions. The 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey
examined three aspects of social capital: (i) spending time with friends and family; (ii) getting involved in the local community and (iii) sense of belonging.

Survey participant were asked how frequently they spent time with friends and family. While this was mostly similar across rural and regional Australia, people living in Tasmania and Western Australia on average spent slightly less time with friends and family compared to those living in other states. People aged 65 and older, and to a less extent those aged 50 to 64, were more likely to spend time with friends and family than those in younger age groups. Women on average reported spending slightly more time with friends and family compared to men.

People living in Western Australia were more likely to report being frequently involved in local community events and organisations, and those in Victoria and South Australia less likely to, compared to those in other states. Women, older people and non-farmers were more likely than men, younger people and farmers to participate frequently in community organisations and activities. Participation in sports groups was quite different, with younger people and men more likely to be members of sports clubs or groups than older people and women.

Positive social interactions within a community can help build a strong sense of belonging – meaning that residents feel they are part of the community, that others in that community look out for them, and that they are welcomed by other community members. This sense of belonging is often strongly associated with a person’s overall wellbeing. On average, people living in Tasmania and Queensland had a slightly lower sense of belonging compared to those living in other states. Older people and farmers (both dryland and irrigators) were more likely than younger people and non-farmers to have a stronger sense of belonging to their community.

Physical capital

The physical characteristics of communities often influence how easy and enjoyable it is to live in that community. Four aspects of physical capital were examined: (i) access to services and infrastructure, (ii) access to telecommunications, (iii) crime and safety in the community, and (iv) landscape and aesthetics.

Access to services and infrastructure, such as health, education, childcare, and roads, was slightly poorer for rural and regional Australians living in Tasmania compared to other states. Differences were much larger between regions within states than between states: access to services and infrastructure was poorer in remote regions, and best in communities located near large cities or regional centres. Those aged 65 and older were on average more satisfied with their access to services and infrastructure than others, while dryland farmers reported poorer access compared to other groups.

Access to telecommunications was examined by asking rural and regional Australians how good or poor their access was to high speed internet and mobile phone coverage. People living in Tasmania and South Australia reported better access to telecommunications on average, and those in Queensland poorer access. People aged (i) under 30 and (ii) 65 or older reported better access than those aged 30 to 64, while farmers reported much lower access to telecommunications infrastructure compared to other groups.
Crime and safety in the community was examined by asking how safe people felt in their community, whether there was a high rate of crime, and whether they felt many people in their community misused alcohol or drugs. This measure focuses on crime and safety in the community, rather than in the household. The regions in which people felt most safe in their communities were Tasmania, southern regions of South Australia, and several Victorian regions. Those where they felt least safe were Western Australia and Queensland. Older people and dryland farmers were more likely to report feeling safe in their community, while those aged under 30 were least likely to feel safe.

Living in locations that have attractive natural places and built areas is often considered to have positive links to wellbeing. Queenslanders, and those living in more remote regions, were less likely than those living in other parts of rural and regional Australia to report that their community had attractive natural landscapes or buildings. Older people and irrigators were more likely to find their local landscape aesthetically pleasing compared to other rural and regional Australians.

Natural capital
Natural capital refers to the natural resources in a region, and the ecosystem services they provide. Survey participants were asked their perceptions of the water quality, soil health, exposure to feral animals, extent of weed invasion, air quality, health of vegetation, and diversity of animals in their local region.

People living in Tasmania and Victoria were more likely to consider their local environment to be in good health, and those in Queensland and Western Australia least likely to. In general, people living further inland were less likely to perceive their environment as being in good health. Those aged 30 to 64 were least likely to feel their local environment was healthy, and those aged 65 and older were most likely to. Farmers – particularly irrigators – were more likely to report the environment as in good health than non-farmers.

Wellbeing and its determinants
While all the wellbeing determinants examined in the survey were significantly statistically associated with the wellbeing of people and communities, some were more strongly associated than others. Community wellbeing was most strongly associated with high levels of leadership and collaboration, being able to have a say and be heard, and a strong sense of belonging. A person’s personal wellbeing, meanwhile, was most strongly associated with their sense of belonging, general health, and frequency of interaction with friends and family. Personal illbeing (indicated by levels of psychological distress) was, similar to wellbeing, strongly associated with a person’s general health and sense of belonging, but was also strongly associated with household financial wellbeing, and a person’s sense of equity and inclusion in their local community.

Every rural and regional area had a different mix of wellbeing opportunities and challenges, defined as areas in which the region had a higher than average or lower than average score for different wellbeing determinants. Some regions scored close to the national average for most wellbeing determinants; some scored above average in several areas; some were experiencing multiple challenges that are likely to compound each other; and others had a mix of both opportunities and challenges.

Farmers and non-farmers, people of different ages, and men and women also experienced different wellbeing related opportunities and challenges. Those aged 65 and older were much more likely
than those younger than 65 to have above average scores for all wellbeing determinants, with two exceptions: they reported poorer health, and poorer household financial wellbeing, compared to the average. Those aged below 30 were most likely to score below average for most wellbeing determinants. Men reported poorer health, and lower levels of social capital, compared to women, while women were more likely to be concerned about poor environmental health. Dryland farmers and irrigators reported positive wellbeing in many areas, but poorer than average access to telecommunications, and lower than average confidence in their skills and education.

Volunteering

Volunteers are critical to the functioning of many rural and regional communities. Volunteering rates are higher in rural and regional communities compared to Australia’s large cities, but there are concerns that this high rate of volunteering may be difficult to sustain into the future, particularly in the many rural communities that have a rapidly ageing population.

Across rural and regional Australia, 56.6% of people indicated they had volunteered in the last 12 months, 28.1% had not volunteered in the last 12 months but had at some point before that, and 15.2% had never volunteered. Those living in Western Australia had the highest volunteering rate, followed by South Australians. Victoria had the lowest volunteering rates, as well as the highest proportion of survey participants who had never volunteered.

While men and women were similarly likely to be involved in volunteering, there were large differences in volunteering rates by different age groups. Volunteering rates were highest amongst survey participants aged 30 to 49, and those over 65 years of age; and lowest for those aged under 30. Farmers, both dryland and irrigators, were more likely to volunteer than non-farmers.

Rural and regional Australians were most likely to volunteer for community events (such as field days, festivals and markets), at sports or recreation clubs/groups, for school-related activities, for health care/welfare related groups, and for music, arts and culture groups. Less common was volunteering for environmental or conservation groups, service clubs, church or spiritual organisations, emergency services groups, farming organisations and animal-focused organisations.

Many people volunteered frequently: almost 25% volunteered more than twice a week, while 39% volunteered once or twice a week, and 37% volunteered once a fortnight or less.

Almost all volunteers found their volunteering satisfying and enjoyable, and felt it gave them a sense of achievement and helped them contribute to, and feel connected to, their community. Less than 15% felt that their volunteering was often frustrating or stressful. People who volunteered more often were more likely to report both positive and negative outcomes from volunteering.

Volunteers on average reported higher subjective wellbeing compared to non-volunteers, but this was not consistent for all age groups - volunteers aged under 40 did not have higher levels of wellbeing compared to non-volunteers in this age group. Volunteering intensity also made a difference: low intensity volunteers aged 50 and over reported higher wellbeing compared to those who volunteered more frequently. These results suggest that for older age groups, high intensity volunteering may be associated with reduced wellbeing. Better understanding this is important for rural and regional Australia, where many older volunteers participate frequently in volunteering.
The most common reasons for not participating in volunteering were lack of time, lack of identification of volunteering opportunities, and lack of knowledge about how to get involved in volunteering. People who had previously volunteered but no longer did had most commonly stopped volunteering because of work or family commitments, because activities were held at times or locations that didn’t work for them, or because they hadn’t been asked to keep volunteering.

Migration
The number of people moving into and out of a community is a crucial determinant of that community’s future success, and even survival. Migration and the process of relocating to a new community are also often argued to significantly influence a person’s wellbeing. The survey asked people whether they were (i) recent migrants who had lived in their current community for three years or less (recent arrivals), (ii) had considered migrating in the last three years but chosen not to, or (iii) were likely to shift to a new community in the next 12 months.

Western Australians were slightly more likely than those living in other states to be recent arrivals, while Tasmanians were slightly less likely to have recently shifted to their community. Women, younger people and non-farmers were more likely than men, older people and farmers to have lived in their community for three years or less. The group most likely to have moved to their community in the past three years were those aged 18 to 29. These recent migrants had similar levels of both individual and community wellbeing compared to those who had lived in their community for a longer time. Recent migrants were most likely to have shifted to their current community for lifestyle reasons, followed by new employment, a desire to live in or near an attractive natural landscape, and to be closer to family. People of different ages had different motivations for their migration: younger people were more likely to shift for new employment, landscape and lifestyle reasons, while older people also shifted for retirement.

In total, 33.5% of respondents indicated they had considered moving to a new community at some point within the past three years, but ultimately decided not to. People living in Queensland and Western Australia were most likely to have considered moving, and Victorians the least likely. Women and younger people were more likely than men and older people to have considered moving but not done so. People who wanted to migrate but had chosen not to reported substantially lower life satisfaction compared to those who had not considered moving in the last three years. Perceptions of community wellbeing, however, were similar for both groups.

People living in Western Australia and South Australia were more likely than those in other states to be actively planning to migrate to a new community in the next 12 months, and those in Tasmania least likely. Younger people, particularly those aged 18 to 29, were more likely than any other group to be planning to move, and those aged 65 and over, and farmers, least likely to. Men were slightly more likely to be planning to move than women, although the differences were very small. Those who were very likely to move in the next 12 months had substantially lower life satisfaction than those who were less likely to move, and slightly lower community wellbeing. The most common reasons respondents gave for wanting to move to a new community were lifestyle reasons, new employment, to be closer to family and to live in or near an attractive natural landscape.
Conclusions
The wellbeing of rural and regional Australians did not change significantly between the 2013 and 2014 surveys, a finding that is not surprising as large short-term changes in wellbeing are typically seen only in association with highly disruptive changes in a household or community.

There were a small number of exceptions. A decline in both individual and community wellbeing was identified in the Central Queensland region between the two surveys, as well as in the Orana region of New South Wales. In both these communities, extended drought is occurring, together with downturn in the mining industry. Importantly, our results show that poorer wellbeing is occurring not only for farmers experiencing drought, or those engaged in the mining sector, but across the entire community, which experiences the flow-on effects of changes in these industries.

Australia’s rural and regional communities are highly diverse. They range from peri-urban areas outside large cities, to remote communities with some of the lowest population densities in the world, and include regions with substantially different histories of social and economic change and development. Given this diversity, it is not surprising that wellbeing, and wellbeing determinants, vary substantially between places. Two key regions in which wellbeing and wellbeing determinants were poorer than average were the Central Queensland (QLD) and Orana (NSW) regions. The Grampians (VIC) region, also experiencing drought conditions, had lower than average life satisfaction but scored positively for many community-scale wellbeing determinants.

No community or region is experienced the same way by everyone. Within any community, some people feel more included than others, some are experiencing financial hardship and others are financially well-off, and some are better able to have their say and have their views listened to than others, to name just a few examples.

Of the different groups examined in this report, younger people (aged 18 to 29) were the group most likely to feel negatively about their communities, and to have lower than average scores for many wellbeing determinants. Our findings suggest that successfully supporting the wellbeing of younger Australians requires going beyond providing employment and education opportunities, two areas often focused on when discussing youth outmigration from rural areas. Our results, like those of other studies, do show that employment and education are critical drivers of migration for younger people. However, young people are not generally less satisfied than older people with the health of their local community’s economy. Instead, the areas of most concern to them, where they feel less able to access benefits in their community, are being able to be meaningfully involved in, feel safe in, and belong to their community. Younger people are, on average, less likely to get involved in volunteering, or in community events and activities, feel less able to have a say and be heard, and feel less like they belong in rural communities, compared to older people. Younger people were also less likely to find their landscape attractive, and were much more likely to report that many people misuse drugs and alcohol in their community, that there is a high crime rate, and that they feel unsafe.

Many of these issues are present not just for those in their twenties, but extend to people aged 30 to 49, suggesting that in rapidly ageing rural communities the definition of ‘youth’ may need reconsideration. Many current programs targeting youth in rural Australia focus on those aged in their teens and early twenties; our results suggest it is important to also focus on improving outcomes for the ‘older youth’: those aged in their twenties and thirties in particular.
Many of the differences identified between younger and older Australians in the Regional Wellbeing Survey are not unique to rural and regional areas. They do, however, present a real challenge for rural and regional communities, given the high mobility of young people. Bridging the ‘age divide’ to make rural communities a place young people want to stay in, or to come back to after periods of time spent studying or working in cities, requires finding ways to better include younger people and give them a sense of belonging, and of being able to have meaningful input and roles in rural and regional communities.

Bridging the age divide is important not only for the wellbeing of younger people, but also for the welfare of older residents. Rural and regional Australians aged 65 and older rated almost every aspect of their lives – whether it was their access to financial, human, physical, social or natural capital – better than those in younger age groups. Older people typically feel better able to be heard, and are more highly involved in community activities, compared to younger people. There were only two exceptions: people aged over 65 on average reported poorer general health, and poorer household financial wellbeing, than younger age groups. As older people age, these health and financial challenges can reduce their capacity to continue these high levels of investment in community involvement and leadership in rural communities. Building capacity in younger age groups is critical to maintaining strong leadership and involvement in rural and regional communities.

Volunteering is an essential part of many rural and regional communities, in which volunteers are often heavily relied on in the health, emergency services, social welfare and education sectors. Older people are disproportionately likely to volunteer, and this creates concerns for the sustainability of volunteering, and of the rural and regional communities that rely on this volunteering. The survey results show that most volunteers, including those who volunteer frequently and across many groups, find their volunteering a positive experience. However, those who volunteer more frequently are more likely to report experiencing some negative outcomes such as stress, and older people who volunteer frequently have lower levels of wellbeing than those who volunteer less frequently. To reduce the potential burden of frequent volunteering, a greater pool of volunteers is needed. To achieve this, our results suggest that change is needed in how volunteers are recruited. Those who have not currently involved in volunteering haven’t been asked to volunteer, don’t know how to find out about opportunities, or find that volunteering opportunities aren’t scheduled in a way that enables them to take part. Volunteering rates can be increased through better and wider communication about opportunities to volunteer, and more flexible scheduling of these opportunities. Doing this has potential to engage younger people in volunteering, something which can both better sustain volunteering, and support the wellbeing of a group who commonly feel more isolated and less included in rural communities.

This report summarises key findings only from the 2014 survey. More in-depth analyses of the survey data are being conducted to inform a wide range of projects, and will be made available on the survey website, www.regionalwellbeing.org.au.

The Regional Wellbeing Survey is an ongoing project, and works collaboratively with a wide range of partner organisations across Australia. Organisations interested in becoming partners, and those interested in accessing more detailed analysis of the survey data, are encouraged to contact the survey team at regionalwellbeing@canberra.edu.au.
Section 1: About the Regional Wellbeing Survey

This part of the report explains what the Regional Wellbeing Survey is, and how data are collected, analysed and reported. You can find out more at www.regionalwellbeing.org.au.
Chapter 1.1: Key points

- Internationally, many organisations are beginning to monitor wellbeing as a measure of progress
- The Regional Wellbeing Survey is the largest survey to examine the wellbeing of people living in rural and regional areas of Australia
- The survey measures subjective wellbeing and how rural and regional Australians are experiencing a wide range of changes occurring in their communities
- This report examines results of the 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey, and focuses on People and communities: the wellbeing of different groups of people living in different communities across rural and regional Australia
- Two further reports will be released from the 2014 survey, focusing on Farming and agriculture and Environment and natural resource management
- Two partner projects are being conducted in addition to the Regional Wellbeing Survey: the Urban Wellbeing Survey (launched in 2014), and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing survey (data collection beginning in 2015 as part of a research partnership between multiple institutions).

1.1 Introduction

Wellbeing in rural and regional communities

The idea of ‘wellbeing’ as a measure of progress is rapidly gaining support worldwide. Put simply, many are arguing that the most important measure of progress is whether people are able to lead meaningful, happy and fulfilled lives - lives in which they have positive wellbeing. Reflecting this, many national and international organisations now include wellbeing as an indicator of improvement or development:

...the generally growing awareness of the possibilities for well-being based measurement and policy, have led an increasing number of national and local governments to use happiness data and research in their search for policies that could enable people to live better lives. – World Happiness Report, p.4 (Helliwell et al. 2015)

The word ‘wellbeing’ is used in different ways by different people, and is sometimes used interchangeably with related concepts such as ‘quality of life’, ‘life satisfaction’ or ‘wellness’, ‘health’ and ‘mental health’, to give just a few examples. Wellbeing is the outcome of many different influences which interact with each other in complex and dynamic ways. It is important to understand these multiple facets of wellbeing, and how they work to change a person’s overall quality of life, or a community’s liveability.

While there is growing acceptance of the idea that measuring wellbeing is important, it is often hard to find information on wellbeing, or about the many things that are likely to be influencing wellbeing. This is particularly the case for rural and regional areas of Australia, as most wellbeing studies include relatively small numbers of rural and regional people. As a consequence, the sometimes large differences in wellbeing of people living in different rural and regional locations can go unrecognised. Additionally, there’s little information on how wellbeing is changing over time, as most surveys don’t collect data annually.
The Regional Wellbeing Survey helps to address this gap, through collecting information not available elsewhere, and ensuring this information is available to those who wish to use it. The data produced from the Regional Wellbeing Survey is intended to complement other sources of information produced by organisations such as the Regional Australia Institute, Australian Bureau of Statistics, and the University of Adelaide (the Social Health Atlas).

**The Regional Wellbeing Survey**

The Regional Wellbeing Survey was launched in 2013, and is an annual survey of rural and regional Australians. A total of 9,135 people participated in the survey in 2013, and this grew to 12,125 people in 2014. This report provides results from the 2014 survey.

In 2014, the Regional Wellbeing Survey was joined by two partner surveys: the Urban Wellbeing Survey, which focuses on people living in large urban centres, and the ‘Hybrid’ survey, for people who live in rural and regional areas that are on the fringes of large cities. Additionally, work began on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing Survey, in partnership with researchers from the Australian National University, University of Sydney, and the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. See page 4 for more on these partner initiatives.

The survey is conducted by researchers from the University of Canberra, who work in collaboration with a large number of community, government and health organisations to survey people across rural and regional Australia. The survey relies on funding from the University of Canberra and from rural and regional organisations.

The topics included in the survey focus on the wellbeing of the person completing the survey, and their views about the wellbeing of the community and region they live in. The measures used are subjective – meaning they ask people to self-report how they experience different aspects of their life and their community. These subjective measures complement the many existing measures of objective wellbeing, such as data produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics on socio-economic conditions in different communities. To read more about why subjective measures of wellbeing are important, see Schirmer and Berry (2014).

Each year, the survey includes a series of ‘core’ measures (meaning questions, or ‘items’, that are included every year), as well as some additional questions on specific topics that change from year to year. For a summary of the topics included in the 2014 survey, see Chapter 1.2.

The Regional Wellbeing Survey team are committed to principles of transparency and openness. To achieve our objective of research that improves the wellbeing of people and places in rural and regional Australia, we commit to ensuring all people are given the opportunity to view the results of the survey. To do this, we produce publicly available reports and tables of data, available to download at [www.regionalwellbeing.org.au](http://www.regionalwellbeing.org.au). We do not accept funding from organisations unless they agree to all results being made publicly available. We are committed to collaborative research, and provide opportunities for researchers interested in rural and regional wellbeing to analyse data from the survey, subject to strict conditions on ethical use of the data. We believe this is the best way to ensure the data collected achieves our objective of contributing to improving wellbeing in rural and regional Australia.
Our reports

This report, *People and communities*, provides results from the 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey on the wellbeing of people and wellbeing of communities, including the special topics of volunteering and migration. It examines the wellbeing of different groups and different places. You can also accessed detailed data for every variable included in this report, by downloading tables of data which describe results for every region in which more than 100 survey responses were received. To access this detailed data, go to [www.regionalwellbeing.org.au](http://www.regionalwellbeing.org.au).

Two further reports on results of the 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey will be released in 2015:

- *Farmers and agriculture*. This report examines the wellbeing of farmers in Australia, focusing on the 3,700 farmers who took part in the survey. It includes results from several sets of questions asked only of farmers.
- *Environment and natural resource management*. This report examines results related to environmental health, natural resource management, and participating in outdoors activities. This includes analysing how rural and regional Australians are experiencing major policy initiatives related to the environment, such as environmental watering in the Murray-Darling Basin.

Survey data can be analysed to answer new and different questions not covered in our public reports. For example, data from the 2013 Regional Wellbeing Survey were used to generate indicators included in the National Water Commission’s final assessment of progress on Australia’s water reforms, *Australia’s water blueprint* (National Water Commission 2014). If you are interested in discussing the potential to use the survey data for new analyses, please contact the survey team ([regionalwellbeing@canberra.edu.au](mailto:regionalwellbeing@canberra.edu.au)).

Partner projects

The Regional Wellbeing Survey aims to better understand the wellbeing of people living in rural and regional Australia. However, it is not possible to design a single survey to examine all the issues relevant to wellbeing of all groups, and it is also important to understand the wellbeing of those living in urban areas. Because of this, we are developing partner projects, which examine wellbeing of specific groups within rural and regional Australia, and of urban Australians. In 2014, two partner projects were developed.

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing Survey*

The Regional Wellbeing Survey is open to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, and each year around 100 to 150 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people participate in the survey. However, this is a small sample, and the survey does not currently include some topics known to be important to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – for example, topics examining connection to country, or experiences of racism. This means the Regional Wellbeing Survey can provide some insight but not a comprehensive understanding of factors important to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

A substantial body of research is emerging in this area, and a national research program is being developed to examine the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. The Regional Wellbeing Survey team are partnering with researchers already working to better understand the
wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In 2014 this partnership received funding for an initial study developing a survey of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing in the Murray region of New South Wales. This project, funded by Murray Local Land Services, is being conducted by researchers from the Australian National University, University of Canberra, University of Sydney and Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, in collaboration with Aboriginal communities in the Murray region of southern New South Wales. With a collaborative process of survey design starting in mid-2014, the first survey will be conducted in the Murray region of NSW in mid-2015, with results to be reported in late 2015.

Funding is being sought to extend this survey nationally (see http://aiatsis.gov.au/mayi-kuwayu). For more information on this project, please contact: Dr Ray Lovett, raymond.lovett@anu.edu.au; Dr Clare Coleman, clare.coleman@sydney.edu.au; or Dr Jacki Schirmer, jacki.schirmer@canberra.edu.au.

The Urban Wellbeing Survey
Wellbeing is important for everyone, no matter who they are or where they live. In 2014, we launched a new Urban Wellbeing Survey to complement and extend the Regional Wellbeing Survey. It asks people living in Australia’s major metropolitan centres (100,000 residents or larger) about their wellbeing and about the urban places in which they live, work and socialise. This means that, uniquely in Australia, our wellbeing surveys are now able to consider and compare the wellbeing of people living in all parts of our vast continent from the most remote rural community to the busiest inner city location. Some 2,166 residents of major metropolitan centres took part in the Urban Wellbeing Survey in 2014. In 2014, for the first time, the Regional Wellbeing Survey additionally targeted participants living on the rural fringes of these large cities. A total of 564 survey participants completed a special version of the regional survey which contained extra questions about key urban issues that are uniquely relevant to these people. A report of key results will be produced in late 2015. For more information, please contact Professor Helen Berry, helen.berry@canberra.edu.au.
1.2 Methods

Introduction

The Regional Wellbeing Survey uses a complex methodology. This chapter provides an overview of the methods used to collect and produce data for the survey. Further description of data collection and analysis processes is provided in the Regional Wellbeing Survey User Manual, available on request from regionalwellbeing@canberra.edu.au.

Designing survey questions

The Regional Wellbeing Survey includes a large number of questions (referred to from here as survey ‘items’, as not all are designed in the form of a question). These include:

- Regular topics: These items are included every year, and are asked of all respondents, enabling change to be tracked over time
- Occasional or ‘one-off’ topics: These items are included on the survey as a ‘one-off’ to enable exploration of a specific topic relevant to rural and regional wellbeing, but they are not repeated every year (some may be repeated once every few years). For example, in 2014 a set of items that examined volunteering was included, but will not be repeated every...
year. Occasional topics are sometimes asked of all respondents, and sometimes of a randomly chosen subset of respondents, called a ‘panel’

- Exploratory topics: Where very little work has explored a topic previously, items designed to collect data on these topics are tested by asking them of a single panel of survey participants. This lets us evaluate whether these items should be considered for inclusion as either an occasional or regular topic in future years.

This design means that each year the survey includes a number of pre-set items, but also has space to include additional content.

In 2014, the occasional and exploratory topics included were decided based on a two-step process. First, suggestions made by 2013 survey participants (who were asked to identify topics they felt should be included in future surveys) were analysed. These suggestions were developed into a document that proposed a set of potential topics for inclusion in the 2014 survey. Following this, two workshops were held in August 2014 with survey supporters and partners. Workshop participants discussed potential survey topics and provided advice on which were of greatest utility for inclusion in the 2014 survey. This process enabled selection of topics of high relevance to a wide number of rural and regional organisations. In addition, specific funding was provided by the Murray Darling Basin Authority and the Victorian Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources to include questions on the topics of environmental watering, water reform, and how farmers are experiencing change on their farm enterprise.

Once survey topics were decided, questions were designed and tested using the following process:

1. Survey items were drafted
2. Draft items were tested in focus groups and revised
3. The revised survey items were sent to survey partner organisations and academic experts for review and comment, and revised based on feedback received
4. The revised survey items were professionally formatted and pilot tested with a sample of 120 people. The test results were examined, and a final revision of questions undertaken.

Table 1.2a summarises the topics included in the 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey that were asked of all participants. It indicates whether each topic was asked of all participants, or of a randomly selected subset of participants. The table also shows whether the question was asked of people who lived on the fringe of a large city (these participants were asked a slightly different set of questions, drawn from both the Regional Wellbeing Survey and the Urban Wellbeing Survey). Table 1.2b shows topics asked of farmers only, which are reported on in our second report.

Some specific items were also included in our partner Urban Wellbeing Survey; these are not shown in Table 1.2a as typically only one or two items for a given topic were replicated across both the Regional Wellbeing Survey and the Urban Wellbeing Survey.

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1 Results from these questions are being published publicly in the same way results are published for all parts of the Regional Wellbeing Survey.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey topic</th>
<th>Regular topic (Asked each year; all items in topic asked of all respondents, each year)</th>
<th>Occasional topic (Asked this year only; some items asked of all &amp; more detailed items of subset of participants)</th>
<th>Exploratory topic (Asked this year; questions asked only of a subset of participants)</th>
<th>Where can I access results for this topic?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Community wellbeing</td>
<td>Views about liveability, environment, economy, local organisations, local government, crime and safety in local community</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Report 1: People &amp; communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to services and infrastructure</td>
<td>Views about how poor or good access is in local area to health, education, childcare, roads, housing, professional services, retail shops etc.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Report 1: People &amp; communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging and exclusion</td>
<td>Views about whether people feel a sense of belonging or exclusion, or feel other people are excluded, in their community</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Report 1: People &amp; communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental health</td>
<td>Views about health of the environment in the local region</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Report 1 (Limited) Report 3: Envt &amp; NRM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extreme weather events</td>
<td>Experience of extreme weather events such as droughts, bushfire, cyclone</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Report 3: Environment &amp; NRM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration and residence</td>
<td>How long people had lived in their current community, and whether they intended to shift. A subset were asked their reasons for migration</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Report 1: People &amp; communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in social and civic activities</td>
<td>How often people participate in different activities such as sports groups, community events, community organisations</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Report 1: People &amp; communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>Whether person volunteers (asked of all), and reasons for volunteering or not volunteering (asked of subset)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Report 1: People &amp; communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills and education</td>
<td>Views about a person’s confidence in their skills and access to resources</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Report 1: People &amp; communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual wellbeing</td>
<td>Participants were asked to rate their wellbeing using a series of standard questions on subjective wellbeing</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Report 1: People &amp; communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; health relevant behaviours</td>
<td>Participants were asked questions assessing their general health, psychological distress, physical health, and smoking and drinking behaviours</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Report 1: People &amp; communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey topic</td>
<td>Regular topic (Asked each year; all items in topic asked of all respondents, each year)</td>
<td>Occasional topic (Asked this year only; some items asked of all &amp; more detailed items of subset of participants)</td>
<td>Exploratory topic (Asked this year; questions asked only of a subset of participants)</td>
<td>Where can I access results for this topic?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-demographic characteristics</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Used in all reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age, gender, cultural background, household structure, educational attainment, household income, occupation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental watering</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Report 3: Environment and NRM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views about environmental watering, and observed outcomes of environmental watering events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murray-Darling Basin Plan</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Report 3: Environment and NRM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants were asked if they had views about the Basin Plan. If they did, they were asked their views about the process and impacts of the Plan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptability of land use change</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Report 3: Environment and NRM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants were asked how acceptable they find a number of land and water use changes that are occurring in parts of rural and regional Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate change</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Report 3: Environment and NRM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants were asked their views about climate change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical literacy</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Report 3: Environment and NRM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants were asked how confident they feel about their physical appearance and engaging in physical activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining and energy industries</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Report 3: Environment and NRM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants were asked if mining or renewable energy industries operated in their region. A subset were asked their views about impacts of these industries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled burning</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Report 3: Environment and NRM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views about the use of controlled burning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor recreational activity</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Report 3: Environment and NRM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement in and views about taking part in outdoor recreational activity in ‘green space’ and ‘wild space’ areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey topic</td>
<td>What type of topic is this?</td>
<td>Where can I access results for this topic?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Farmer and farm enterprise characteristics</strong></td>
<td>Regular topic (Asked each year of all farmers)</td>
<td>Report 2: Farmers and agriculture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of farm (e.g., commodities produced), area, business structure</td>
<td>Occasional topic (Asked this year only; some items asked of all &amp; other of subset of farmers)</td>
<td>Report 2: Farmers and agriculture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrigation and water trading (asked of irrigators only)</td>
<td>Exploratory topic (Asked this year; questions asked of subset of farmers)</td>
<td>Report 2: Farmers and agriculture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of irrigation system used, volume of water entitlements and allocation,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>engagement in water trading activity in last 12 months</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural grants and support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use and usefulness of different types of grants and support accessed by farmers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural markets and supply chain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers were asked how they interact with customers, focusing on how prices for their produce are set and access to market information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm finances and on- and off-farm income</td>
<td></td>
<td>Report 2: Farmers and agriculture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers were asked about their farm financial health, and on- and off-farm income earning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm enterprise change</td>
<td></td>
<td>Report 2: Farmers and agriculture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers were asked whether they had changed the size, type or employment structure of their farm enterprise in the last 12 months</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future farming intentions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Report 2: Farmers and agriculture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers were asked how likely they were to change the size, type of employment structure of their farm enterprise in the next 5 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural resource management and regenerative farming</td>
<td></td>
<td>Report 2: Farmers and agriculture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers were asked if they undertake any of a number of NRM activities or manage their farm using regenerative farming principles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer identity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Report 2: Farmers and agriculture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of different aspects of farming to the farmer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to farm development</td>
<td></td>
<td>Report 2: Farmers and agriculture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent to which different issues present barriers to farm development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Collecting survey data

The Regional Wellbeing Survey sought to encourage participation from adult people living across rural and regional Australia. Rural and regional Australia was defined as all areas of Australia outside cities with a population of more than 100,000 people. It thus includes regional cities such as Wagga Wagga, but excludes large cities such as Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Canberra.

The Regional Wellbeing Survey’s data collection methods are designed to enable us to reach a large number of people across rural and regional Australia. In 2014, participants could complete the survey between September 15th and December 14th. Participants could request support when completing the survey by calling a freecall number at any time; a total of 750 calls were received on this number during the period the survey was open.

Two platforms were used to collect data, and participants were recruited using a wide variety of methods, described in the next sections.

Survey platforms

A survey ‘platform’ refers to the mechanism by which people take part in a survey. Common platforms include paper surveys, online surveys, and phone surveys. The 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey could be completed using either of two platforms, with participants able to select the platform they preferred to use:

- **Online survey:** The survey could be completed online at [www/regionalwellbeing.org.au](http://www/regionalwellbeing.org.au). The online survey was designed so that, if the participant had enabled cookies on their computer, they did not have to complete the survey in one sitting: those who experienced internet drop-out or did not have time to complete it in a single session could re-enter the survey by going back to the website, which would automatically return them to the point they had previously reached in survey. A total of 8,711 people chose to complete the survey online.

- **Paper survey:** People who had heard about the survey through one of the recruitment methods described below, but who could not (or preferred not) to complete it online, could request a paper survey be mailed to them, by calling a Freecall telephone number prominently displayed on all survey recruitment materials. Additionally, paper surveys were mailed directly to a large number of farmers. Paper survey recipients were posted a survey pack that included the survey form, an information sheet and a prepaid envelope for return of the completed survey. A total of 2,850 people completed the paper version of the survey.

The Regional Wellbeing Survey primarily uses an online platform for a number of reasons. The most important is that online platforms offer greater flexibility in survey design and enable a larger range of items to be included in the survey, compared to other platforms. The cost of collecting data via an online platform is substantially lower than for other platforms, and online surveys can be designed to minimise data entry error. However, online surveys also have disadvantages. The disadvantage most commonly cited is that they can achieve a biased sample. This is addressed in the Regional Wellbeing Survey through (i) offering a paper survey option to ensure those who are unable or unwilling to complete the survey online are able to participate, and (ii) using recruitment methods...
(described below) that reduce the likelihood of bias by ensuring the survey is promoted to a random sample of households.

A paper survey option will continue to be offered for the foreseeable future. This is because, despite high rates of internet usage in rural and regional Australia, a substantial minority of participants report problems successfully accessing the online survey, largely due to lack of reliable access to high speed internet at their residence.

The use of an online survey platform enabled a unique approach to determining the length of survey a person completed. Survey participants were asked whether they preferred to complete a short, regular or long version of the survey. The short length survey included only regular topics (shown in Tables 1.2a and 1.2b) and no occasional or exploratory topics, and took around 10 to 15 minutes to complete. The regular length survey included all regular topics as well as two additional topics chosen at random from the occasional/exploratory topics shown in Tables 1.2a and 1.2b, and took 20 to 30 minutes to complete. The long survey included all regular topics as well as six additional occasional/exploratory topics, and took 40 to 60 minutes to complete. Online participants were advised how long each would take, and informed that they would receive a larger number of entries into the survey prize draw if they chose to complete the long survey. Of the 9,284 participants who completed the survey online, 17% chose the short survey, 20% chose the regular survey and 63% chose the long version of the survey (although approx. 18% of the latter did not complete all questions on the long survey). Paper surveys were designed to be the same length as the ‘regular length’ online survey.

**Survey recruitment**

A wide variety of methods can be used to encourage, or ‘recruit’, people to take part in a survey. When selecting recruitment methods, the objective is to achieve as representative a sample as possible, meaning that the recruitment encourages all types of people relevant to the study to take part – in this case, all adult rural and regional Australians. While all (or almost all) surveys achieved a biased sample of respondents, using appropriate recruitment methods can assist in reducing this bias, thus making biases easier to correct when analysing data.

Multiple recruitment methods were used in the 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey. These are summarised in Table 1.2c, and are designed to complement each other:

- Flyers and printed surveys delivered to letterboxes. This was the principal means of recruitment: 73.4% of participants reported that they heard about the survey via a flyer or survey pack delivered to their letterbox. Participants were selected to receive flyers and printed surveys in the following ways, which were designed to achieve desired sample sizes in different regions and of different types of people, while simultaneously ensuring a random sample was selected within each of these regions and groups:
  - In intensively sampled regions, flyers were delivered to every letterbox in designated postal areas. This occurred only in areas in which funding was received to intensively sample the local region, listed in Appendix 1.
  - In non-intensively sampled regions, flyers were sent to addresses selected at random from the publicly available mailing database ‘Aus-On-Disc’. This resulted in a smaller proportion of households being requested to participate in the survey.
compared to the intensively sampled regions, but ensured a random sample was selected.

- To ensure a large sample of farmers was achieved, farmers were deliberately over-sampled. This was done through identifying a random sample of each of several groups of farmers (for example, dairy farmers, graziers, horticultural growers), using the FarmBase database. As with the broader sample, specific funding was contributed to increase the sample of farmers living in some regions. To achieve this, a greater proportion of farmers were selected to receive paper surveys in regions for which additional funding was received, while in all other regions, a simple random sample was used. Appendix 1 lists the regions in which farmers were deliberately over-sampled.

- Email promotion. Rural and regional organisations throughout Australia were asked to promote the survey to their online networks by forwarding an email encouraging participation in the survey. Over 100 organisations are known to have forwarded this email; it is likely that other organisations also promoted the survey to their networks via email but did not notify the research team they had done so. A wide range of organisations were asked to forward the email, in order to reach as diverse and broad a number of rural and regional residents as possible. In total, 32.9% of participants indicated they heard about the survey via email (note that there were some who indicated they heard about the survey via both a flyer/survey pack and email).

- Newsletter, social media and traditional media promotion: A media release was sent to media outlets through rural and regional Australia, with some media outlets encouraging rural and regional Australians to participate. Some organisations chose to post a notice about the survey on their social media sites (Facebook, twitter), or to include an item in their newsletter. In total, 7.5% of participants indicated they heard about the survey via social media, traditional media or a newsletter; many of these also heard about it via email or a flyer.

Survey participants were asked to indicate how they heard about the survey, to help analyse whether particular recruitment methods result in specific biases in answers to different items.
Table 1.2c Methods used to recruit participants in the 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey, in descending order of importance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruitment method</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Regions used in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email, newsletter and social media promotion</td>
<td>Rural and regional organisations were asked to forward an email encouraging participation in the survey, or to include it in their newsletters or social media. A large number of organisations assisted with this, reaching thousands of people across rural and regional Australia. People who had participated in the 2013 survey and given permission to be contacted again were also sent emails about the survey.</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media promotion</td>
<td>A media release was used to promote the survey via rural and regional media. A small number of media interviews were conducted.</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flyer promotion</td>
<td>Flyers were delivered by Australia Post to a total of just over 400,000 delivery points. While flyers have a low response rate (approx. one in 40 achieves a survey response), they are cost-effective as a recruitment measure due to the very low cost of delivering flyers compared to posting letters or survey forms. The majority of flyer distribution was determined by funding received. This reflects the funding model for the survey: currently, funding is determined year to year, and in most cases funders providing funding to cover specific regions, rather than the nation as a whole. Of the total number of flyers, 61% were delivered in Victoria (to all parts of the state except Melbourne, Geelong, Wodonga, Moe, Monwell, Ocean Grove, Sale, Torquay, Warragul); 19% in New South Wales, 10% in South Australia, 6% to Tasmania, 3% to Queensland, and the remaining 1% in Western Australia and the Northern Territory.</td>
<td>The majority of flyer distribution was determined by funding received. This reflects the funding model for the survey: currently, funding is determined year to year, and in most cases funders providing funding to cover specific regions, rather than the nation as a whole. Of the total number of flyers, 61% were delivered in Victoria (to all parts of the state except Melbourne, Geelong, Wodonga, Moe, Monwell, Ocean Grove, Sale, Torquay, Warragul); 19% in New South Wales, 10% in South Australia, 6% to Tasmania, 3% to Queensland, and the remaining 1% in Western Australia and the Northern Territory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mailed survey</td>
<td>Mailed surveys were sent to a pre-determined sample of farmers across Australia (most of whom who also received a flyer prior to receiving the letter). The purpose was to increase the number of responses from farmers, who often prefer to complete surveys on paper rather than online. A sample of farmers was purchased from the FarmBase database. Each farmer was sent a survey pack containing the questionnaire, a letter encouraging completion, an information sheet, and a pre-paid return envelope. Survey packs were sent to farmers in regions where funding was received for the survey. A total of 23,905 survey packs were posted to farmers, with 13,500 posted to farmers in Victoria, 5,785 to farmers in NSW, 1350 in QLD, 1270 in SA, 1000 in Tas and 1000 in WA.</td>
<td>Survey packs were sent to farmers in regions where funding was received for the survey. A total of 23,905 survey packs were posted to farmers, with 13,500 posted to farmers in Victoria, 5,785 to farmers in NSW, 1350 in QLD, 1270 in SA, 1000 in Tas and 1000 in WA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prize draw</td>
<td>Survey participants had the option of entering a prize draw to win one of nine prizes. Winners could choose a Coles-Myer, WISH, IGA or Flight Centre gift card. Online participants who chose to complete a longer survey received more entries into the prize draw, while those who chose the shortest version of the survey received only one entry into the prize draw.</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey responses

In total, 12,125 people took part in the 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey, an increase of almost 3,000 compared to the 9,135 who took part in the survey in 2013. As noted earlier, not every participant answered every question on the survey: some questions were asked only of a randomly selected sub-set of participants, and some participants chose not to answer all the questions asked of them.

Figure 1.2a shows the number of survey responses received from different Regional Development Australia (RDA) regions across Australia. The majority of responses were received from regions in which funding was available to mail flyers and/or questionnaire packs directly to residents. Fewer responses were received in regions where email, newsletter and social media promotion was the principal recruitment method. In cases where less than 100 responses were received from a RDA region, that region was grouped with a neighbouring RDA when reporting results.

The 2014 survey included the state of Tasmania for the first time, and a total of 564 Tasmanians took part. A much larger number of responses was received from Victoria in 2014 compared to 2013, due to the investment of funding by the Victorian Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources to enable increased numbers of respondents.

Overall, a greater number of responses were received from more remote regions, although the number of participants in these regions remains relatively small. This is due in large part to the smaller number of people who live in more remote regions. It is likely to also reflect greater difficulty completing an online survey in many remote regions, in which slow or unreliable internet connectivity is more common than in rural and regional areas with greater population density.

Representativeness of responses

As the Regional Wellbeing Survey uses non-traditional survey recruitment methods, it is not possible to estimate the number of people who received a request asking them to consider taking part in the survey, and hence it is not possible to estimate a survey response rate. As noted in the report for the 2013 survey, many statisticians now argue that response rates are a relatively poor indication of the quality or representativeness of survey responses (Johnson and Wislar 2012). Given this, a better approach to understanding representativeness is to compare the characteristics of survey respondents to those of people living in rural and regional Australia.

Some groups and regions were deliberately oversampled: for example, farmers were deliberately oversampled to enable this group to be analysed in-depth, and specific funding was provided to increase the number of people surveyed in Victoria. As expected, this resulted in over-representation of farmers, and of the state of Victoria, in the responses (Table 1.2d). There is also a bias towards older respondents, and female respondents – a common bias in surveys of this type.

Different survey recruitment methods can also result in differing samples. In this case, the concern is not whether one method is more successful than others in recruiting a particular group, as multiple recruitment methods are used intentionally to encourage participation by groups who may be more easily reached by some methods than others. What is of importance is whether people with differing levels of wellbeing – the core focus of the survey – are more or less likely to be recruited using different methods.
Figure 1.2a Number of survey responses received, by Regional Development Australia region.
Table 1.2d Comparison of Regional Wellbeing Survey respondents to characteristics of rural and regional Australians

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Rural and regional Australia, 2011</th>
<th>Regional Wellbeing Survey, 2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW &amp; ACT</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>43.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA &amp; NT</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50.7%</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>49.3%</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-39</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-54</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working as a farmer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-farmer</td>
<td>95.5%</td>
<td>69.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data source: Australian Bureau of Statistics *Census of Population and Housing* 2011. Data accessed via TableBuilderPro. Data were calculated for rural and regional Australia and exclude people living in cities with >100,000 population.

Figure 1.2b compares the ‘global life satisfaction’ scores of people who were recruited to participate in the survey by (i) flyer, and (ii) email. These are the two most common methods of recruitment to the survey, and provide a useful comparison. Both groups show a similar wellbeing profile, although with some differences, suggesting there was some bias, most likely relatively small, resulting from the differing recruitment methods with regard to the most important topic examined in this report – wellbeing.

![Figure 1.2b Comparison of Global Life Satisfaction scores reported by survey participants recruited principally by (i) flyer and (ii) email](image)

While the biases identified in this section are expected, they need to be addressed when analysing data. The methods used to do this are described in the next section.
Data preparation & analysis

The data presented in this report were prepared and analysed in multiple stages. Key analysis techniques used are described below.

Data preparation
Prior to data analysis, Regional Wellbeing Survey data were processed and cleaned. This involved:

- Entering data from paper surveys into the online survey form, and checking data for errors
- Formatting survey data (both online and paper), with each survey item checked for error, coded numerically where appropriate, and any missing data identified
- Removal of invalid surveys. All surveys in which a participant had completed less than 10 items were removed. Duplicate surveys (for example, in which a participant began the survey more than once) were also removed, and the data set checked for any false entries (for example, participants attempting to complete the survey multiple times).

Data analysis
The cleaned data set was then analysed. Analysis of data for this report was undertaken using Microsoft Excel, the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS), SAS and Stata.

Calculation of averages
‘Average’ scores are reported for many results in this report. In all cases, unless otherwise specified, the term ‘average’ refers to the mean score for the group of people being analysed (not to the median or mode).

Data weighting
A key part of analysis was the weighting of data where appropriate. ‘Weighting’ refers to a statistical process in which known biases in the responses received are corrected for. Weighting was used to correct for both intentional over-sampling (of farmers and some regions), and non-intentional biases (the bias towards female, older respondents). Weighting responses involves adjusting the relative contribution each survey respondent contributes to the whole when analysing survey results, so that analysed data from the survey sample more accurately represents the population it was drawn from (in this case, people living in rural and regional Australia). Weighting doesn’t change the answers people gave to survey questions.

Data were weighted using GREGWT, a generalised regression weighting procedure developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (Bell, 2000). GREGWT is a SAS macro that generates survey weights so that survey estimates agree with external benchmarks, which we obtained from the 2011 Australian census. For the 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey, the benchmarks used were age (18–39, 40–54, 55–64, 65+), sex (female, male), agricultural occupation (farmer, not-farmer), and geographical location (32 geographic regions were defined across Australia in which sampling intensity varied, and each included as a benchmark, enabling different sampling intensities to be corrected as part of the weighting process).

Individual weights have been applied to all analyses in this report, unless otherwise specified. In some cases, it was not appropriate to apply weights as the items being analysed were only asked of a specific sub-sample of survey respondents to whom the weights used elsewhere may not be applicable.
Due to the way GREGWT calculates weights, a small number of respondents were allocated unrealistically high weights. This was a consequence of having a small number of observations corresponding to a particular benchmark category (Central Statistics Office 2001). To control for extreme weights, weights were Winsorised at the 95th percentile, thus controlling for unrealistically high weights. This reduced the maximum weight from 16,167.41 to 1,269.79 and the standard deviation from 1,113.79 to 310.02.

Winsorisation was considered an appropriate method of adjusting the data as (i) the source of data bias was known, and (ii) comparison of Winsorised and non-Winsorised datasets against independent benchmarks for key variables showed that the Winsorised data better reflects distributions seen in other datasets.

**Confidence intervals**

Throughout this report, confidence intervals are shown as part of the results. A confidence interval, put simply, is a measure of how confident we can be in the results. More accurately, it tells you the boundaries between which the value of a given variable would be 95% likely to fall if you repeated the survey multiple times with a similar sample. In general, confidence is higher if there is a large sample size and little deviation in scores (for example, almost all people answered ‘4’ on a scale of 1 to 7). Confidence is lower if there is a small sample size and high deviation (for example, equal numbers of people answered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 on the 7-point scale). An example is shown in Figure 1.2c, to help explain how to interpret confidence intervals.

Confidence intervals were calculated using the following formulae:
Mean scores: 95% confidence intervals were calculated using the classic formula. Using this formula, there is 95% confidence that, if multiple similar samples were taken, the true value of the mean would fall between \( \pm 1.96 \times \frac{\sigma}{\sqrt{n}} \) where \( \sigma \) is the standard deviation, and \( \frac{\sigma}{\sqrt{n}} \) is the standard error of the mean.

Proportions: In some cases, we report results by proportions – for example, we might report that 40% of people had a low level of wellbeing, and 20% a high level of wellbeing. A different approach is needed to calculate the confidence interval for a proportion, as it isn’t possible to use the standard error of the mean in this case. There is debate in the literature about the most appropriate calculation for proportions and related quantities. The classically used ‘Exact’ confidence interval for proportions is widely agreed to be too conservative, while the alternative approach - the Wald interval - is considered not conservative enough. We therefore used the modified Wald confidence interval proposed by Agresti and Coull (1998), which has been shown to be appropriate for large sample sizes such as that available in the Regional Wellbeing Survey (Brown et al. 2001). Using the modified Wald, we are 95% confident the true value of the proportion being reported falls between
\[
\pm 2 \sqrt{\frac{p(1-p)}{n+4}}, \quad \text{where } p' \approx \frac{s+2}{n+4},
\]
\( S \) is the proportion (e.g. 20% of people responded ‘yes’), and \( n \) the sample size for the variable.

While confidence intervals provide a useful way of understanding how reliable the results are likely to be, they are not perfect. Confidence interval calculations assume that data are normally distributed, and a representative sample has been achieved. If these conditions are not met, the confidence interval may not be an accurate representation of confidence. In this report, the weighting of data can amplify unknown biases in the dataset, reducing confidence intervals. The potential for this has been reduced through the use of Windsoring when weighting, described earlier. Because of these limitations, confidence intervals are a useful indicator of confidence in the results, but will not be completely accurate in representing confidence in all cases.

Comparing data over time
This report principally presents data from the 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey. Some cross-sectional comparisons are made to 2013 survey data where appropriate. Cross-sectional means that the average scores of respondents to the 2013 survey are compared to average scores from the 2014 survey. The report does not include longitudinal analysis that is based on tracking the same people over time: this type of longitudinal analysis will begin in future years when a large enough sample of people have completed the survey across multiple years to enable meaningful longitudinal analysis of how a specific cohort of people (i.e. a set of people who have answered the survey each year) have changed over time.

Caveats and limitations
All research has limitations; the Regional Wellbeing Survey is no exception. The following important limitations should be noted when reading this report and drawing conclusions from it.

‘Significant’ differences are not always meaningful
Throughout this report, confidence intervals are used to identify whether there is likely to be a significant difference between groups. Significance is a statistical term, and in this case significance is
measured using a confidence interval. It is not a test of meaningfulness. The meaningfulness of differences between regions, or different groups of people, can be judged subjectively (through people discussing what they believe to be a meaningful difference), or objectively (for example, by statistically analysing what size difference between groups needs to be present before some other relevant variable changes in a measurable way).

**Technical limitations: missing data, sample error**

Not all respondents answered every question they were asked and no-one was asked every question in the survey. Missing data imputation can be used to estimate what respondents might have said if they had been asked, or had answered, each question, but in the initial analysis of results presented in this report no imputation has been undertaken. This means that results may differ compared to any future analyses of the survey data that do impute missing data. Though we have weighted the data for biases resulting from sampling strategy and sampling error, we will not have removed all sample-related error.

**Some groups are not well represented in the Regional Wellbeing Survey**

The Regional Wellbeing Survey is easier to complete for people with good literacy skills and for those with internet access. It is less easy to complete for those with poor English literacy or poor access to the internet. Our long-term goal is to provide versions of the survey that can be more readily completed by people for whom English is a second language or who have difficulties with reading, writing or using a computer. In 2014, however, funding limitations did not permit investment in these areas. There will therefore be significant under-representation of people with poor literacy in general and those for whom English literacy is low in particular. Despite this, respondents to the 2014 survey included 429 who reported that English was their second language.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are also under-represented in the 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey. A total of 125 people who participated in the survey identified as having these origins; to understand wellbeing, a much larger sample is needed. As described earlier in this report, during 2014, the Regional Wellbeing Survey team began working in partnership with researchers from the Australian National University, Aboriginal Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and University of Sydney, on a pilot study examining the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders living in the Murray region of New South Wales.

**The results are a snapshot in time, influenced by the issues of the day**

Each year, the data collected in the Regional Wellbeing Survey represents the views of regional people during the period in which data were collected (in 2014, late September to early December). These views will have been influenced by specific issues occurring during that period.

**Ethics**

The Regional Wellbeing Survey was approved by the University of Canberra Human Research Ethics Committee, protocol number 12-186.
1.3. Survey regions

Participants in the Regional Wellbeing Survey came from many communities across rural and regional Australia. Results in this report are shown for states and large regions. In addition to these large regions, data tables containing detailed survey results for smaller regions and natural resource management regions, can be downloaded at www.regionalwellbeing.org.au.

States: We report results for rural and regional areas of New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia. In the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and Northern Territory (NT) too few rural residents took part to enable separate reporting for these regions. Instead, rural residents in the ACT who took part in the survey are included as part of the Southern Inland and rural ACT region; the views of rural residents of the NT are reported grouped with those of people living in the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

Regional Development Authorities: Results are reported for different Regional Development Australia (RDA) regions. These are large regions, each including several local government areas. Where possible, results are reported by individual RDA region. However, in several cases not enough responses were received from an RDA to report results from it separately. In these cases, two or more RDAs have been combined to form an ‘RDA region’ when reporting results. Appendix 2 summarises which RDAs are located in these RDA regions. Data for RDA regions is presented in several parts of this report, and is also available to download at www.regionalwellbeing.org.au.

Natural resource management regions: Data for different natural resource management (NRM) regions in Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia, and for Local Land Services (LLS) regions in New South Wales, can be downloaded from www.regionalwellbeing.org.au.

Local government areas: LGA-based regions are the smallest scale at which data from the survey are released publicly. Where possible, survey results are produced for a single LGA, or for a small group of LGAs that neighbour each other. This is only possible where 100 or more responses are received for an LGA or group of LGAs. Appendix 2 shows the regions for which data are available for either an LGA, or a small group of neighbouring LGAs. Results for these LGA regions can be downloaded from www.regionalwellbeing.org.au.
Section 2: Wellbeing

The Regional Wellbeing Survey examines both the wellbeing of individual people, and of the communities they live in. The wellbeing of a community is not simply the sum of the wellbeing of the individuals who make up that community, and the resources available in a community are not always shared equally with all the people within that community. Because of this, it is essential to separately examine the wellbeing of people and of communities, as well as the relationship between them.

Section 2 reports on the wellbeing of Australia’s rural and regional people and places in 2014. It examines indicators of overall wellbeing ‘outcomes’ – meaning the characteristics you would expect a person or community to have if the many things that influence wellbeing have come together to provide a high quality of life. For example, someone with higher levels of wellbeing will be more satisfied with their life compared to someone with poorer wellbeing.

Section 3 then examines various factors that may influence wellbeing (referred to as ‘wellbeing determinants’). These are the things that contribute to wellbeing, such as a person’s mental and physical health, standard of living, confidence in their skills and education, social connectedness, and the liveability of their community, amongst others.
This chapter examines the wellbeing of individual people living in rural and regional Australia. We define the wellbeing of a person as:

*a state ... in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.* – World Health Organization, 2013

Many factors contribute to a person’s overall wellbeing, including their safety and security, their physical and mental health, their relationships and social networks, their access to goods and services, and the fairness of the society they live in, to name just a few (see for example Wilkinson and Marmot 2003). This section considers a person’s overall wellbeing, while Section 3 of the report examines some of the factors that contribute to that overall wellbeing at a given point in time.

When considering wellbeing, it is important to identify both those people experiencing ‘positive’ wellbeing – in other words, those people with high levels of wellbeing – and those who are experiencing poor wellbeing, sometimes called illbeing. This section principally considers wellbeing: to what extent are rural and regional Australians reporting feeling positive about their lives? Illbeing is discussed further in Section 3, which examines a measure of psychological distress sometimes considered to be a useful representation of illbeing.

**What did we measure and why?**

The Regional Wellbeing Survey measures a person’s overall wellbeing using two commonly used, internationally recognised and well validated subjective measures:
Global Life Satisfaction: A person’s rating on a scale of 0 (not at all) to 10 (very satisfied) of their satisfaction with ‘Your life as a whole’. To enable comparison of the scores on this measure to those from the Personal Wellbeing Index (described below), scores have been multiplied by 10 so life satisfaction is measured on a scale of 0 to 100.

Personal Wellbeing Index: This index measures a person’s wellbeing on a score from a potential 0-100 (although extreme scores are excluded), calculated based on responses to questions asking how satisfied they are on a scale of 0 (not at all) to 10 (very satisfied) with the following: (i) Your standard of living, (ii) Your health, (iii) What you are currently achieving in life, (iv) Your personal relationships, (v) How safe you feel, (vi) Feeling part of your community, and (vii) Your future security. See International Wellbeing Group (2013) for a detailed description of the calculation of the Personal Wellbeing Index score.

In this chapter, the wellbeing measure presented is the Global Life Satisfaction (GLS) measure. This is for two reasons. Firstly, scores were very similar for the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) and the GLS measure, as shown in Appendix 3. Second, a larger sample of people responded to the GLS measure, providing greater robustness in reporting. PWI scores are available to download from www.regionalwellbeing.org.au.

As noted by Schirmer and Berry (2014), the GLS and PWI scores reported in the Regional Wellbeing Survey are on average lower than those reported in results of other Australian surveys which include both urban and rural Australians. However, there are important similarities, particularly in the patterning of responses to the items that are used to calculate the PWI, as reported by Schirmer and Berry (2014).

Wellbeing of people living in different places

The average life satisfaction reported by rural and regional Australians did not change significantly between 2013 and 2014, with the average score remaining almost identical (71.2 in 2013 compared to 70.9 in 2014). There was also no significant change in average wellbeing reported by people living in different states between the 2013 and 2014 surveys (Figure 2.1a).

The average life satisfaction score for people living in different states varied by a small amount in 2014. Rural and regional Australians living in Tasmania (included in the survey for the first time in 2014) reported slightly higher levels of wellbeing, and those in Queensland, Western Australia and

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2 There are limited rural and regional data with which to compare Regional Wellbeing Survey results. Other wellbeing surveys are typically dominated by respondents living in large metropolitan areas, and use different survey platforms and recruitment techniques to the Regional Wellbeing Survey. As such, it is not possible to robustly confirm which specific factors result in lower wellbeing scores in the Regional Wellbeing Survey versus other Australian surveys. Three potential drivers of the differences in wellbeing scores are being explored: first, that there is a difference in wellbeing between urban and rural residents; second, that rural residents respond to wellbeing questions in ways that result in lower scores on the same measures despite little actual difference in wellbeing; and third, that the varying methods used to recruit participants for different surveys result in samples with differing wellbeing distributions. There is some limited evidence for the first hypothesised driver: previous Australian studies have found that people living in more remote rural and regional areas have lower levels of life satisfaction than those living in metropolitan areas. However, those living in rural areas with high accessibility to services have in at least one study reported higher levels of life satisfaction than their metropolitan peers (Cummins et al. 2005).
South Australia slightly lower levels of wellbeing, compared to other states. However these differences cannot be confidently said to be significant (Figure 2.1b). Despite the apparent similarity of life satisfaction across different states, these average scores do mask some important differences between states. An average score is not always a good representation of the distribution of wellbeing within a community. For example, a region in which 50% of people have very poor wellbeing and 50% very high wellbeing will have the same average score as one in which 100% of people have an ‘average’ score directly between the very low and very high scores.

To better understand the distribution of wellbeing, Figure 2.1b identifies the proportion of people who reported lower than average and higher than average wellbeing scores, defined as those had life satisfaction scores below 60 and above 80 respectively. These two points were chosen as, across Australia, they are the points that best represent the lowest and highest quartiles of the population. Those with a score under 60 have lower scores than approximately 75% of rural and regional Australians, and those with a score above 80 have higher scores than approximately 75% of rural and regional Australians.

Comparing lowest and highest quartiles is a common approach to understanding variability within a group of people, or between regions (see for example Leslie et al. 2007). While those in the lowest quartile do not all have excessively low scores, their wellbeing can be confidently said to be poorer than average. Similarly, those in the highest quartile can be confidently said to have higher than average levels of wellbeing. This is a conservative approach to showing higher and lower than average scores, which is used throughout this report to help examine the variability between different places and different groups of people, while not focusing solely on extremely high or low scores.

Rural and regional residents of Queensland and Western Australia were more likely to have lower than average life satisfaction, and Queenslanders were least likely to report higher than average life satisfaction. Those living in New South Wales and Tasmania were most likely to report higher than average life satisfaction.

State level comparisons by their nature ‘even out’ differences within regions in each state, and as such show little differentiation in wellbeing. Within every state, there are often large variations in wellbeing of people living in different local communities and regions. Figure 2.1c shows the average life satisfaction score reported in different regions, while Figures 2.1d and 2.1e show the proportion of residents reporting lower than average and higher than average life satisfaction.

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3 See Chapter 1.2 for notes about how to interpret the confidence intervals shown in Figure 2.1b and subsequent figures.
4 Because Global Life Satisfaction is measured on an 11 point scale, the cut off points do not have exactly 25% of people scoring below and above them respectively nationwide – instead, they represent the score that comes closest to a true quartile.
Figure 2.1a Global Life Satisfaction – average score reported by individuals living in Australia, and in different states

Too small a sample was achieved in the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory to produce separate results from these territories in 2014. The state of Tasmania was included in the Regional Wellbeing Survey from 2014 only; therefore no 2013 data are shown for this state.
Figure 2.1b Global Life Satisfaction, 2014, by state
Figure 2.1c Global Life Satisfaction, 2014 – average scores by region
Figure 2.1d Global Life Satisfaction, 2014 – proportion of population reporting lower than average life satisfaction  

6 Defined as those with a score lower than the 25th percentile score for all rural and regional Australians.

Figure 2.1e Global Life Satisfaction, 2014 – proportion of population reporting higher than average life satisfaction  

7 Defined as those with a score higher than the 75th percentile score for all rural and regional Australians.
GLS scores were below the national average in several regions:

- NSW: the Central West, Murray, and Orana regions
- VIC: the Grampians region
- QLD: Southern Coastal Queensland, Central Queensland
- SA: Murraylands and Riverland, Limestone Coast
- WA: South West Perth and Peel*, Great Southern, Mid West Gascoyne and Pilbara, Wheatbelt

GLS scores were above the national average in:

- NSW: Far South Coast and Illawarra
- VIC: rural areas in Melbourne East
- QLD: Far North Queensland and Torres Strait
- WA/NT: Goldfields Esperance*, Northern Territory and Kimberley.

As well as considering the average score, it is useful to look at the proportion of residents reporting a lower than average and higher than average score. This can help identify whether the average score is a consequence of most people in a region reporting similar wellbeing, or if it is instead the result of many reporting lower than average and many reporting higher than average scores.

From Figures 2.1d and 2.1e it is clear that in the Darling Downs and South West (QLD) region, a larger proportion of people reported both lower and higher than average scores than was typical across Australia as a whole. In most other regions, patterns indicated either a relatively similar proportion of people reporting higher and lower than average scores, or a pattern in which more people reported lower scores, or higher scores, but not both. This suggests that in the Darling Downs and South West region many people are experiencing poorer life satisfaction, while others are experiencing high life satisfaction. Local organisations, when consulted about this, suggested it may be due to extended drought being experienced in some parts of the region while at the same time jobs in the mining sector remained relatively strong in other parts. It is important to note that these will be just some of the factors influencing the distribution of wellbeing in the region – and in particular, that how changes such as drought and mining affect a region will be in part determined by the resilience and capacity of that region to cope successfully with change.

More broadly, people living in regions experiencing drought or severe rainfall deficiency in the last three years were more likely to report poor wellbeing, particularly in the Central Queensland (QLD), Orana (NSW) and (to a lesser extent) Grampians (VIC) regions. This can be seen by comparing Figure 2.1f, which shows areas of Australia had experienced rainfall deficiencies over a 31 month period to April 2014, with average life satisfaction scores in Figure 2.1c. In other regions with poor GLS scores, it is possible to identify community-level factors that may contribute to poorer wellbeing, such as downturn in mining or tourism industries. However, a complex mix of factors will be influencing life satisfaction of residents in every region; while broad changes such as drought or economic downturn will be a contributing factor, there will be many other short- and long-term contributing factors.

* Throughout this report, the use of a * indicates a region in which a small sample size was achieved. As a consequence, there is lower confidence in results.
Wellbeing of different types of people

A person’s wellbeing is influenced by many factors, and the mix of factors that contribute to any given person’s wellbeing is unique. Despite this complexity, there are some common patterns to wellbeing and how it varies between groups. The average wellbeing scores of men and women, people of different ages, and farmers and non-farmers are compared in Figure 2.1g. The proportion of each group who reported lower and higher than average wellbeing is also shown.

Women, those aged 65 and older, and dryland farmers were more likely to report high levels of wellbeing compared to the national average. Men were more likely to report low levels of wellbeing. People aged below 65, irrigators and non-farmers reported wellbeing levels similar to the national average, although those aged 30 to 49 did have slightly lower life satisfaction compared to other age groups. These results are very similar to those reported from the 2013 Regional Wellbeing Survey.

Comparing different groups

Throughout the main body of this report, we examine differences between people of (i) different ages, (ii) different genders, and (iii) farmers and non-farmers. These groups are compared because there are important differences between them; and because we have a large sample size for each.

Many other groups could also be examined: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, migrants from other countries, and those identifying as ‘LGBTIQ’ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intergender, questioning or asexual), to name just a few. As the survey includes relatively small samples of these groups (100 to 300 people for each), we will publish findings for them after a more detailed analysis of potential biases and limitations of the responses received for each group.
Figure 2.1g Global Life Satisfaction, 2014, by group
Conclusions

Between 2013 and 2014, the average life satisfaction of rural and regional Australians did not change significantly. In 2014, at the population level there were no significant differences in the wellbeing of rural and regional Australians living in different states. However, the distribution of wellbeing differed: lower than average levels of wellbeing were more common in Queensland and Western Australia than other states, while Queenslanders were least likely to report higher than average levels of wellbeing. Those living in New South Wales and Tasmania were more likely to report higher levels of wellbeing compared to those other states. Wellbeing varied much more at the regional level. Average wellbeing scores were consistently lower in areas experiencing drought and rainfall deficiency, but were also low in several regions not experiencing drought. A complex mix of factors will be influencing average wellbeing scores across the population of any given region, including cultural, historical, social, economic, physical and health-related factors.

Women, those aged 65 and older, and dryland farmers were more likely to report high levels of wellbeing compared to the national average. Men and those aged 30 to 49 were more likely to report low levels of wellbeing. People aged below 65, irrigators and non-farmers reported wellbeing levels similar to the national average.
2.2 Wellbeing of communities

The future of Australia’s rural and regional communities is often a subject of debate. Concerns about depopulation and loss of services are commonly reported in both the news media and academic studies; equally, there is examination of the factors leading to rapid population growth in some rural and regional areas such as coastal towns experiencing an influx of ‘seachangers’. A large body of work examines the causes and consequences of both decline of some rural communities, and the growth of others.

Increasingly, this work is considering not only the important economic and demographic drivers and consequences of change, but also the role of a community’s ‘liveability,’ or wellbeing, in determining its future. A community with high liveability, it is argued, is more likely to retain its existing residents, and to attract new people to live in it. Perhaps more importantly (at least from a wellbeing perspective), it is also more likely to support high levels of wellbeing for its residents.

Community wellbeing has not been as precisely defined as individual wellbeing, but the work of international organisations and the ‘healthy cities/healthy communities’ movement suggests that a healthy community is one in which:

\[
\text{... all systems function as they should, and work together to make the community function well ... a healthy community is one in which all citizens can be assured of a decent quality of life – economically, physically, environmentally, socially, and politically. - KU Work Group for Community Health and Development (2014)}^{9}\]

This is often referred to as the ‘liveability’ of a community. However, as detailed in Schirmer and Berry (2014), it is critical to recognise that it goes well beyond the physical aspects of liveability to

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9 This reference is available online at http://ctb.ku.edu/ (the cited text was accessed on May 12, 2014). More about the Community Tool Box this quote was sourced from can be found in Fawcett et al. (2000).
issues of equality of opportunity and access to a community’s resources. To have high levels of wellbeing communities need, amongst other things, a healthy environment (natural and built); healthy and stable governance with opportunities for participation; adequate access to food, water, shelter, education and learning opportunities, health services, cultural and social opportunities; and a diverse economy that provides livelihood opportunities (Norris and Pittman 2000). There remains considerable debate about which of these is most important and in what order but, together, they are key elements of communities that prosper socially, economically, and environmentally.

What did we measure and why?

Community wellbeing was measured using the Community Wellbeing Index (CWI), first used in the 2013 Regional Wellbeing Survey (Schirmer and Berry 2014). This index is measured as the average score of responses to the following items, each of which is measured on a 7-point scale from ‘strongly disagree’ (1) to ‘strongly agree’ (7). The CWI thus has a range of 1 to 7:

- My community is a great place to live
- This community copes pretty well when faced with challenges
- I feel proud to live in this community
- This community has a bright future
- There’s good community spirit around here

These statements collectively provide a measure of how attached and positive residents feel about living in their community, and about the future of that community. It measures the overall ‘sense of community’ a person feels (Pretty et al. 2007). In both the 2013 and 2014 surveys, statistical analysis confirmed that these five items measure different facets of the underlying concept of community wellbeing.

Community wellbeing – by region

Between 2013 and 2014, the Community Wellbeing Index rose slightly across rural and regional Australia (Figure 2.2a). This change was consistent across all states in which the survey was conducted in both 2013 and 2014.

People living in Queensland had a lower average CWI score significantly lower than the national average, and all other states (Figure 2.2b). When the proportion of people reporting scores that were lower and higher than the national average were examined, shown in Figure 2.2b, Queensland was the only state in which residents more frequently reported lower than average scores compared to higher scores.

When examined by region (Figure 2.2c), regions with lower than average CWI scores included southern coastal regions in both New South Wales and Queensland, the Northern Territory and Kimberley region, Central Queensland, and the Murraylands and Riverland (SA) region. Few regions

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10 Lower than average scores were defined as those falling within the bottom quartile of the nationwide rural and regional average (scores of 4.81 or below out of a possible 7), and higher than average scores were defined as those falling in the top quartile (scores of 6.19 or above out of a possible 7). As described in Section 2.1, this is a conservative approach to defining ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ than average, designed to show differences between regions and groups.
had scores that were significantly higher than the national average, the exceptions being the mid- and northern coastal areas of New South Wales.

Whereas individual wellbeing was consistently lower in regions experiencing drought in 2014, the same is not true for community wellbeing: the CWI was lower than average in Central Queensland, a region experiencing extended and severe drought, but not in several other regions that have experienced drought in recent years. This highlights that while events such as drought have profound impacts on wellbeing, the relationship to community wellbeing is more complex.

In some regions, many residents report poor community wellbeing and others high wellbeing, even though they live in the same region. Regions in which a large group of residents reported lower than average community wellbeing scores were the Central Queensland (QLD), Northern Territory and Kimberley, Melbourne East (VIC), Wheatbelt (WA), Far South Coast and Illawarra (NSW), Murraylands and Riverland (SA) and Murray (NSW) regions (Figure 2.2d). In these regions, even though the average CWI score for the whole community may be close to average, there is a substantial group of people who have low confidence in, and sense of pride in, their community. Conversely, those in which a large group of residents reported higher than average scores were the Riverina (NSW), Mid West Gascoyne and Pilbara (WA), Central and southern remote Australia (SA/NSW), Gippsland (VIC), Great Southern (WA) and Northern Rivers (NSW) regions (Figure 2.2e).

In each of these regions, a different set of factors is likely to be contributing to poorer or higher than average community wellbeing.

**Community wellbeing experienced by different types of people**

A community with high liveability typically has positive resources – for example, it may have good access to services, high quality infrastructure, and have strong community organisations. However, even in these communities, not all residents will have equal access to the assets, resources and benefits that exist in that community. People who live in the same town may experience it very differently depending on what street they live in, who they interact with, and whether they feel others would welcome their involvement in community activities, to name just a few. Therefore it is important to examine whether some groups typically report lower community wellbeing than others. Men and women, and farmers and non-farmers, had very similar CWI scores (Figure 2.2f). People aged 18 to 29 had lower than average CWI scores.
Figure 2.2a Community Wellbeing Index, 2013 and 2014, by state.
Figure 2.2b Community Wellbeing Index, 2014, by state
Figure 2.2c Community Wellbeing Index, 2014 – average scores by region
Figure 2.2d Community Wellbeing Index, 2014 – proportion of population reporting lower than average scores

11 Defined as those with a score lower than the 25th percentile score for all rural and regional Australians

Figure 2.2e Community Wellbeing Index, 2014 – proportion of population reporting higher than average scores

12 Defined as those with a score higher than the 75th percentile score for all rural and regional Australians
Figure 2.2f Community Wellbeing Index, 2014, by group
Conclusions

The wellbeing of a community is not the same as that of an individual: a healthy community is one which functions successfully to provide a high quality of life for all residents. The Community Wellbeing Index measures this by asking residents how much they agree or disagree that their community is a great place to live, copes well with challenges, has a bright future, has good community spirit, and is a place they are proud to live in. These measures provide insight into how people feel about their community – something commonly called their ‘sense of community’ (Pretty et al. 2007).

People living in Queensland reported lower levels of community wellbeing compared to those living in other states. This was particularly the case in Central Queensland, where extended drought and a downturn in mining were being experienced simultaneously in 2014. At a regional scale, there was more variability in community wellbeing, which is not able to be explained with reference to any single influencing factor – for example, some regions experiencing drought had lower than average CWI scores, while others did not. In any given community, a wide range of factors are likely to influence the CWI score.

Men and women reported similar levels of community wellbeing, while farmers reported slightly higher community wellbeing compared to non-farmers. The group most likely to report low community wellbeing was younger people (those aged under 30 years). Younger people had lower confidence in the future of their community, lower pride in their community, and were less likely to feel that their community was a great place to live or that it coped well with change. This highlights that young people are often experiencing living in rural and regional communities in very different ways to older people, something discussed further in subsequent parts of this report.
Section 3 Wellbeing determinants

Section 3 examines factors that are often argued to influence the wellbeing of people and places, and the capacity of those people and places to adapt successfully to change. These are sometimes referred to as ‘determinants of wellbeing’, sometimes as ‘resilience resources’, and sometimes as ‘capital’ that supports adaptive capacity.

We use the term ‘wellbeing determinants’, but note that while the ‘wellbeing determinants’ we examine are commonly believed to influence wellbeing – in other words, to help determine how positive or negative a person or community’s wellbeing is – in many cases, there is limited evidence about whether, how strongly, or through what mechanisms, the each of these determinants influences wellbeing. Fleche et al. (2012), reviewing current knowledge on the determinants of subjective wellbeing, also point out that the determinants of wellbeing will not necessarily be the same for all countries, for all regions within countries or for different groups of people. This means that not all the wellbeing determinants examined in this section will be important to all rural and regional Australians, or to all of the communities they live in. It also means that there will be determinants of wellbeing important to communities that are not examined in the Regional Wellbeing Survey.

At the community scale, communities are commonly argued to be more resilient, adaptive and healthy if they have a strong economy, good access to services and infrastructure, aesthetically pleasing landscapes, low crime, positive social interaction and inclusion, strong institutions and governance, and positive leadership. At the personal level, people with high levels of wellbeing who cope well with change often have high confidence in their skills and resources, low household financial stress, strong involvement in the community, good relationships with family and friends, good health, and are included in local decision making processes, amongst other things. Each of these areas is discussed in more detail in Section 3.

Having access to the types of resources that support wellbeing, resilience and adaptive capacity is sometimes called having access to different types of ‘capital’ – financial, human, social, physical, natural and institutional. These capitals are argued to provide resources people and communities can draw on, use and transform, to achieve positive wellbeing outcomes (Schirmer and Berry, 2014). In this section we report on the access of rural and regional Australians to the following types of resources:

- Chapter 3.1 Financial capital
  - Household financial wellbeing
  - Local economic wellbeing
- Chapter 3.2 Human capital
  - Confidence in skills and education
  - Health
  - Community leadership and collaboration
- Chapter 3.3 Institutional capital
  - Having a say and being heard
  - Equity and inclusion
- Chapter 3.4 Social capital
- Friends and family
- Getting involved in the local community
- Belonging

- Chapter 3.5 Physical capital & liveability
  - Access to services and infrastructure
  - Access to telecommunications
  - Crime and safety
  - Landscape and aesthetics

- Chapter 3.6 Natural capital
  - Perceived environmental health

We then examine how access to these varying resources varies overall for different regions and different people, identifying which places and which people are facing more challenges versus more opportunities across rural and regional Australia.
3.1 Financial capital

The term ‘financial capital’ can be defined as the access households and communities have to financial resources. A household with high levels of financial capital is one in which household income is easily enough to meet expenses and provide a high standard of living. This doesn’t necessarily require a high income – for example, low income earners who are located in regions in which the cost of living is also low may have higher financial wellbeing than those who earn a higher income, but live in regions with expensive food and housing (Rowley et al. 2014).

Going beyond the household, the importance of economic viability to a community’s future is well recognised. A community in which there are plenty of jobs, living costs aren’t too high, and shops and businesses are doing well, is more likely to be viable into the future, and to support high levels of wellbeing for its residents (Frey and Stutzer 2010).

To understand the contribution of financial capital to overall wellbeing, the survey measured (i) the financial wellbeing of households, and (ii) the economic wellbeing of communities.

Household financial wellbeing

While money isn’t everything, having adequate money to access food, housing, goods and services is important to every household. Higher levels of income have been found in many studies to be correlated with higher life satisfaction, but usually only up to a point: the correlation between
additional income and higher levels of wellbeing typically weakens as incomes increase (Cummins 2000, Diener and Biswas-Diener 2002).

**What did we measure?**
Household financial wellbeing is not solely dependent on income, but also the cost of living relative to income and a person’s values and expectations about money. Given this, household financial wellbeing was examined using two measures:

- **Household income**: Survey participants were asked to select their household income bracket from the following options - Nil or negative income; $1-10,399; $10,400-20,799; $20800-31,199; $31,200-41,599; $41,600-51,999; $52,000-64,999; $65,000-77,999; $78,000-102,999; $103,000-129,999; $130,000-155,999; $156,000-207,999; $208,000-259,999; $260,000 plus. These categories were used as they align with data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics *Census of Population and Housing*.

- **Self-rated financial wellbeing**: Respondents were asked ‘given your current needs and financial responsibilities, would you say that you and your family are...’ and provided the response options: prosperous, very comfortable, reasonably comfortable, just getting along, poor, very poor. This measure reflects both a person’s social expectations about what constitutes an adequate income, and their objective needs related to household size, cost of living, income etc., and is used in several Australian surveys.

These two measures were arithmetically adjusted so that each was measured from 1 (lowest level of financial wellbeing) to 7 (highest level of financial wellbeing). A single measure of household financial wellbeing was then calculated as the average score of the two measures. Lower scores indicate poorer financial wellbeing, and higher scores greater financial wellbeing.

This measure differs slightly to that used in the 2013 Regional Wellbeing Survey, which also included a measure of the number of financial stress events a respondent had experienced. The experience of financial stress events was excluded from the household financial wellbeing measure in this report for two reasons: firstly, it contributed little variability to the overall measure, and secondly, it is best examined as a separate measure of financial distress, rather than as a measure of financial wellbeing.

**Household financial wellbeing in different places**
Across rural and regional Australia, average household financial wellbeing differed substantially between states and regions. Figure 3.1a shows the average household financial wellbeing score for people living in different states, as well as the proportion of people in each state who reported low and high levels of household financial wellbeing. Those living in Western Australia had the highest overall household financial wellbeing, and those in Tasmania the lowest, while household financial wellbeing was also slightly below the national average in South Australia. People living in Western Australia were much more likely to have incomes higher than the national average, while those in Queensland and Tasmania were more likely to have incomes below the national average.

Household financial wellbeing varied substantially between regions (Figure 3.1b). Average household financial wellbeing was lowest in the Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island (SA), Southern coastal Queensland (QLD), Murraylands and Riverland (SA), Loddon Mallee (VIC) and Barwon South West (VIC) regions. It was highest in regional areas to the east of Melbourne, in regions surrounding...
Perth, in regions of Western Australia and the Northern Territory with high dependence on mining employment (Goldfields Esperance, Northern Territory and Kimberley, and Mid West Gascoyne and Pilbara), in the Limestone Coast (SA), and in the Far South Coast and Illawarra (NSW).

**Household financial wellbeing for different people**

Figure 3.1c shows, for different groups of people, (i) average household financial wellbeing, and (ii) the proportion of people reporting lower and higher than average household financial wellbeing. There was very little difference between men and women. Older people reported poorer household financial wellbeing compared to younger people. Irrigators were more likely to report poor financial wellbeing compared to dryland farmers and non-farmers, while dryland farmers were slightly more likely than others to report having high household financial wellbeing.

![Graph showing household financial wellbeing by state](image1.png)

*Figure 3.1a Household financial wellbeing, 2014, by state*
Figure 3.1b Household financial wellbeing, 2014, by region – average score
Figure 3.1c Household financial wellbeing, 2014, by group
Community economic wellbeing

The economic wellbeing of a person’s local community is an important factor influencing the financial wellbeing of the people living in it. A community is typically considered to have high economic wellbeing if there are plenty of jobs, living costs are affordable, local businesses are maintaining viability, and most people in the community are financially secure (Frey and Stutzer 2010).

In some rural communities, some of these things are present while others are not. For example, rapid expansion of jobs in a rural community is often associated with a rapid increase in living costs, as more people compete for limited housing and other goods and services. The impact of the expansion of mining in rural areas of Australia is often used as an example of this economic growth/living cost ‘squeeze’: expansion of mining often brings economic benefits to rural areas in the form of increased economic activity and local jobs for a rural area. However, the same expansion often also leads to growth in local living costs, due to increased competition for limited housing, and growth in wages to workers both within and outside the mining sector. This increase in living costs can reduce the economic benefits generated for local residents by the mining activity (Measham et al. 2013, Zhang and Moffat 2015). While the mining sector is perhaps the most commonly cited example of this type of pressure in Australia, expansion of any industry in rural areas can lead to both increased jobs, and increased living expenses.

A rural community with few employment opportunities, closing local shops, and limited financial resources also often experiences declining population, loss of services, and may be less able to support the wellbeing of its residents. While community economic wellbeing is not the sole driver of decline or growth of rural and regional communities - Pritchard and McManus (2000) provide an overview of the many factors contributing to this type of change – it is an important contributor.

What did we measure?

The economic wellbeing of communities was measured using a scale calculated based on survey participant’s level of agreement with the following statements:

- Living costs are affordable here e.g. food, petrol, housing
- This community is financially well-off
- There are plenty of jobs available around here
- Local businesses in this town are doing pretty well at the moment

Responses to these four statements were averaged to form a single measure of community economic wellbeing, measured from 1 (low levels of community economic wellbeing) to 7 (high levels of community economic wellbeing). This measure is slightly different to that used in 2013, when only the first three questions were combined into a scale. The new addition to the scale measures a further dimension of community economic wellbeing.

Community economy wellbeing in different places

People living in rural and regional areas of Victoria had, on average, the most positive views about the health of their local economy, followed by those in New South Wales. Those living in Queensland
reported the lowest levels of community economic wellbeing, much lower than for all other states (Figure 3.1d).

At a regional scale (Figure 3.1e), the regions most likely to report low community economic wellbeing included several that are experiencing drought, decline in the mining sector or decline in tourism – and in some cases more than one of these. These included the Central Queensland (QLD), Far North Queensland and Torres Strait (QLD), Mid West Gascoyne and Pilbara (WA), Northern Territory and Kimberley (NT/WA), and Central and southern remote Australia (SA/NSW) regions. Poor economic wellbeing was also reported in the Northern Rivers (NSW) and Murraylands and Riverland (SA) regions.

Higher than average levels of economic wellbeing were reported in a diverse set of regions, which included the rural regions just outside two major cities (Melbourne and Perth), the Limestone Coast (SA), Riverina (NSW) and Central West (NSW) regions.

**Community economic wellbeing for different people**

Within any local community, some groups may have more ready access to the local economy than others. For example, a person who lacks the skills to access jobs on offer in their local community may feel their local economy is performing poorly even if it is considered by others to have a healthy level of economic activity. When the views of different groups were compared (Figure 3.1f), men reported slightly more positive views of the health of their local economy than women, although differences were small. Those aged 65 and older were more likely to have a positive view of the health of their local economy compared to those aged 30 to 64; while those aged less than 30 had a slightly more positive view of their local economy compared to those aged 30 to 64. Dryland farmers were more likely than irrigators or non-farmers to report positive community economic wellbeing.

The more positive views of people aged 65 and older possibly reflect the very different ways in which people engage with their local economy after retiring from the workforce. The views of the younger age group, and dryland farmers, are more difficult to interpret, suggesting a need to better understand how these groups engage with and view their local community’s economy.
Figure 3.1d Community economic wellbeing, 2014, by state
Figure 3.1e Community economic wellbeing, 2014, by region – average score
Figure 3.1f Community economic wellbeing, 2014, by group
Chapter 3.2: Key points

- This chapter examines human capital. For individual people, human capital can be thought of as the personal skills, resources and resilience a person can draw on to help achieve the things they want to in life. At the local community scale, human capital can be thought of as the processes of leadership and collaboration in which people’s skills and resources are brought together to help ensure the future of the community.
- Three aspects of human capital were examined: (i) health, (ii) confidence in skills and education, and (iii) community leadership and collaboration.
- Health
  - People living in New South Wales and Western Australia were slightly more likely to report their overall health as very good or excellent, and those in Queensland and South Australia less likely to, compared to the national average.
  - Young people, women and dryland farmers on average reported better general health compared to older people, men, non-farmers and irrigators.
  - Those aged under 30 were much more likely to report high levels of psychological distress compared to other groups; average distress levels fell as age increased, and was lowest for those aged 65 and over, and for dryland farmers. Average distress levels were slightly higher for men compared to women.
- Confidence in skills and education
  - People living in Western Australia were more likely to report having high confidence in their skills and education, and those in Victoria, and to a lesser extent Queensland and Tasmania, less likely to.
  - Those aged under 30 were more likely to report low confidence in their skills and education than those aged 30 and over. Farmers also had lower confidence compared to non-farmers.
- Community leadership and collaboration
  - People living in Western Australia were most likely to report strong levels of leadership and collaboration in their local communities, and those in living in Queensland and Tasmania least likely to.
  - Men, younger people and non-farmers reported lower confidence in the level of leadership and collaboration in their local communities, and women, older people and farmers higher confidence.
- Overall, human capital is highest for older people and farmers, however the results show different types of human capital are stronger and poorer for different groups and in different regions. Farmers, for example, report better health, and stronger confidence in community leadership and collaboration, but lower confidence in their skills and education, compared to other groups. Younger people report poorer human capital in almost all areas.
3.2 Human capital

‘Human capital’ refers to the resources available to people and communities as a result of their skills, education, health and more broadly their personal resilience and capabilities (Luthans et al. 2005, Stokols et al. 2013). A person who has the skills, education and health they need to achieve their desired goals is likely to have higher wellbeing compared to a person who faces difficulties due to poor health, or a gap in skills and education (Costanza et al. 2007). At the community scale, residents who contribute their skills and resources help to ensure a successful future for their community: the community’s future is more likely to be successful compared to a community in which residents do not contribute, or contribute less, to the community (Cuthill and Fien 2005, Magis 2010).

Three types of human capital were examined as part of the Regional Wellbeing Survey. First, key measures of general health and psychological distress were examined to better understand health. Second, people’s confidence in their access to the skills and resources they need was examined. Thirdly, survey participants were asked whether they felt local residents contributed their skills and resources to their local community.

Health – overall health

A person’s overall health (mental and physical) has an important influence on their wellbeing. A strong body of evidence has demonstrated strong linkages between a person’s subjective wellbeing (measured using indicators such as life satisfaction), and their objectively or subjectively measured physical or mental health (see for example Brief et al. 1993, Okun et al. 1984).

A person’s health can be measured in many ways, and one useful way of doing this is to ask people to rate their health overall, without asking them to specify the different aspects of their health that are good or poor.

What did we measure?
Respondents were asked ‘how would you rate your general health?’, and asked to select one of the following options: excellent, very good, good, fair or poor. This simple measure has been shown in multiple studies to have high validity as a single item measure of general health (De Salvo et al., 2006).

Health in different places

Figure 3.2a shows the proportion of rural and regional Australians who reported they were in (i) fair or poor health, and (ii) excellent or very good health. Nationally, 18.4% of rural and regional Australians were in fair or poor health, while the majority – 51.8% - were in excellent or very good health, and the remaining 29.8% reported being in good health.

Rural and regional Australians living in New South Wales reported slightly better health on average compared to those living in other states (Figure 3.2a). Average scores for general health were lower in South Australia and Queensland compared to other states.

There was significant regional variation in health scores (Figure 3.2b). Average scores for general health were poorest in the Yorke and Mid North (SA), Southern Coastal Queensland (QLD),
Murraylands and Riverland (SA), Mid West Gascoyne and Pilbara (WA), Great Southern (WA), and Goldfields Esperance (WA) regions. People were most likely to report excellent or very good health if they lived in the Far South Coast and Illawarra (NSW), South West Perth and Peel (WA), Northern Rivers (NSW), Northern Territory and Kimberley (NT/WA), Southern Melbourne (VIC) and Barwon South West (VIC) regions.

**Health for different people**

Younger people, women, and dryland farmers reported better health than average. Older people and men reported poorer health than average. Irrigators reported general health similar to the rural and regional Australian average (Figure 3.2c).

![Figure 3.2a General health, 2014, by state](image)
Figure 3.2b General health, 2014, by region – proportion of residents reporting ‘poor’ or ‘fair’ health
Figure 3.2c General health, 2014, by group
Health – psychological distress

This section examines the experience of psychological distress, an important indicator of mental health, and often considered an indicator of overall ‘illbeing’ – in other words, of negative wellbeing outcomes. Increasingly, many argue that it is important to measure not only a person’s level of wellbeing, for example, through indicators such as their overall life satisfaction, but also their levels of illbeing, using indicators such as levels of psychological distress. While wellbeing and illbeing are typically strongly correlated, there can be important differences in the factors that influence each, although there remains a lack of evidence regarding when, where and how the determinants of wellbeing and illbeing might differ (Winefield et al. 2012). The wellbeing determinants associated with psychological distress (illbeing) versus life satisfaction (positive wellbeing) are examined further in Chapter 3.7.

What did we measure?

We measured the Kessler ten-item measure of General Psychological Distress (the ‘K10’) (Kessler et al. 2002). The K10 is a scale designed to measure non-specific symptoms of psychological distress derived from ten questions about anxiety and depression. It is measured by asking respondents ‘in the last four weeks, how often have you felt…’

- Tired out for no good reason
- Nervous
- So nervous nothing could calm you down
- Hopeless
- Restless or fidgety
- So restless you could not sit still
- Depressed
- That everything was an effort
- So sad that nothing could cheer you up
- Worthless

Participants indicated whether they had felt this way none of the time (1), a little of the time (2), some of the time (3), most of the time (4), or all of the time (5). Total scores were added across these 10 items, to give an overall score of distress measured from a lowest possible score of 10 (no distress at all) to a maximum of 50 (the most severe distress).

Unlike other wellbeing determinants, higher scores for this measure indicate poorer outcomes in the form of greater distress. While not a diagnostic tool, the K10 is a valid screening tool, with higher scores indicating higher likelihood a person has a clinically diagnosable mental illnesses (Andrews and Slade 2001). In a clinical setting, the following guide is commonly used to interpret K10 scores (Andrews and Slade 2001; Kessler et al. 2002)13:

- score under 20: likely to be well

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13 Different cut-off points are sometimes used: for example, Slade et al. (2011) reported scores of 10-15 as low low distress, 16-21 moderate distress, 22-29 high distress and 30 and over very high distress.
• score 20-24: likely to have a mild mental disorder
• score 25-29: likely to have moderate mental disorder
• score 30 and over: likely to have a severe mental disorder

We use this guide to identify two groups of people: those who have low levels of distress (scores under 20), and those with high levels of distress (scores of 25 and over).

Psychological distress in different places
Across Australia, the average K10 score for rural and regional Australians was 17.2. This score is similar to that identified for rural Australians of 18.2 by Berry and Rodgers (2003), but is higher than average scores typically identified for Australia as a whole, which are commonly 14 to 15 (for example, Slade et al. 2011 identified an Australia-wide mean score of 14.5). It is also higher than that identified in some studies of rural and regional Australians (for example, Kelly et al. 2010 identified scores ranging from 14.4 to 16.3 for people living in areas with differing levels of remoteness).

There were relatively small differences between states (Figure 3.2d), although people living in Western Australia reported better outcomes, having low levels of distress compared to other state, those in South Australia were more likely to report high levels of distress. By region, there was variance in patterns of distress. As can be seen in Figure 3.2e, the regions with the lowest psychological distress scores (in other words, those where fewer people are likely to be experiencing severe distress), were Melbourne East (VIC), Wheatbelt (WA), South West Perth and Peel (WA), Far North Queensland and Torres Strait (QLD), and Goldfields Esperance (WA). Those in which residents were most likely to report high levels of distress, indicating potentially poorer mental health outcomes, were the Murray (NSW), Adelaide Hills Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island (SA), Loddon Mallee (VIC), Hunter Central Coast and Mid North Coast (NSW), Central Queensland (QLD) and Mid West Gascoyne and Pilbara (WA) regions.

Psychological distress for different people
The groups least likely to report psychological distress were older people (particularly those aged 65 and older), dryland farmers, and irrigators (Figure 3.2f). Those most likely to report distress were people aged under 30, who on average reported much higher levels of distress than those in older age groups. Women reported slightly lower levels of psychological distress than men, however the difference between women and men was smaller than the differences between age groups, and between farmers and non-farmers.
Figure 3.2d Psychological distress (K10 measure), 2014, by state
Figure 3.2e Psychological distress (K10 measure), 2014, by region — average score (higher scores indicate higher distress)
Figure 3.2f Psychological distress (K10 measure), 2014, by group
Confidence in skills and education

There are strong associations between an individual’s access to education and skills, and their economic and social success in general (Heckman 2000). There are fewer demonstrated direct linkages between a person’s education and skills and their subjective wellbeing (Helliwell and Putnam 2004). Rather than measuring skills as being equivalent to a person’s level of formal educational attainment – a problematic assumption for the many people for whom informal skills are as important as formal education - the Regional Wellbeing Survey asks about a person’s level of confidence that they have the skills and resources they need.

What did we measure?

A person’s access to skills and resources was measured by asking survey participants how much they agreed or disagree that:

- My skills and education are adequate for my needs
- The skills I have are in demand in my local community

Responses to these two statements were significantly correlated, and were averaged to form a single measure of confidence in skills and education, scored from 1 (low levels of confidence in skills and education) to 7 (high levels of confidence in skills and education). This measure is more specific than the broader measure of human capital used in the 2013 Regional Wellbeing Survey.

Confidence in skills and education in different places

People living in Victoria, and to a lesser extent Tasmania and Queensland, were more likely to report having low confidence in their skills and education compared to those in other states (Figure 3.2g). Those living in Western Australia reported the highest confidence in their skills and education.

At the regional level, there was relatively little variation between regions (Figure 3.2h). People living in the Southern Melbourne (VIC), Southern coastal Queensland (QLD), Grampians (VIC), Southern Inland (NSW) and Murraylands and Riverland (SA) regions were more likely to report having low confidence in skills and education. The region in which people were most likely to report high confidence in skills and education were predominantly in Western Australia or more remote areas (the outskirts of Perth, the Mid West Gascoyne and Pilbara, Goldfields and Esperance and Northern Territory and Kimberley regions), and in the Limestone Coast (SA).

Confidence in skills and education for different people

Men and women reported similar levels of confidence in their skills and education (Figure 3.2i). People aged under 30 were less confident in their skills and education compared to those in older age groups, and confidence in general increased with age. Farmers – both dryland and irrigators – reported lower levels of confidence in their skills and education compared to non-farmers.
Figure 3.2g Confidence in skills and education, 2014, by state
Figure 3.2h Confidence in skills and education, 2014, by region – average score
Figure 3.2i Confidence in skills and education, 2014, by group
Community leadership and collaboration

To sustain a viable future, communities often aim to attract residents who have high levels of human capital – people with high levels of skills, education, and good health. However, for the community to benefit from the presence of these skilled residents, they must be willing to contribute their skills and resources in ways that support the community they live in. Ensuring people’s resources are drawn on to help their community involves both human capital (having skills and resources to draw on) and social capital (people working together to use those skills and resources to benefit their community). The ‘human capital’ side of this can be thought of as whether people choose to use their skills and resources to contribute to the broader community. One way of measuring whether this is occurring is to identify whether the community has strong leaders, who draw on the skills and resources available in their own and nearby communities to help their community cope with change. Leadership and collaboration are commonly argued to be key factors determining the future success of communities (e.g. Cuthill and Fien 2005, Emery and Flora 2006, Magis 2010).

What did we measure?
The human capital available to communities was measured using the following statements, each of which examines a different aspect of whether the human capital of individuals in a community is brought together to address challenges facing that community:

- People around here are good at getting help and ideas from other communities
- Whatever the problem, someone in this community takes the lead in sorting it out
- Local groups and organisations around here are good at getting things done

Responses to these three statements were averaged to form a single measure of community human capital, measured from 1 (low levels of community human capital in the form of leadership and collaboration) to 7 (high levels of leadership and collaboration).

This measure has been simplified since the 2013 Regional Wellbeing Survey, which also included the statements ‘People around here have a lot of drive and energy’ and ‘People in this community work together to overcome challenges’. The two excluded statements were found to have cross-over with other concepts beyond community leadership and collaboration, and so were excluded, leaving three statements that more specifically focus on leadership and collaboration.

Community leadership and collaboration in different places

People living in Western Australia, and to a lesser extent New South Wales and Victoria, were more likely than those living in other states to report that people in their local communities collaborated and worked together for the future of their community. Those living in Queensland and Tasmania were least likely to feel that people contributed their skills to the future of their community (Figure 3.2j).

People were more likely to report low levels of community leadership and collaboration if they lived in the Central Queensland (QLD), Northern Territory and Kimberley (NT/WA), Far North Queensland and Torres Strait (QLD), Murray (NSW), Yorke and Mid North (SA) or Orana (NSW) regions (Figure 3.2k). This is a diverse set of regions, including both more and less densely populated parts of regional Australia. People were more likely to report high levels of community leadership and
collaboration if they lived in the South West, Perth and Peel (WA), Northern Rivers (NSW), Mid West Gascoyne and Pilbara (WA), Riverina (NSW) or Wheatbelt (WA) regions.

**Community leadership and collaboration for different people**

Women, older people, dryland farmers and irrigators were more likely than men, younger people, and non-farmers to report high levels of leadership and collaboration in their local community (Figure 3.2l). This was the case even within the same community, suggesting that in a given community, some groups feel more connected to community leaders and community processes than others.

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**Figure 3.2j Community leadership and collaboration, 2014, by state**
Figure 3.2k Community leadership and collaboration, 2014, by region – average score
Figure 3.21 Community leadership and collaboration, 2014, by group
Chapter 3.3: Key points

- This chapter explores institutional capital: the effectiveness of formal and informal organisations, rules and decision making processes in rural and regional communities.
- Local organisations are considered effective if they are fair, inclusive, and achieve outcomes. More broadly, communities that include all people in decision making and in everyday life are considered to have higher institutional capital.
- Rural and regional Australians were asked if they felt they were able to have a say and be heard in their local community:
  - There were few differences between states, but people’s confidence in being able to have a say and be heard varied substantially between regions within each state.
  - Not everyone felt equally able to have a say and be heard: those aged under 50 felt less able to, while older people and farmers were more confident in their ability to have a say and be heard in their local community.
- Equity and inclusion:
  - People living in Victoria and Western Australia were more likely to feel their community was inclusive and equitable, and those in Tasmania, Queensland and South Australia less likely to.
  - Younger people were least likely to feel their community was equitable and inclusive, and older people, dryland farmers, and irrigators most likely to.

### 3.3 Institutional capital

Institutional capital refers to the quality, representativeness, fairness and inclusiveness of local organisations and, more broadly, decision making processes in a person’s local community. If local decision making processes and institutions are effective in achieving outcomes, enable the views of their constituents to be listened to and represented equitably, are inclusive, and are transparent, there is a high level of institutional capital (Platje 2008, Gupta et al. 2010).

Institutional capital was measured in the Regional Wellbeing Survey by examining (i) the quality, representativeness and fairness of governance in a community; and (ii) the extent to which residents felt their community was equitable and inclusive.

**Having a say and being heard**

To understand the effectiveness and fairness of local governance institutions (e.g. local government, community organisations), survey participants were asked their views on the effectiveness, representativeness and inclusiveness of local decision making processes. This measure is called ‘having a say and being heard’, as the success of local governance is often strongly dependent on whether all people feel they are given opportunities to have a say, and are listened to when they do decide to ‘have a say’. Effectiveness, representativeness and fairness are three dimensions considered critical to having good institutional capital (Gupta et al. 2010).
**What did we measure?**

The extent to which rural and regional Australians felt they could have a say, and that they would be heard if they did, was examined by asking survey participants the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that:

- My local government is able to help our community face challenges
- The people who make decisions for my community represent the whole community, not just part of it
- I can get involved in local decision-making processes if I want to
- Most people around here get a fair go

This measure is a simplified version of the measure used in the 2013 survey after analysis of 2013 data identified that the more complex measures used in the first survey could be represented using this simpler measure.

**Having a say and being heard in different places**

Confidence in being able to have a say and be heard was similar for people living in different states (Figure 3.3a). There were some differences between regions (Figure 3.3b): people were less likely to report feeling they could have a say and be heard if they lived in the Northern Territory and Kimberley (NT/WA), Central Queensland (QLD) or the regional outskirts of southern Melbourne (VIC). Those living in the following regions were more likely to report feeling they could have a say and be heard: the Wheatbelt (WA), Riverina (NSW), southern coastal Queensland (QLD), Limestone Coast (SA), Northern Rivers (NSW).

**Having a say and being heard for different people**

While there were relatively small differences between people living in different regions, much larger differences were identified between different groups of rural and regional Australians. Older people and farmers (particularly dryland farmers) reported the highest levels of confidence in being able to have a say and be heard, suggesting they are better able to access decision making processes in rural and regional communities compared to other groups. Those younger than 50 years were less confident than older people, while men more commonly reported having low confidence in their ability to have a say than women. Dryland farmers were much more likely to be confident in having a say compared to non-farmers or irrigators (Figure 3.3c).
Figure 3.3a Having a say and being heard, 2014, by state
Figure 3.3b Having a say and being heard, 2014, by region – average score
Figure 3.3c Having a say and being heard, 2014, by group
Equity and inclusion

Institutions can be formal organisations, such as those survey participants were asked about in the ‘having a say and being heard’ measure of institutional capital. They can also be informal. ‘Informal’ institutional capital refers to the unspoken rules about which people are allowed to interact with each other, and about access to different resources. These unspoken rules of behaviour can be very important in determining which people are included and excluded in community activities and decision making, and are widely discussed as critical to the future of communities and management of rural areas (see for example Colding and Folke 1999, Casson et al 2010).

The first Regional Wellbeing Survey, in 2013, didn’t include questions on informal institutional capital. When discussing results, several survey partner organisations suggested including items that asked whether some rural and regional Australians are excluded from accessing the benefits their community could provide them, such as social interaction and decision making processes.

To address this, specific items on this topic were included in the 2014 survey, and are considered to represent informal institutional capital. They could equally be considered a measure of so-called ‘dark’ social capital, in which some groups exclude others, whether intentionally or unintentionally: exclusion has been linked to some types of social capital both in Australian and international studies (see for example Anderson 2013, Billett 2014).

What did we measure?

Equity and inclusion was measured by asking survey participants how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

- Some groups in this community keep to themselves
- Some individuals get left out in this community
- There is a lot of disagreement between people in this community

These three variables were each measured on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). They were combined into a single measure of equity and inclusion by (i) reversing the scoring of each, so that low scores indicated poor equity and low inclusion, and high scores indicated high levels of equity and inclusion; and (ii) calculating the average score across the three variables.

Equity and inclusion in different places

People living in Tasmania, Queensland and South Australia were most likely to report that exclusion or social conflict occurred in their community. Those living in Victoria and Western Australia were most likely to report high levels of inclusion and equity (Figure 3.3d).

When examined by region (Figure 3.3e), people were most likely to report exclusion and social conflict in the Goldfields Esperance (WA), Yorke and Mid North (SA), Northern Territory and Kimberley (NT/WA), Far North Queensland and Torres Strait (QLD), Northern Inland (NSW), Great Southern (WA), Central Queensland (QLD) and Orana (NSW) regions. They were most likely to report their community was inclusive in regions bordering Melbourne (VIC), and the Grampians (VIC) region.
Equity and inclusion for different people

Younger people were most likely to report that there was exclusion or social conflict in their community, suggesting that they are more likely to experience exclusion in their communities than those in older age groups. Older people and farmers (dryland and irrigators) were much more likely than others to report high levels of equity and inclusiveness, suggesting that these groups experience higher levels of inclusion in their local communities compared to others (Figure 3.3f).

Figure 3.3d Equity and inclusion, 2014, by state
Figure 3.3e Equity and inclusion, 2014, by region – average score
Figure 3.3f Equity and inclusion, 2014, by group
Social capital can be broadly defined as ‘...the processes between people which establish networks, norms and social trust, and facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit.’ (Cox, 1995, p.15). It refers to the behaviours, systems, experiences and perceptions that promote cooperation, mutual support and collaborative problem-solving between people, and is often referred to as the ‘glue’ that holds communities together.

Social capital can be measured in many different ways, as there are multiple dimensions to social capital. In fact, some of the measures of human and institutional capital included in the Regional Wellbeing Survey could be argued to be measuring dimensions of social capital.

Both ‘structural’ and ‘cognitive’ measures of social capital were included in the 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey (in addition to measures included as part of institutional and human capital). ‘Structural’ social capital measures how often and in what ways people interact with each other (Harpham et al. 2002); higher amounts of social interaction are typically (although not always) associated with higher levels of wellbeing. Talking with friends and family, taking part in community
events, or joining a local sports group are all examples of structural social capital. Structural social capital has been shown to group into three separate, but linked, dimensions (Berry et al. 2007):

- **Friends and family.** Usually referred to as informal social connectedness, this refers to how often people spend time with friends, extended family and neighbours.
- **Civic engagement** refers to taking part in organised community activities such as local community groups and events: for example, being a member of the local Rotary club, football club or choir.
- **Political participation** refers to participating in activities to achieve public outcomes. This may, for example, involve attending meetings to discuss political issues, local activism and political protest.

‘Cognitive’ social capital examines how people think and feel as a result of their community participation. For example, when measuring social capital it is common to examine whether a person feels a strong sense of belonging, trust in others, or obligation to exchange actions with others for mutual benefit (reciprocity) (Harpham et al. 2002).

In general, having positive social interactions (structural social capital) is argued to lead to more positive cognitive outcomes (for example, more trust, or a greater sense of belonging to a community), and higher levels of wellbeing. As we reported in our 2013 Regional Wellbeing Survey Report (Schirmer and Berry 2014):

Social capital, when measured appropriately, is robustly linked to subjective wellbeing and to mental health (Berry and Welsh 2010). Importantly, however, this is not the case for all types of participation (Berry et al. 2007), and it is not always positive: while many studies show a positive association, in some cases some types of social capital can be associated with poorer wellbeing (Mitchell and LaGory 2002). In particular, political participation is often associated with poor wellbeing. The nature of the links that do exist is also highly complex and still not fully understood, with social capital and wellbeing linked ‘through many independent channels and in several different forms’ (Helliwell and Putnam 2004, p. 1435).

A causal link between social capital and wellbeing has been commonly postulated, but not empirically proven. This link has recently been causally established in a study that showed empirically that increasing community participation in one year leads to greater wellbeing the next year among Australians (Ding et al. 2015). This emphasises the direct role of social capital in contributing to wellbeing.

The 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey included measures of (i) friends and family (informal social capital) (ii) getting involved in the local community and (iii) social belonging. Each measures different dimensions of social capital in rural and regional Australia.

**Spending time with friends and family**

The ‘spending time with friends and family’ measure examines informal social connectedness: how often people spend time engaging in informal social interaction. Informal social connectedness has been shown to be important to a person’s sense of social cohesion, which in turn is associated with wellbeing (Berry and Welsh 2010).
What did we measure?
Informal social connectedness was measured by asking survey participants how often they did the following, on a scale measured from 1 (never) to 7 (all the time):

- I make time to keep in touch with my friends
- I chat with my neighbours
- I spend time doing things with family members who don’t live with me

The ‘friends and family’ measure was calculated as the average of these three measures.

Spending time with friends and family - in different places
There were relatively few differences across different states in the amount of time rural and regional Australian spent with friends and family (Figure 3.4a). The two exceptions were Tasmania and Western Australia, where survey participants were less likely to report spending substantial time with friends and family. In South Australia, there was both a large proportion of residents who spent little time with friends and family, and a large proportion who frequently spent time with friends and family.

When examined by region, there was relatively little variation across the country in most regions (Figure 3.4b). Residents living in the following regions reported somewhat lower frequency of interaction with family and friends: Limestone Coast (SA), Northern Territory and Kimberley (NT/WA), Mid West Gascoyne and Pilbara (WA), Goldfields Esperance (WA), Murray (NSW), Great Southern (WA), Tasmania (TAS) and the Grampians (VIC). People living in the South West, Perth and Peel (WA), Riverina (NSW), Far South Coast and Illawarra (NSW), and Barossa and Adelaide metropolitan (SA) regions were more likely to report frequently spending time with friends and family.

Spending time with friends and family - for different people
Women, people aged 65 and older, and dryland farmers were more likely than other rural and regional Australians to report that they frequently socialised with friends and family. Men and those aged under 50 were less likely to report that they frequently socialised with friends and family (Figure 3.4c).
Figure 3.4a Spending time with friends and family (informal social connectedness), 2014, by state
Figure 3.4b Spending time with friends and family (informal social connectedness), 2014, by region – average score
Figure 3.4c Spending time with friends and family (informal social connectedness), 2014, by group
Getting involved

Rural and regional Australians are often noted for their willingness to get involved in activities in their local communities. This section examines how frequently rural and regional Australians take part in a range of community activities. This is also sometimes called ‘civic engagement’. Later in this report, Chapter 4.1 examines one of these types of involvement – volunteering – in more detail.

Higher levels of community participation – in other words, getting more involved in local community activities – is often argued to lead to higher wellbeing. A recent Australian study has provided evidence for this linkages, identifying that people who increase their community participation in one year show greater wellbeing the following year (Ding et al. 2015).

What did we measure?
The extent of a person’s involvement in local community activities was examined by asking survey participants how frequently they took part in the following types of activities, on a scale of 1 (never) to 7 (all the time):

- I go to arts or cultural events
- I attend community events such as farmers’ markets, festivals and shows
- I take part in community-based clubs or associations e.g. Rotary, Lions, CWA
- I get involved with political activities e.g. though interest groups, public meetings, consumer boycotts
- I take part in sports groups or teams

Most of these activities were strongly correlated: in other words, people who took part in one were more likely to also take part in others. There was one exception: many people participated in sports groups and teams but not in the other activities listed above (and many participated in all of the activities except sports groups/teams).

For this reason, the final measure of ‘getting involved’ was the average score for the first four items in the list above, and excluded taking part in sports groups and teams. Involvement in sports groups is reported separately, given how differently this type of social participation is structured compared to others. Volunteering, another important form of civic engagement, is reported on in Chapter 4.1.

Getting involved in different places

People living in Western Australia were most likely to report frequently engaging in local community activities, and those living in Victoria and South Australia the least likely to (Figure 3.4d). Participation in sports groups and teams, meanwhile, was higher in South Australia and Western Australia, and lowest in Tasmania (Figure 3.4e).

At the regional scale, community involvement was lower than average in regional areas east of Melbourne, and in the Murray (NSW), Limestone Coast (SA), Yorke and Mid North (SA) and Barwon South West (VIC) regions. Community involvement was highest in the Northern Rivers (NSW), Northern Territory and Kimberley (NT/WA), Far South Coast and Illawarra (NSW), and Goldfields Esperance (WA) regions, although some other regions also had higher than average levels of community involvement (Figure 3.4f). Participation in sports was lowest in the Northern Rivers.
(NSW), Southern Inland (NSW), Orana the Northern Territory and Kimberley (NT/WA), Central and southern remote Australian (SA/NSW), Murraylands and Riverland (SA), Limestone Coast (SA) and Riverina (NSW) regions (Figure 3.4g).

**Getting involved for different people**

Women, older people, and non-farmers were more likely than men, younger people and farmers (dryland and irrigators) to report getting involved in community activities (Figure 3.4h).

Men and younger people were much more likely to take part in sports groups and teams than other rural and regional Australians. Women, people aged 50 and over, and irrigators were less likely to regularly take part in sports groups or teams (Figure 3.4i).

![Average community involvement score](image)

![Lower than average score vs Higher than average score](image)

*Figure 3.4d Getting involved in community activities, 2014, by state*
Figure 3.4e Getting involved in sporting groups/teams, 2014, by state
Figure 3.4f Getting involved in community activities, 2014, by region – average score
Figure 3.4h Getting involved in community activities, 2014, by group
Figure 3.4i Getting involved in sports groups/teams, 2014, by group
**Sense of belonging**

‘Belonging’ is one measure of ‘cognitive’ social capital (others include generalised reciprocity and cooperation, and social trust) (Berry and Welsh 2010). A person’s sense of belonging is related to the extent to which they feel welcome in their community, part of their community, or like an outsider in their community.

**What did we measure?**

A person’s sense of belonging was measured based on the extent to which survey participants agreed or disagreed with the following statements, from a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree):

- *I feel welcome here*
- *I feel part of my community*
- *We are all ‘in it together’ in my community*
- *I feel like an outsider here*

The ‘belonging’ measure was calculated as the average score for these four variables, after the scoring for ‘I feel like an outsider here’ was reversed.

**Belonging in different places**

Tasmanians and Queenslanders were less likely than those living in other states to report that they felt like they belonged in their community (Figure 3.4j). Specific regions in which fewer people reported feeling like they belonged were the central Queensland (QLD), Murray (NSW), Northern Territory and Kimberley (NT/WA), Great Southern (WA), Southern Coastal Queensland (QLD) and Yorke and Mid North (SA) regions (Figure 3.4k). Sense of belonging was higher than average in the Barwon South West (VIC), Far South Coast and Illawarra (NSW), Northern Rivers (NSW), and Goldfields Esperance (WA) regions.

**Belonging for different people**

Older people and farmers (dryland and irrigators) were more likely than other rural and regional Australians to report a high sense of belonging. Younger people were least likely to report a strong sense of belonging, particularly those aged under 30. There were very small differences between men and women (Figure 3.4l).
Figure 3.4j Sense of belonging, 2014, by state
Figure 3.4k Sense of belonging, 2014, by region – average score
Figure 3.4l Sense of belonging, 2014, by group
Chapter 3.5: Key points

- This chapter examines four physical and socio-physical characteristics of communities that influence how easy and enjoyable it is to live in that community: (i) access to services and infrastructure, (ii) telecommunications, (iii) crime and safety in the community, and (iv) landscape and aesthetics.

- Access to services and infrastructure, such as health, education, childcare, and roads
  - People living in Tasmania reported slightly poorer access to infrastructure and services compared to those in other states. However, differences were larger between regions within states than between states. Access to services and infrastructure was poorer in remote regions, and highest in communities located near large cities or regional centres.
  - Those aged 65 and older were on average more satisfied with their access to services and infrastructures than others, while dryland farmers reported poorer access compared to other groups.

- Telecommunications
  - Access to telecommunications was examined by asking rural and regional Australians how good or poor their access was to high speed internet and mobile phone coverage.
  - People living in Tasmania and South Australia reported better access to telecommunications on average, and those in Queensland poorer access.
  - People aged under 30 and 65 or older reported better access, and farmers reported much lower access to telecommunications infrastructure, compared to other groups.

- Crime and safety in the local community
  - Fear of crime was examined by asking people how safe they felt in their community, their perceptions of local crime rates and of crime-related behaviour in the form of misuse of alcohol and drugs.
  - The regions in which people felt safest in their communities were Tasmania, southern regions of South Australia, and several Victorian regions. Those where they felt least safe were Western Australia and Queensland.
  - Older people and dryland farmers were more likely to report feeling safe in their community. Those aged under 30 were least likely to feel safe.

- Landscape and aesthetics
  - Living in an area that has attractive natural places and built areas is often considered to have positive links to wellbeing.
  - People living in Queensland, and those living in more remote regions, were less likely than those in other parts of rural and regional Australia to find their local landscape attractive.
  - Older people and irrigators were more likely to find their local landscape aesthetically pleasing, and younger people least likely to
3.5 Physical capital and liveability

The physical characteristics of the place a person lives in can influence that person’s wellbeing. For example, living in an aesthetically pleasing landscape is argued to be beneficial for health, while living in a region with limited access to health services can have negative impacts on health.

Physical capital and liveability measures examine the characteristics of communities that affect how easy and pleasant it is to live in that community. These characteristics have been argued to include, for both rural and urban communities (see for example Race et al. 2010, Badland et al. 2014):

- **Services and infrastructure** – does a person have good access to health, education, childcare, professional and legal services in their local community?
- **Access to telecommunications** – does a person have access to reliable, high speed phone and internet in their community?
- **Crime and safety** – is a person’s community a safe place, or do people feel unsafe there?
- **Landscape and aesthetics** – does a person find the landscape they live in (including both natural features and built features such as houses and buildings) aesthetically pleasing?

**Access to services and infrastructure**

Access to services and infrastructure is an often discussed issue in rural and regional communities in Australia, with many studies finding that rural and regional Australians often have poorer access than their urban counterparts to health services, education services, well maintained roads, high quality housing, and childcare, to name just a few (see for example Butler and Lawrence 1996, Jones and Tonts 2003, McGrail and Humphreys 2009). For example, in May 2015, the National Rural Health Alliance called for greater investment in improving the physical features of country roads, such as roadside hazards and road markings, in order to reduce road-related injuries and fatalities in rural Australia (NRHA 2015).

**What did we measure?**

Survey participants were asked to rate their access to the following types of services and infrastructure in their local community, on a scale of 1 (very poor) to 7 (very good):

- **Education e.g. schools, distance education**
- **Childcare**
- **Roads**
- **Good quality housing**
- **Professional services e.g. accountants, lawyers**
- **Retail shops**
- **Health services**

A single measure of overall access to infrastructure and services was then constructed based on the average score of a person’s responses to these seven items.

This measure examines people’s perceptions of their access to services. A person’s perception of whether their access is good or poor is likely to be based not just on their ability to access the service, or the quality of the infrastructure, but also by their expectations regarding the services and infrastructure that could reasonably be provided in their community. For example, a person living in
a more remote region who has relatively low expectations regarding service and infrastructure provision may giving a similar rating of their access as a person living in a region that has better services and infrastructure, but who has higher expectations about having access to these things.

**Access to services and infrastructure in different places**

People living in Tasmania and Queensland reported overall poorer access to services and infrastructure, and those in New South Wales better access, compared to the national average (Figure 3.5a). Within states, access to services and infrastructure often varied across regions, shown in Figure 3.5b. Access to services and infrastructure was rated poorest by those living in the Wheatbelt (WA), Northern Territory and Kimberley (NT/WA), Mid West Gascoyne and Pilbara (WA), Central Queensland (QLD), Orana (NSW) and Murraylands and Riverland (SA) regions. These regions all include areas of very low population density, which tend to have lower access to many services.

Access to services and infrastructure was rated highest by those living in the Limestone Coast (SA), Great Southern (WA), Southern Coastal Queensland (QLD), Melbourne East (VIC), Riverina (NSW) Central West (NSW), and South West Perth and Peel (WA) regions. These regions all either border large cities, or contain a large regional city within them. This suggests that, consistent with most work in this area, perceptions of service provision are most positive for rural and regional Australians who live near larger regional cities and centres in which many service providers are located.

**Access to services and infrastructure for different people**

The quality and availability of services and infrastructure is well understood to vary in quality and availability in different places. Less commonly examined is the extent to which services and infrastructure can be accessed by different types of people. Differing access between groups can be a consequence of the places in which particular groups live: for example, many farmers live on rural properties a long distance from health services, whereas non-farmers are more likely to live in towns that have closer proximity to health services. It can also be a consequence of the ability of different groups to access services in the place they live in – for example, if it costs a lot to visit a doctor in a particular community, people with lower income in that community are likely to report having poor access to health services, while high income earners may report good access.

Older people – specifically, those aged 65 and older - were more likely than others to report having good access to services and infrastructure. The reasons for this are unknown, although it may in part reflect (i) lower expectations about provision of services and infrastructure compared to younger people, and (ii) a tendency of those aged over 65 to migrate to larger centres in which they can access services. Farmers, particularly dryland farmers, were more likely than non-farmers to report having poor access to services and infrastructure, reflecting the often more remote locations in which they live, which also typically have poorer local provision of services and infrastructure (Figure 3.5c).
Figure 3.5a Access to services and infrastructure, 2014, by state
Figure 3.5b Access to services and infrastructure, 2014, by region – average score
Figure 3.5c Access to services and infrastructure, 2014, by group
Telecommunications

Improving access to telecommunications in rural Australia is a commonly discussed topic and focus of government policy. In general, rural and regional areas are argued to have poorer access to telecommunications compared to urban areas, an issue often referred to as the ‘digital divide’ (Curtin 2001).

Having adequate access to telecommunications – in the form of reliable, high speed and widespread mobile phone and internet coverage – is critical to the future of rural and regional communities. Rural and regional businesses, ranging from farmers to retail shops, increasingly rely on having on access to reliable, high speed internet and phone services. Having this access helps support the development not only of traditional businesses, but of the growing numbers of e-commerce businesses located in rural and regional areas (e.g. Rao et al. 2011).

What did we measure?
Survey participants were asked to rate their access to the following types of telecommunications in their local community, on a scale of 1 (very poor) to 7 (very good):

- High speed internet
- Mobile phone coverage

The average of a person’s responses to these two items, which were highly correlated, was used to construct the ‘access to telecommunications’ measure.

Access to telecommunications in different places
People living in Tasmania and South Australia reported better access to telecommunications compared to those living in other states (Figure 3.5d), while those living in Queensland and New South Wales reported poorer access compared to those living in other states.

Within most states, telecommunications access varied substantially in different regions: residents were most likely to report poor access in the Wheatbelt (WA), Northern Rivers (NSW), Southern Melbourne (VIC), Murray (NSW), Southern Inland (NSW), Far North Queensland and Torres Strait (QLD), and Darling Downs and South West (QLD) regions (Figure 3.5e). Higher levels of telecommunications access were more commonly reported in the Melbourne East (VIC), South West Perth and Peel (WA), Mid West Gascoyne and Pilbara (WA), Northern Territory and Kimberley (NT/WA), Goldfields Esperance (WA), Central and southern remote Australia (SA/NSW), Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island (SA) and Yorke and Mid North (SA) regions. The latter are dominated by peri-urban regions (which are more likely to have good telecommunications access compared to remote regions), and remote regions. The reasons for the relatively high rating of telecommunications in many remote regions is unknown although it should be noted that in these regions, which often have small sample sizes, there is more potential for bias in the sample towards those with good internet access than in other regions.

Access to telecommunications for different people
Different groups rated their access to telecommunications quite differently. This is likely to reflect both differing expectations about what constitutes ‘good’ versus ‘poor’ telecommunications provision, as well as the fact that some groups disproportionately live in areas with poorer or better access to telecommunications.
People aged under 30, and 65 or older, were more likely to report good telecommunications access than those aged 30 to 64 (Figure 3.5f). Women were slightly more likely than men to report good telecommunications access. Farmers reported much lower access to telecommunications infrastructure than other groups. These findings likely reflect both the objective level of access these groups have to telecommunications—farmers predominantly live on rural properties, on which telecommunications access is poorer than access in even nearby towns, for example—and expectations of different groups about what constitutes ‘good’ access. For example, older people may be more satisfied with lower levels of access than younger people, and consequently rate their access relatively more positively than younger people who have the same level of access to telecommunications. Younger people aged under 30, meanwhile, disproportionately live in larger population centres in which telecommunications access is likely to be better, although this may not explain all the variance in views between this age group and those aged 30 to 64.

Figure 3.5d Access to telecommunications, 2014, by state
Figure 3.5e Access to telecommunications, 2014, by region - average score
Figure 3.5f Access to telecommunications, 2014, by group
Crime and safety in the local community

Feeling safe is an important contributor to wellbeing. People who don’t feel safe in the community they live in – due to fear about crime rates, drug or alcohol abuse, to name just a few – are likely to report poorer wellbeing (Lorenc et al. 2012, Cornaglia et al. 2014). The 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey examined fear of crime by asking how safe people felt living in their local community, building on the single item that was included in the previous year’s survey.

What did we measure?

The survey asked how safe people felt in their local community, whether they believed there was a high crime rate, and whether there were high rates of alcohol or drug misuse, all things that contribute to how safe people feel where they live. Survey participants were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements, on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree):

- This is a safe place to live
- There is a high crime rate in this community
- Many people in this community drink too much alcohol or misuse drugs

The ‘crime and safety’ scale was then calculated as the average score across the three items. The scores for the second and third items were reversed, so that for the scale as a whole score of 1 indicated low levels of safety, and a score of 7 high levels of safety.

It is important to note that this scale focuses on crime and sense of safety in a person’s local community, rather than how safe a person feels in other places, such as their own household. It therefore reflects broader concerns about crime rates across a community, and should not be confused with other important aspects of crime and safety which consider how safe a person feels in their personal relationships and their own household.

Crime and safety in different places

People living in Tasmania, South Australia and to a lesser extent Victoria were more likely than those living in other states to report their community was a safe place to live. Those living in Western Australia and Queensland, and to a lesser extent New South Wales, were more likely to report feeling unsafe in their community (Figure 3.5g).

There were large variations in the extent to which people felt safe in different regions. Regions in which fewer residents felt safe were the Northern Territory and Kimberley (NT/WA), Orana (NSW), Goldfields Esperance (WA), Northern Inland (NSW), Mid West Gascoyne and Pilbara (WA), Central Queensland (QLD), and Far North Queensland and Torres Strait (QLD) (Figure 3.5h). Those in which more residents felt safe were Tasmania, southern regions of South Australia surrounding Adelaide (the Adelaide Hills Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island, Barossa and Adelaide metropolitan outskirts, and Yorke and Mid North regions), and several Victorian regions (Southern Melbourne, Gippsland, Barwon South West, Grampians and Melbourne East).

Crime and safety for different people

Older people and dryland farmers were more likely to report feeling safe in their local community compared to other rural and regional Australians. Younger people, particularly those aged under 30,
were much more likely to report feeling unsafe than other groups. Women and men reported similar perceptions of crime and safety in their community (Figure 3.5i).
Figure 3.5h Crime and safety, 2014, by region – average score (higher scores indicate greater safety)
Figure 3.5i Crime and safety, 2014, by group – average score
Landscape and aesthetics

Spending time in attractive landscapes is often argued to be a contributor to a person’s wellbeing: for example, people have been shown to be happier when in natural or ‘greenspace’ areas compared to highly urbanised areas containing little green space (MacKerrson and Mourato 2013). In recent years, wellbeing interventions have been developed that aim to improve the greenspace near workplaces and residences, and to use enjoyable natural settings, in order to improve wellbeing (see for example Pitt 2014, Gilchrist et al. 2015). While everyone’s view about what constitutes a desirable landscape differs, people who live in a place they find visually pleasing are argued to be more likely to report high subjective wellbeing compared to those who live in places with landscapes they find unattractive. A ‘pleasant’ landscape is not simply one which is aesthetically attractive, but may be one that fits a person’s values and ideals about how land should be used, and the types of services it should provide (Liu and Opdam 2014).

What did we measure?
The attractiveness of the landscape a person lived in was measured by asking survey participants how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statements, measured on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree):

- The environment around here is in good condition
- There are attractive buildings / homes in my community
- There are attractive natural places in my community e.g. parks, bushland

The ‘landscape and aesthetics’ scale was then constructed as the average score of responses to these three items.

Landscape and aesthetics in different places

People living in Tasmania and Victoria were more likely than those in other states to living in communities they find aesthetically pleasing (Figure 3.5j). Those living in Queensland were less likely to find the landscape they lived in aesthetically pleasing, although this varied for different parts of Queensland, as can be seen in Figure 3.5k: people living in Central Queensland and the Darling Downs and South West were less likely to find their landscape aesthetically pleasing, and those in northern and coastal regions more likely to.

In general, those living in inland regions, particularly more remote inland regions, were less likely to feel their environment was in good condition or that there were attractive buildings or natural places in their community, with the poorest scores occurring in the central and southern remote Australia (SA/NSW), Central Queensland (QLD), Darling Downs and South West (QLD), Orana (NSW), Northern Territory and Kimberley (NT/WA), Wheatbelt (WA), and Murraylands and Riverland (SA) regions.

Conversely, the highest scoring regions were almost all coastal, with highest scores reported in the Far South Coast and Illawarra (NSW), Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island (SA), Hunter Central Coast and Mid North Coast (NSW), and Barwon South West (VIC) region. The only inland region in which higher than average scores were reported was the Central West (NSW) region.
**Landscape and aesthetics for different people**

Older people and irrigators were more likely than other rural and regional Australians to find the local landscape they lived in aesthetically pleasing. Younger people were most likely to report low scores. There was very little difference in the views of women and men (Figure 3.5l).

![Figure 3.5j Local landscape and aesthetic quality, 2014, by state](image-url)
Figure 3.5k Local landscape and aesthetic quality, 2014, by region – average score
Figure 3.51 Local landscape and aesthetic quality, 2014, by group
3.6 Natural capital

The natural capital of a region refers to its natural assets: the water, soil, minerals, vegetation, and fauna of a region. As well as being important in their own right, this natural capital contributes to human wellbeing in many ways, including through food production, clean water, and providing aesthetically pleasing landscapes. These contributions to human wellbeing are commonly called ‘ecosystem services’. A large and diverse body of work has emerged in recent decades examining the services that ecosystems provide to humans, and how these ecosystem services support human wellbeing, although understanding of many of the complex linkages between ecosystem services and human wellbeing remains limited (Yang et al. 2013, Bennett et al. 2015). Many of the determinants of wellbeing examined in this report depend in part on having access to natural capital – for example, in regions dependent on agriculture, the health of the local economy depends on having access to productive agricultural land.

Perceived environmental health

Survey participants were asked their views about the health of the environment in their local area. This measure is called ‘perceived environmental health’ as residents’ perceptions of environmental health may be different to objective measures of environmental health.

What did we measure?

Perceived environmental health was measured by asking survey participants the extent to which they felt any of the following were a problem in their local region, on a scale from 1 (not a problem) to 7 (big problem):

- Poor water quality
- Soil health problems e.g. erosion, salinity
- Feral animals e.g. pigs, goats, wild dogs, rabbits
- Invasive weeds
- Air pollution
- Poor health of natural vegetation
- Declining numbers of some native animals or birds
- Poor quality tap water in your house.
The average score of these eight variables was calculated as a measure of perceived environmental health. Each variable was reversed before calculation of the scale, so that a score of 1 represented poor environmental health, and a score of 7 represented good environmental health.

More detailed analysis of views about each of these areas of environmental health will be included in subsequent reports of results from the 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey.

**Environmental health in different places**

People living in Tasmania and Victoria were more likely to believe their environment was healthy, and those in Western Australia and Queensland least likely to report that the local environment was in good condition (Figure 3.6a).

Perceptions of environmental health at a regional level were very similar to perceptions of landscape and aesthetics (Figure 3.6b): the poorest scores were typically recorded in inland regions, and the highest scores in coastal regions. There were some differences to perceptions of landscape and aesthetics, however: in addition to inland and remote regions, residents living in the Northern Rivers (NSW) and Great Southern (WA) regions were more likely than average to report poor environmental health. Perceptions of environment health were most positive in Tasmania, the Limestone Coast (SA), Gippsland (VIC), Melbourne outskirts (eastern and southern, VIC), Yorke and Mid North (SA), and Barwon South West (VIC) regions.

**Environmental health for different people**

People aged 65 or older, dryland farmers, irrigator, and to a lesser extent men and those aged under 30, were more likely than others to report that their local environment was healthy. People aged between 30 and 64 and women were more likely to report their local environment was in poor health (Figure 3.6c).
Figure 3.6a Perceived environmental health, 2014, by state
Figure 3.6b Perceived environmental health, 2014, by region – average score
Figure 3.6c Perceived environmental health, 2014, by group
3.7 Wellbeing and its determinants

The ‘wellbeing determinants’ presented in Part 3 have all been measured as they are argued to potentially influence either the wellbeing of individuals, the wellbeing of rural communities, or both. However, there is often little evidence examining the strength of the association between each wellbeing determinant and wellbeing. In other words, despite the assumption that these things have some influence on wellbeing, the evidence for this remains limited. This section examines these relationships a little more, to help draw out lessons for supporting wellbeing in rural and regional communities. More detailed analysis of Regional Wellbeing Survey data is being undertaken to better understand the complex relationships between wellbeing and wellbeing determinants.

Wellbeing determinants and wellbeing: when and how are they associated?

As discussed in earlier parts of this report, not all wellbeing determinants are important to every person or community’s wellbeing. To better understand the variation in this, Figure 3.7a shows how strongly associated different wellbeing determinants are with (i) community wellbeing (as measured

Chapter 3.7: Key points

- While all the wellbeing determinants examined in Section 3 were statistically associated with wellbeing, some were more strongly associated with the wellbeing of people and communities than others.
- People were more likely to rate their community’s wellbeing highly if they also felt their community had good leadership and collaboration, that they were able to have a say and being heard, and they had a strong sense of belonging to their community.
- People with high life satisfaction (wellbeing) also typically had a strong sense of belonging, good general health, and greater frequency of interaction with friends and family.
- People with higher levels of psychological distress (illbeing) typically also reported poorer general health, a lower sense of belonging, poorer household financial wellbeing, and lower levels of equity and inclusion in their local community.
- When regions scoring above and below average for different wellbeing determinants were compared, every region had a different mix of wellbeing opportunities and challenges. Some scored close to the national average in most areas, some scored above average in several areas, some were experiencing multiple challenges that are likely to compound each other, while others had a mix of both opportunities and challenges.
- Across rural and regional Australia, some common patterns are apparent in the wellbeing-related opportunities and challenges experienced by different groups. Those aged over 65 were much more likely to be positive about all aspects of their wellbeing, with two exceptions: they reported poorer health, and poorer household financial wellbeing, compared to the average. Those aged under 30 were more likely to report lower than average scores in many areas, particularly relating to safety, inclusion and being heard. Men reported poorer health, and lower levels of social capital, compared to women, while women were more likely to be concerned about poor environmental health. Dryland farmers and irrigators reported positive wellbeing in many areas, but poorer than average access to telecommunications, and lower than average confidence in their skills and education.
by the Community Wellbeing Index), (ii) personal wellbeing (using Global Life Satisfaction as an indicator of wellbeing), and (iii) personal illbeing (using the K10 as an indicator of illbeing). Association simply means that if one thing occurred, another was also likely to occur – for example, people who reported high levels of community wellbeing typically also reported their community had positive leadership and collaboration. It does not identify causal relationships (for example, whether the strong leadership and collaboration led to the high community wellbeing, or whether having high levels of community wellbeing lead to better leadership and collaboration).

**Community wellbeing** was most strongly associated with **leadership and collaboration, having a say and being heard, and a sense of belonging**. In other words, people who felt confident there was strong leadership and collaboration in their community, that they could have a say and be heard, and who felt a strong sense of belonging to their community, were more likely to have confidence in the wellbeing of their community compared to those who rated local leadership poorly, felt unable to have a say, and feel like they did not belong. These are all factors related to people and relationships in the community, rather than the physical assets of the community. Physical assets – landscape and aesthetics, and access to services and infrastructure – were also significantly associated with a person’s rating of their community’s wellbeing, but not as strongly as leadership, collaboration, having a say and a sense of belonging. All other wellbeing determinants were significantly correlated with community wellbeing, but less strongly than those highlighted above.

A person’s **personal wellbeing** was most strongly associated with their **sense of belonging, general health**, and frequency of interaction with **friends and family**. Strong associations also existed between personal wellbeing and a person’s confidence in their skills and education, confidence in being able to have a say and be heard, and their perceptions of their local landscape, access to services, community leadership and collaboration, and the local economy, as well as household financial wellbeing. A person’s **personal illbeing** was, similar to wellbeing, strongly associated with their **general health** and **sense of belonging**. It was also strongly associated with **household financial wellbeing**, and a person’s sense of **equity and inclusion** in their local community. This suggests that illbeing and wellbeing have some differing relationships with wellbeing determinants.

Even a simple analysis of association such as this highlights that, as expected, wellbeing determinants that occur at the community scale are more strongly associated with community wellbeing, and those that occur at the individual scale are more strongly associated with personal illbeing and wellbeing. The exception is a person’s sense of belonging: this measure of social capital is strongly associated with community wellbeing, personal wellbeing, and personal illbeing.

This analysis does not attempt to examine the complex causal pathways occurring between wellbeing determinants and wellbeing. For example, the strong association between a person’s rating of their community’s wellbeing, and their rating of leadership and collaboration in that community, could be the result of many different processes: it is possible that strong leadership and collaboration is a result of a strong sense of belonging amongst community members, which encourages those members to contribute their skills in the form of leadership and collaborative work; alternatively it may be related to the types of people who choose to live in communities with good access to services and infrastructure and aesthetically pleasing landscapes. A better understanding of these causal relationships is a core goal of the Regional Wellbeing Survey into the future.
Figure 3.7a Correlation between different wellbeing determinants and (i) Community Wellbeing Index, (ii) Global Life Satisfaction, and (iii) K10 Psychological Distress Scale. All correlations were statistically significant at the p<0.01 level.
Wellbeing determinants in different places

As well as looking at each wellbeing determinant separately, it is useful to look at how different wellbeing determinants come together in a region as a whole.

Table 3.7a identifies the wellbeing-related ‘opportunities’ and ‘challenges’ being reported by residents of different regions in 2014. An opportunity – represented by a tick (✓) - is a wellbeing determinant for which the region had an above average score. For example, a region may have an above average score for household financial wellbeing, or for landscape and aesthetic quality. A challenge – represented by a cross (✗) in Table 3.7a - is a wellbeing related area for which the region had a below average score.

While this approach is not comprehensive, particularly as regions will be experiencing more wellbeing related opportunities or challenges than just those examined in the Regional Wellbeing Survey, it does provide a useful overview of how overall access to the financial, human, institutional, social, physical and natural capital examined in this chapter varies.

As can be seen in Table 3.7a, every region has a differing mix of challenges and opportunities. In some regions, above average scores were recorded for multiple wellbeing determinants. For example within New South Wales the Riverina, Far South Coast and Illawarra, and Northern Rivers regions all scored above average for several wellbeing determinants. However, the wellbeing determinants each of these regions scored above average for were different, highlighting the variability between regions.

Figure 3.7b provides a visual map to help understand which regions are experiencing relatively more versus relatively fewer challenges and opportunities, showing the number of wellbeing-related areas in which a region scored either above or below average. Based on this, four core types of region were identified:

- ‘Typical’ regions: Most regions had average scores for the majority of the 16 wellbeing determinants examined in this report. In these regions, residents rated their community and their own wellbeing similarly to the average for rural and regional Australia as a whole. These regions include the Loddon Mallee (VIC), Hume (VIC), Gippsland (VIC), Grampians (VIC), Southern Inland (NSW), Northern Inland (NSW), Tasmania (TAS), Central West (NSW), and Darling Downs and South West (QLD) regions

- ‘High wellbeing’ regions: In these regions, residents reported higher than average rating for several wellbeing determinants, and few areas of challenge. They include the South West Perth and Peel (WA), Melbourne East (VIC), Far South Coast and Illawarra (NSW), Barwon South West (VIC), and Limestone Coast (SA) regions

- ‘Multiple challenge’ regions: In the Central Queensland (QLD), Orana (NSW), Murraylands and Riverland (SA) and Great Southern (WA) regions, scores for several wellbeing determinants were below average. The nature of these wellbeing challenges, however, vary between the regions, as can be seen in Table 3.7a. In Central Queensland and Orana, for example, some of the challenges were low landscape and aesthetic ratings, and perceived poor environmental health, both potentially related to the extended drought occurring in those regions. These challenges were not identified in the other two regions
‘Challenge and opportunity’ regions: In these three regions, a higher than usual number of both opportunities and challenges were identified. Three regions in particular fell into this category - Mid West Gascoyne and Pilbara (WA), Northern Territory and Kimberley (NT/WA), and Yorke and Mid North (SA). Several other regions had three or four areas of both challenge and opportunity, falling between a ‘typical’ and a ‘challenge and opportunity’ region.

When attempting to explain why some regions have more wellbeing-related challenges than others, some associations are evident. Prolonged drought was occurring in the Central Queensland (QLD) and Orana (NSW) regions in 2014 together with downturn in the mining sector, and these regions had more wellbeing-related challenges than most others. Drought was also occurring in parts of the Darling Downs and South West (QLD) and Grampians (VIC) regions, albeit in a smaller proportion of each region, and these regions reported fewer challenges. Downturn in mining was widely reported as affecting many communities in Queensland and Western Australia, and many regions in these states with high dependence on mining had lower than average scores for several wellbeing determinants.

However, these are the ‘easy to spot’ associations. Many more subtle drivers will be influencing wellbeing in different regions, often more profoundly and over a longer time span. Historical legacies of development and migration patterns, industry development, and many other factors all combine to lead to different outcomes for every region.
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<th>Region</th>
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<th>Community economic wellbeing</th>
<th>Confidence in skills &amp; education</th>
<th>General health</th>
<th>K10 distress scale</th>
<th>Community leadership &amp; collaboration</th>
<th>Having a say and being heard</th>
<th>Equity &amp; inclusion</th>
<th>Getting involved</th>
<th>Sense of belonging</th>
<th>Access to services and infrastructure</th>
<th>Access to telecommunication</th>
<th>Crime and safety</th>
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<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Wheatbelt (n=216)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NT/WA</td>
<td>Northern Territory and Kimberley (n=84)</td>
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A tick indicates the region scored above average for this area; a cross indicates the region scored lower than average. Where no tick or cross is shown, the region had a ‘average’ score. A below average score is defined as one falling below the 95% confidence interval of the average score across all of rural and regional Australia. An above average score is defined as one falling above the 95% confidence interval of the average score for all of rural and regional Australia. An average score is one that fell within the confidence interval upper and lower bounds for the Australian mean score.
Figure 3.7b Challenges and opportunities: which regions are experiencing more challenges, and which more opportunities?
**Wellbeing determinants for different people**

Similarly to regions, it is helpful to understand which groups of rural and regional Australians are experiencing different combinations of wellbeing-related challenges and opportunities. Table 3.7b compares the areas in which men and women, people of different ages, and farmers had scores above or below the rural and regional Australian average for different wellbeing determinants. Each group stands out in different ways.

Those aged under 30 reported many wellbeing-related challenges, in particular reporting lower social capital, institutional capital, and some aspects of physical and human capital, compared to other groups. This younger age group felt less connected to their community, were more likely to feel that their community excluded some groups, and felt less able to have a say and be heard by leaders in their community, compared to older rural and regional Australians. They also reported greater exposure to crime and safety, and were least likely to live in an area where they felt there were attractive natural spaces or buildings.

People aged 30 to 49 had higher household financial wellbeing than those in other age groups, but were less likely to feel their local landscape was aesthetically pleasing, healthy and safe, and reported lower levels of institutional capital.

Those aged over 65 were much more likely to be positive about all aspects of their wellbeing, with two exceptions: they reported poorer health, and poorer household financial wellbeing, compared to the average.

Men reported poorer health, and lower levels of social capital, compared to women, while women were more likely to be concerned about poor environmental health.

Dryland farmers were similar to those aged 65 and older, in that they often reported high wellbeing. However, dryland farmers reported poorer than average access to infrastructure, services and telecommunications, and lower than average confidence in their skills and education.

Irrigators were less likely than dryland farmers to report feeling positively about many areas of their wellbeing. They did report poorer household financial wellbeing than most other groups. Similarly to dryland farmers, they also reported poor access to telecommunications.
Table 3.7b Challenges and opportunities: challenges and opportunities experienced by different rural and regional Australians

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Aged 18 to 29</th>
<th>Aged 30 to 49</th>
<th>Aged 50 to 64</th>
<th>Aged 65 and older</th>
<th>Dryland farmer</th>
<th>Irrigator</th>
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<tr>
<td>Global Life Satisfaction</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Wellbeing Index</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>Psychological distress (K10)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>General health</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived environmental health</td>
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<tr>
<td>Landscape and aesthetics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access to services and infrastructure</td>
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<td>Sense of belonging</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Getting involved</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friends and family</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Equity and inclusion</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Having a say and being heard</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaboration and leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confidence in skills and education</td>
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<td>Household financial wellbeing</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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A tick indicates the group scored above the national rural and regional Australian average for this area; a cross indicates the group scored lower than the rural and regional Australian average. Where no tick or cross is shown, the group had an average score. A below average score is defined as one falling below the 95% confidence interval of the average score across all of rural and regional Australia. An above average score is defined as one falling above the 95% confidence interval of the average score for all of rural and regional Australia. An average score is one that fell within the confidence interval upper and lower bounds for the Australian mean score.
Section 4 Rural and regional futures: volunteering and migration

Each year, in addition to measuring wellbeing, and factors that influence wellbeing, the Regional Wellbeing Survey asks questions on selected special topics that are important to the future of people and places across rural and regional Australia. In 2014, based on consultation with survey partner organisations, two special topics were included that focus on rural and regional futures:

- Chapter 4.1: Volunteering. Volunteers are critical to the functioning of many rural and regional communities. Volunteering rates are higher in rural and regional communities compared to Australia’s large cities – but there is concern that volunteering may be difficult to sustain in many communities in future, particularly those with rapidly ageing population. This chapter examines who volunteers, and who doesn’t, in regional Australia.
- Chapter 4.2: Migration. The number of people moving into and out of a community is a crucial determinant of the future success of that community. This chapter examines the factors that drive migration to and from rural and regional communities, helping identify the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors that determine whether a person shifts to a new community.
**4.1 Volunteering**

Volunteers are critical to the functioning of many rural and regional communities. Volunteering rates are higher in rural and regional communities compared to Australia’s large cities, but there is concern that volunteering may be difficult to sustain in many of these communities, particularly those with a rapidly ageing population. This chapter examines the people who volunteer – and those who don’t – in regional Australia.

A volunteer is a person who willingly gives up their time, services or skills through an organisation or group, without any monetary reward (Cnaan et al. 1996, Wilson 2000). They play a vital role in Australian communities, providing services that would otherwise need to be paid for, or not be carried out at all, allowing groups to allocate their often limited finances elsewhere (ABS 2012). Volunteering in rural and regional areas is more common than in urban areas, with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reporting that, in 2010, 41% of people living outside a capital city participated in volunteering, compared to 34% within capital cities (ABS 2011). Volunteering is
particularly important for developing and reinforcing social networks and social cohesion (ABS 2011).

People are motivated to volunteer for many reasons, and benefit from volunteering in many ways. These include enjoyment, meeting new people, socialising with friends, learning new things, feeling needed, feeling a sense of achievement, wanting to do something meaningful, wanting to help others, keeping physically and mentally active, and increasing confidence, to name just a few (Koss & Kingsley 2010, Liarakou et al. 2011, Bruyere & Rappe 2007, Bushway et al. 2011, Stanley & Blahna 2013). It is argued that participating in volunteering supports a person’s health and wellbeing through providing some or all of these benefits (O’Brien et al. 2010, Pillemer et al. 2010, Bushway et al. 2011, Brown et al. 2012). Conversely, it is also argued that dedicating a large proportion of time to volunteering can have adverse effects on a person’s wellbeing, particularly through increased stress (Bushway et al. 2011).

**What did we measure and why?**

Survey participants were asked if they had volunteered in the last 12 months, if they used to volunteer in the past but had stopped, or if they had never volunteered in the past.

A subset of volunteers was asked further questions about volunteering, focusing on:

- What type of volunteering they did, and how frequently
- How volunteering made them feel.

Survey respondents who indicated they used to volunteer but had stopped were asked whether they had stopped volunteering for any of a number of reasons. Survey participants who had never volunteered before were asked why they had not volunteered.

**Who volunteers?**

Across rural and regional Australia, 56.6% of people indicated they had volunteered in the last 12 months, 28.1% had not volunteered in the last 12 months but had at some point before that, and 15.2% had never volunteered (n=9047).

This volunteering rate was higher than that last reported by the ABS. This is likely to be in part due to differences in the way volunteers were defined in the Regional Wellbeing Survey compared to the ABS. Regional Wellbeing Survey respondents were asked if, in the past 12 months, they had been a volunteer (e.g. for groups like fire brigades, sports clubs, school canteen, meals on wheels, festivals). The ABS defines volunteering more specifically, with a volunteer defined as someone who ‘in the previous 12 months, willingly gave unpaid help, in the form of time, service or skills, through an organisation or group’. Additionally, the ABS volunteering rate of 41% examined volunteers living outside Australia’s capital cities, whereas the Regional Wellbeing Survey also excluded large cities with a population greater than 100,000, such as Geelong and the Gold Coast. The rate may also be related to the different times at which data were collected (2010 for the ABS versus 2014 for the Regional Wellbeing Survey). It is also possible that volunteers are more motivated than non-volunteers to take part in the Regional Wellbeing Survey.
Participation in volunteering in different places

Across rural and regional Australia, volunteering rates differed between states and regions (Figure 4.1a). Those living in Western Australia had the highest volunteering rate, followed by South Australians. These states also reported the lowest proportion of survey participants who had never volunteered, and who had volunteered in the past but stopped. Victoria had the lowest volunteering rates, as well as the highest proportion of survey participants who had never volunteered.

When examined by region (Figure 4.1b), the highest volunteering rates were in the Wheatbelt (WA), Goldfields-Esperance (WA), Yorke and Mid North (SA), Murraylands and Riverland (SA), Limestone coast (SA), Barwon South West (VIC), Southern Inland (NSW), Far South Coast and Illawarra (NSW) and Darling Down and South West (QLD) regions.
Figure 4.1b: Proportion of adults who currently volunteered, by region

Estimated % of population reporting that they currently volunteer. Nationally, 56.61% of people reported that they currently volunteer.

- 37 - 48%
- 49 - 60%
- 61 - 72%

Region with low sample size: there is lower confidence in results for these regions

Data source: 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey, weighted dataset
Participation in volunteering by different people

Volunteering varied between some groups (Figure 4.1c). There was little difference between men and women, although more women reported that they used to volunteer but were not currently involved in volunteering. Volunteering rates were highest amongst survey participants aged 30 to 49, and those over 65 years of age, although those in older age groups were also more likely to report that they used to volunteer, but were not currently involved in volunteering. Younger people were least likely to be active volunteers, and most likely to have never volunteered. Farmers, both dryland and irrigators, were more likely to volunteer than non-farmers.

Figure 4.1c: Rates of volunteering in different groups
What types of volunteering are most common?
Rural and regional Australians most commonly volunteered for community events (such as field days, festivals and markets), at sports or recreation clubs/groups, for health care/welfare related groups and for music, arts and culture groups (Figure 4.1d). Less commonly, they volunteered for environmental or conservation groups, service clubs, church or spiritual organisations, emergency services groups, farming organisations and animal-focused organisations. Survey participants could also indicate if they volunteered for other types of groups, and were asked to describe these. Other groups people volunteered for included local government, Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander groups, political groups, refugee and migrant groups, youth groups, education, international aid organisations, local tourism, early childhood groups, and senior citizen groups, amongst others.

How often do people volunteer?
Some people volunteer more frequently than others. The high reliance of many rural communities on volunteering has raised concerns about whether some volunteers are at risk of burnout or stress due to the large amount of time they spend volunteering. Some studies have found that dedicating large amounts of time to volunteering increases the chance of burnout in volunteers, particularly through exhaustion and cynicism, and that those who volunteer in multiple organisations are more likely to experience burnout (e.g. Claxton et al. 1998, Chacon and Vecina 1999, Moreno-Jiménez and Villodres 2010). However, there is also evidence that high levels of volunteering are associated with higher health and wellbeing amongst volunteers (Harris 2005).

Burnout amongst volunteers is likely to be influenced by many factors beyond the frequency of volunteering; previous studies suggest volunteer burnout is related to, amongst other things, the type of volunteering, the tasks involved while volunteering, role ambiguity, organisational issues,
social interactions while volunteering, integration into the volunteering organisation, volunteer personality traits, socio-demographic factors, and volunteer motivations (e.g. Bakker et al. 2006, Moreno-Jiménez and Villodres 2010, Ross et al. 2010). Nevertheless, frequency of volunteering is an important issue for rural and regional Australia, where volunteering rates are particularly high. Regional Wellbeing Survey participants were asked how often they volunteered. Those who volunteering for church and spiritual organisations, sports and recreation groups, emergency services groups and health care and welfare groups were most likely to volunteer frequently for their group (Figure 4.1e). The least intensive volunteering was for community events, farming and agricultural organisations, environmental or conservation groups, and school related activities.

![Figure 4.1e: Frequency of volunteering reported by current volunteers, by type of community group/organisation](image)

A ‘volunteering intensity’ scale was developed, shown in Figure 4.1f. A ‘low intensity’ volunteer was estimated to engage in volunteering between 1 and 25 times per year in total across all their volunteering activities, ‘moderate intensity’ volunteers were estimated to volunteer between 26-100 times a year, and ‘high intensity’ volunteers volunteered more than 100 times a year.

This intensity scale was calculated by assigning each of the volunteering frequencies shown in Figure 4.5 a score (once or twice = 1.5, 3-5 times =4, 6-10 times = 8, 11 -25 times = 18, most weeks = 52 and more than once a week = 104). The score was then added across all types of volunteering that the survey participant was involved in. For example, a survey participant who indicated that they volunteered for emergency services ‘most weeks’ (a score of 52) and school related activities ‘3 to 5 times’ (a score of 4) had a volunteering intensity score of 56, and was classified as a ‘moderate intensity’ volunteer.
The experience of volunteering

Volunteers were asked how participating in volunteering made them feel, and if it resulted in any of a number of outcomes for them. Overall, volunteers reported positive outcomes from their volunteering activities (Figure 4.2g). In total, 89.7% of current volunteers reported that their volunteering was often or always satisfying, 88.6% that it was often or always enjoyable, and 88.4% that it often or always gave them a sense of achievement. Only 14.2% of volunteers felt that volunteering was often or always frustrating and 13.2% that it was stressful. When asked about more specific outcomes of volunteering, such as whether it helped them contribute to their community, the large majority of volunteers were again very positive about their volunteering experience (Figure 4.1h). In particular, most felt that volunteering let them contribute to their community (93.6%), provided opportunities to do things outside their normal routine (89.2%), and helped them feel connected to their community (87.1%).

15 Analyses of characteristics of volunteers are unweighted. There is a lack of robust benchmark data on the typical characteristics of volunteers, meaning it is not possible to weight this group when analysing its characteristics.
Figure 4.1h: Volunteering outcomes (unweighted data)
Survey participant’s views about volunteering were compared with the intensity of their volunteering. People who volunteered more often were more likely to report having both positive and negative outcomes from volunteering (Figures 4.1g and 4.1h), with only one exception (those who volunteered more frequently were not more likely to report that volunteering ‘looks good on my resume’).

Figure 4.1i illustrates the different experiences of volunteering reported by those who volunteer at low, moderate and high intensity. High intensity volunteers were more likely to experience positive outcomes from volunteering, such as feeling satisfied or feeling a sense of achievement from their volunteering. They were also more likely to report negative outcomes from volunteering, such as stress or volunteering taking up too much of their time. Low intensity volunteers were less likely to feel stressed or frustrated with their volunteering, but also less likely to feel the positive benefits of volunteering. There was one exception to this pattern. High intensity volunteers were less likely to agree with the statement that ‘volunteering is hard because the meetings/activities are on at the wrong time’ when compared to low intensity volunteers. This is not surprising, as it is unlikely a frequent volunteer is unable to attend the meetings/activities.

![Figure 4.1i: Difference in volunteering experience, by volunteering intensity (unweighted data)](image)

**Health and wellbeing of volunteers**

The health and wellbeing of volunteers was compared to those who used to volunteer and those who do not volunteer. Volunteers on average reported higher subjective wellbeing compared to non-volunteers (Figure 4.1j).

We examined the wellbeing of volunteers and non-volunteers by age, to identify whether the higher wellbeing reported by volunteers was due simply to the older average age of volunteers. As older
people report, on average, higher levels of wellbeing compared to younger people, it was considered possible that the relationship between volunteering and wellbeing was simply a function of age. However, when the average wellbeing reported by volunteers versus non-volunteers was examined by age group (Figure 4.1j), volunteering was associated with higher wellbeing for those aged 30 and older. For younger people, however, this wasn’t the case, with volunteers aged under 30 having slightly lower life satisfaction compared to those who don’t volunteer. The reasons for this are unknown.

Figure 4.1j: Average global life satisfaction score for volunteers and non-volunteers (unweighted data)

The health and wellbeing of volunteers who volunteer more and less frequently was also compared. Higher intensity volunteers on average reported slightly lower subjective wellbeing compared to lower and moderate intensity volunteers, although the difference was small (Figure 4.1k).

When examined by age, higher intensity volunteering was associated with slightly lower levels of wellbeing for those aged 50 and older. This suggests that, for older rural and regional Australians, frequent volunteering may be associated with slightly reduced wellbeing. Better understanding this
is important for rural and regional Australia, where many older volunteers participate frequently in volunteering.

![Figure 4.1k: Average life satisfaction score of low intensity, moderate intensity and high intensity volunteers (unweighted data)](image)

**Reasons for not volunteering**

Survey participants who had never volunteered were asked why they had not volunteered (Figure 4.1l). The most common reason for not volunteering was lack of time to volunteer (70.1%), ‘other’ reasons (in other words, reasons other than the options able to be selected in the survey form) (45.9%), lack of opportunity to volunteer (41.6%), and lack of knowledge about how to get involved in volunteering in their community (23.8%). This suggests that many people are not aware of potential volunteering opportunities in their community, something that can be more readily addressed than issues such as lack of time to volunteer.
Reasons for stopping volunteering

Survey participants who had volunteered in the past but were not currently volunteering were asked why they stopped volunteering. The most common reasons were work commitments (58.8%), family commitments (49.1%), and because activities were held at times or locations they couldn’t manage (46.7%) (Figure 4.1m). A reasonably large proportion (37.0%) did not volunteer because they had not been asked to in the last 12 months, illustrating a need to keep inviting people to volunteer.
Conclusions

Rural and regional Australians who volunteer typically have higher levels of wellbeing than those who do not volunteer. While ours and other studies on volunteering do not identify the causal relationships behind this association, it is likely both that volunteering supports wellbeing, and that having high levels of wellbeing increases the likelihood that a person will be a volunteer. People who volunteered at a higher frequency were more likely to report positive experiences and outcomes from their volunteering, such as feeling a sense of achievement or that volunteering is enjoyable, but were also more likely to report the negative experiences and outcomes of volunteering, such as stress and frustration.

However, the picture is more complex when different groups are examined. Volunteers over the age of 50 reported lower wellbeing with increasing volunteering frequency, while younger people were less likely to volunteer at all compared to older age groups. This suggests a need both to reduce volunteering load for older volunteers, and to find ways to engage younger people in volunteering.

When people who were not currently volunteering were asked why they had either stopped volunteering, or never participated in it, many reported that they had not been asked to volunteer in the last 12 months, the opportunity hadn’t come up, or they did not know how to get involved. This is consistent with other research (e.g. Bushway et al. 2011), which identified not being asked to volunteer and lack of information about opportunities to volunteer as important barriers to volunteering. This suggests many people may be willing to volunteer but either don’t know how or are waiting to be asked rather than seek the opportunity themselves. Organisations seeking to increase volunteering rates may be able to achieve this by ensuring they communicate widely about volunteering opportunities, and invite people to volunteer regularly, particularly those who have volunteered in the past but who have since stopped.
Chapter 4.2: Key findings

- The number of people moving into and out of a community is a crucial determinant of that community's future success; migration is also argued to have a significant impact on a person's wellbeing.
- Western Australians were slightly more likely than those living in other states to be recent arrivals who had shifted to their community in the last three years, while Tasmanians were slightly less likely to have recently shifted to their community.
- Women, younger people and non-farmers were more likely than men, older people and farmers to have lived in their community for three years or less. The group most likely to have moved to their community in the past three years were those aged 18 to 29.
- Recent migrants had similar levels of both individual and community wellbeing compared to those who had lived in their community for a longer time.
- Recent migrants were most likely to have shifted to their current community for lifestyle reasons, followed by new employment, a desire to live in or near an attractive natural landscape, and to be closer to family.
- In total, 33.5% of respondents indicated they had considered moving to a new community at some point within the past three years, but ultimately decided not to. People living in Queensland and Western Australia were most likely to have considered moving, and Victorians the least likely. Women and younger people were more likely have considered moving than men or older people.
- Those who had considered moving but not done so reported substantially lower life satisfaction compared to those who had not considered moving in the last three years.
- People living Western Australia and South Australia were more likely than those in other states to be actively planning to migrate to a new community in the next 12 months, and those in Tasmania least likely. Younger people, particularly those aged 18 to 29, were more likely than any other group to be planning to move.
- Those who were very likely to move in the next 12 months has substantially lower life satisfaction than those who were less likely to move, and slightly lower community wellbeing.
- The most common reasons respondents gave for wanting to move to a new community were lifestyle reasons, new employment, to be closer to family and to live in or near an attractive natural landscape.

4.2 Migration

The number of people moving into and out of a community is a crucial determinant of that community’s future success, and even survival. While media attention often focuses on migration from rural and regional Australia to larger cities and concerns about depopulation of the country’s interior, these are just two aspects of what is a much larger and more complex phenomenon. In addition to rural people shifting to cities, many people choose to move from capital cities to rural properties and regional towns, and rural residents often move from one rural community to another (Argent et al. 2014).

Migration and the process of relocating to a new community are often argued to significantly influence a person’s wellbeing. Previous studies – including the first Regional Wellbeing Survey - have found that migration is associated with poorer wellbeing in the period leading up to the move.
(Schirmer and Berry 2014), and that wellbeing often remains poorer for many months after moving (Luhmann et al. 2012). This chapter examines people who are migrating, the places they are moving to and from, and their motivations for moving. Understanding this can help identify the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors of most importance to different people.

**What did we measure and why?**

The 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey asked participants:

- How many years they had lived in their current community
- How likely they were to shift to a new community in the next 12 months
- Whether they had considered shifting to a new community in the last 3 years, but not actually shifted
- Their motivations for migration (this was asked of a subset of those survey participants who (i) had moved to a new community in the last 3 years, or (ii) indicated they were likely to shift within the next 12 months).

**Recent arrivals**

The length of time a person has spent in their community is likely to influence both their individual wellbeing and their perception of the wellbeing of their community. This section examines recent arrivals: people who have lived in their current community for three years or less.

**Recent arrivals in different places**

Figure 4.2a compares the proportion of people who had lived in their communities for three years or less by state. Western Australians were slightly more likely to be recent migrants than respondents from other states, and Tasmanians were slightly less likely to have recently shifted to their community. The regions with the highest proportions of new migrants were the Mid West Gascoyne and Pilbara (WA), South West Perth and Peel (WA), Murray (NSW) and Far South Coast and Illawarra (NSW) regions (Figure 4.2b).

![Figure 4.2a Proportion of residents who had lived in their current community for three years or less, by state](image-url)
Figure 4.2b Proportion of residents who had lived in their current community for three years or less, by region
Recent arrivals by different types of people

Women, younger people and non-farmers were more likely than men, older people and farmers to have lived in their community for three years or less (Figure 4.2c). The higher migration rates of women will likely have many contributing factors. Previous studies have, for example, found that women are more likely to shift into the home of their male partner when they shift in together, rather than vice versa (Wilkins et al. 2009, p. 140).

The group most likely to have moved to their community in the past three years were those aged 18 to 29. Migration is well documented to peak in young adulthood and then decline with age, as shown in Figure 4.2d (Bernard et al., 2014). This reflects the changes in lifestyle experienced by many young adults as they first move out of the family home for work or study, and relocate to take advantage of new opportunities. Figure 4.2e shows the same pattern, but this time using Regional Wellbeing Survey data, with the proportion of people who had spent three years or fewer in their current community used as a proxy for migration propensity.

Irrigators and dryland farmers were less likely than non-farmers to have moved recently. Farmers have greater ties to a specific location through the nature of their work.
Figure 4.2d Typical age profile of migration and key life-course transitions (from Bernard et al. 2014)

Figure 4.2e Migration age profile, using 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey data
Recent arrivals and wellbeing

Life satisfaction and community wellbeing were slightly higher for those who had lived in their community for more than three years (Figure 4.2f); however the differences may not be meaningful, as the confidence intervals for the two categories overlap. This suggests that the length of time a person have lived in a community is only one of many factors contributing to overall wellbeing.

![Figure 4.2f Differences in life satisfaction and community wellbeing reported by people who had lived in their community for different lengths of time](image)

Motivations for recent migration

Survey participants who had lived in their community for three years or less were asked to nominate the reasons they had migrated, from a list provided in the survey. The most common reason was for lifestyle reasons, followed by new employment, a desire to live in or near an attractive natural landscape, and to be closer to family. The reasons given by survey respondents are similar to those provided by respondents in comparable surveys, such as the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey (Wilkins et al. 2009, pp. 142–143), with the exception of the desire to move to a more attractive natural landscape, which was not asked in the HILDA survey.

Table 4.2a shows the top five reasons people gave for moving to their community by age, and gender. While in other parts of the report we compare gender, age and farming status, here we did not include farming status as the number of farmers who recently moved was too low to include in the analysis. The relative importance of employment decreases as age increases, while retirement becomes important to those aged 50 and older. The top five reasons for moving to a new community were similar for men and women. New employment, being closer to family, and the cost of housing were of greater relative importance to women, but the differences were too small to suggest definitive differences in motivations for past migration of men versus women.
Table 4.2a Top five motivations for past migration of different age groups (‘other’ category omitted) (unweighted data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aged 18-29</th>
<th>Aged 30-49</th>
<th>Aged 50-64</th>
<th>Aged 65+</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 (most common)</strong></td>
<td>New employment</td>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>Retire</td>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>New employment</td>
<td>Find attractive natural landscape</td>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>New employment</td>
<td>Find attractive natural landscape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td>Find attractive natural landscape</td>
<td>Find attractive natural landscape</td>
<td>Retire</td>
<td>Find attractive natural landscape</td>
<td>Find attractive natural landscape</td>
<td>New employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td>Closer to work or study</td>
<td>To be closer to family</td>
<td>New employment</td>
<td>To be closer to family</td>
<td>To be closer to family</td>
<td>Retire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5 (5th most common)</strong></td>
<td>To be closer to family</td>
<td>Cost of housing</td>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>Cost of housing</td>
<td>Cost of housing</td>
<td>Closer to family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Deciding not to migrate

Much migration research focuses on those who have migrated to a new community; however, some people may consider migrating but decide not to shift. People may decide not to shift for a range of reasons, including financial constraints, inability to find employment in their desired location, a need to access particular services that are not available in their desired location, or an unwillingness to leave their familial and social support networks. One third of Regional Wellbeing Survey respondents, 33.5% (n=3,639), had considered moving to a new community at some point within the past three years, but decided not to.

Deciding not to migrate in different places

People living in Queensland and Western Australia were most likely to have considered moving, and Victorians the least likely (Figure 4.2g). Figure 4.2h maps the proportion of residents in different regions who had considered moving within the past three years, but not actually done so.

Figure 4.2g Proportion of residents who had considered moving in the past three years but decided not to, by state

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Figure 4.2h Proportion of residents who had considered moving in the past three years but decided not to, by region
Deciding not to migrate for different people

Those most likely to have considered moving but not done so were women, younger people, and non-farmers (Figure 4.2i) – similar to the types of people who had recently moved.

![Figure 4.2i Proportion of residents who had considered moving in the past three years but decided not to, by group](image)

Deciding not to migrate and wellbeing

Those who had considered moving reported lower life satisfaction and community wellbeing (Figure 4.2j). Differences in life satisfaction were substantial. Perceptions of community wellbeing were similar for both groups.
Migration intentions

Planning to migrate has been shown in past studies to be associated with poorer wellbeing. Those who anticipate a move in the near future may be preoccupied with packing, organising transport, finding a new residence, making new schooling / childcare arrangements, finding a new job, and other tasks necessary for a successful move (Wilkins et al., 2009). Even if the move is likely to be a positive one, these concerns can introduce additional stress to an individual’s life. Additionally, some people may be anticipating a move because it is necessary rather than because it is desirable, for example due to divorce or relationship breakdown, becoming unemployed, or a need to be closer to medical care.

Migration intentions in different places

Figure 4.2k compares the migration intentions of people in different states. Those living in Western Australia and South Australia were most likely to be planning to move to a new community in the next 12 months. People living in central and southern remote Australia (SA/NSW) and Orana (NSW) were most likely to be intending to migrate in the next 12 months, and those living in the Wheatbelt (WA) least likely to (Figure 4.2l).
Figure 4.21 Proportion of residents who were likely or very likely to migrate in the next 12 months, by region
**Migration intentions for different people**

As shown in Figure 4.2m, younger people (particularly those aged 18 to 29) and non-farmers were more likely than older people and farmers to be intending to move to a new community in the next 12 months. Men were slightly more likely to be planning to move than women, although the differences were very small. Non-farmers were more likely to be planning to move in the next 12 months than farmers.

Figure 4.2m Proportion of population who reported they were likely or very likely to migrate in the next 12 months, by group

**Migration intentions and wellbeing**

Figure 4.2n compares the average life satisfaction and community wellbeing of those who were (i) very likely, or (ii) less than very likely, to move in the next 12 months. Those who were more likely to move reported lower life satisfaction than those who were less likely to move. People very likely to move reported slightly lower community wellbeing than people less likely to move.
Figure 4.2n Differences in life satisfaction and community wellbeing reported by people who were very likely to migrate to a new community in the next 12 months

**Motivations for future migration**

The most common reasons for wanting to move to a new community were, similar to motivations reported by recent migrants, lifestyle reasons, new employment, to be closer to family and to live in or near an attractive natural landscape. Table 4.2b shows the top five reasons people gave for moving to their community by age, and gender. We did not include farming status in this comparison, as the number of farmers planning to move in the near future was too low to include in the analysis. The relative importance of moving because of employment was lower as age increased, while retirement was a more important driver for those aged 65 and older. The top five reasons for moving to a new community were similar for both females and males, with health services being of slightly greater relative importance to women, and retirement for men. These differences are, however, too small to say anything conclusive about the relationship between gender and future migration intentions.

| Table 4.2b Top five motivations for future migration of different age groups ('other' category omitted) (unweighted data) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Aged 18-29 | Aged 30-49 | Aged 50-64 | Aged 65+ | Females | Males |
| 1 (most common) | New employment | New employment | Lifestyle | Lifestyle | Lifestyle | Lifestyle |
| 2 | Lifestyle | Lifestyle | New employment | Retire | New employment | New employment |
| 3 | Closer to work or study | To be closer to family | To be closer to family | To be closer to family | To be closer to family | Find attractive natural landscape |
| 4 | Find attractive natural landscape | Find attractive natural landscape | Find attractive natural landscape | Health services | Find attractive natural landscape | Closer to family |
| 5 (5th most common) | To be closer to family | Schools / childcare | Climate | Find attractive natural landscape | Health services | Retire |
Conclusions

Rural and regional Australians who have recently considered migrating, or who are actively planning to migrate, have substantially lower life satisfaction than those who have not. However, those who moved within the last three years did not report lower life satisfaction compared to those who have lived longer in their community, suggesting the wellbeing effects of migration last for months rather than years after a person shifts to a new community.

Younger people and non-farmers were much more likely to have considered migrating, have recently migrated, and be very likely to migrate in the near future than older people and farmers. Motivations for migrating differ with age, but are similar between genders, suggesting that a person’s life stage is a better predictor of their migration characteristics than their gender.

Employment, lifestyle, and attractive natural landscapes feature prominently in both reasons given for migrating and wanting to migrate, suggesting that organisations looking to attract or retain migrants need to address more than just economic drivers in order to successfully maintain or grow their population.
Section 5 People and place in regional Australia: conclusions

This section draws out key conclusions from the 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey about the wellbeing of different places people in rural and regional Australia in 2014.

Wellbeing in different places

Australia’s rural and regional communities are highly diverse. They range from peri-urban settlements to remote communities with some of the lowest population densities in the world, and include regions with substantially different histories of social and economic change and development. Given this diversity, it is not surprising that wellbeing, and wellbeing determinants, vary substantially between places. This variance in wellbeing and wellbeing determinants between regions is not a result of the physical ‘place’ itself, but of the history of that place, how it has developed socially and culturally, and how this shapes the types of people who live in that place and the opportunities and challenges they experience (for a discussion of the role of place in wellbeing, see Butterworth et al. 2014). This means that in every region, a different mix of factors is likely to be contributing to the wellbeing-related challenges and opportunities identified in the 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey.

New South Wales

As a whole, New South Wales residents were more likely than those in other states to report feeling positive about their local community’s economic wellbeing, their access to services and infrastructure, and their general health. They were less likely to feel safe in their community, and reported slightly poorer access to telecommunications. Within New South Wales, every region varied:

- Far South Coast and Illawarra: This region had average or higher than average scores for almost all wellbeing-related measures\(^\text{16}\). It had lower than average scores for community wellbeing, but higher than average scores for health, social capital and landscape attractiveness
- Hunter, Central Coast and Mid North Coast: This region had average score for most wellbeing-related measures, with above average access to services, infrastructure and telecommunications, landscape attractiveness, and community economic wellbeing, but slightly higher than average levels of psychological distress
- Northern Rivers: This region had average or above average scores for most wellbeing-related measures, with higher than average confidence in skills and education, health, community leadership and collaboration, ability to have a say, community involvement and sense of belonging. However, residents of this region reported lower than average household and community financial wellbeing, access to telecommunications, and perceived environmental health
- Southern Inland: This region had average scores for almost all wellbeing-related measures, with the exceptions being higher than average household financial wellbeing and community

[^16]: A wellbeing-related measure means a wellbeing determinant (e.g. household financial wellbeing) or wellbeing outcome (e.g. Global Life Satisfaction or Community Wellbeing Index) measure.
safety, and lower than average confidence in skills and education, and access to telecommunications

- Northern Inland: This region had average scores for almost all wellbeing-related measures, with the exceptions being higher than average household financial wellbeing and confidence in skills and education, and lower than average community inclusiveness and community safety

- Murray: This region had average scores for most wellbeing related measures, the exceptions being higher than average community economic wellbeing, and lower than average life satisfaction, social capital, leadership and collaboration, and access to telecommunications

- Riverina: This region had average or above average for all wellbeing related measures. Residents in this region did not have below average scores for any wellbeing determinant or outcome measured, and reported higher than average community economic wellbeing, leadership and collaboration, ability to have a say and be heard, involvement with friends and family, access to services and infrastructure

- Central West: This region had average scores for most wellbeing related measures. It had poorer than average life satisfaction and household financial wellbeing, but higher than average community economic wellbeing, access to services and infrastructure, and landscape attractiveness

- Orana: This region had lower than average scores for multiple wellbeing related measures, including community safety and inclusiveness, access to services and infrastructure, social capital, landscape values, and community leadership and collaboration. Average life satisfaction scores for this region were lower in 2014 compared to 2013. The Orana region has experienced extended drought, which was continuing at the time the survey was conducted.

**Victoria**

Rural and regional Victorians on average were more confident in the wellbeing of their local economy, felt safer, found their landscape more attractive, reported their environment was in better health, and were more likely to feel their community was inclusive, compared to those in other states. Conversely, they were less likely to report getting involved or volunteer in their local communities, and were less confident in their skills and education, compared to the national average. Regions within the state were relatively similar for the most part, but there were some differences:

- Gippsland: This region had average scores for almost all wellbeing related measures, with residents more likely to report their community had good environmental health, and high safety, but also more likely to report poor household financial wellbeing

- Southern Melbourne: This region, which includes rural people living on the southern and south east outskirts of Melbourne, had average or above average scores in almost all wellbeing related measures, with residents more likely to report high community economic wellbeing, good health, high inclusiveness and community safety, and high perceived environmental health. Residents had lower than average confidence in skills and education, in being able to have a say and be heard, and access to telecommunications

- Melbourne East: This region, mostly located in the Yarra Ranges Council, had above average or average scores for all but one wellbeing related measure (community involvement).
Residents were more likely than average to report high household and community financial wellbeing, high inclusiveness, high access to physical capital, and good environmental health.

- **Hume**: This region had average scores for all but two wellbeing related measures; residents reported higher than average household financial wellbeing and perceived environmental health. This region reported higher community wellbeing in 2014 compared to 2013. When discussed with local residents, this increase in community wellbeing was considered to be largely a result of greater economic security in the region, as the future of the SPC factory and for some farmers in the region was more secure in 2014 compared to 2013.

- **Loddon Mallee**: This region had average scores for most wellbeing related measures, although residents reported poorer household financial wellbeing, better community economic wellbeing, and a higher than average Community Wellbeing Index score.

- **Grampians**: This region had average or above average scores for most wellbeing related measures. While residents reported lower confidence in skills and education, and less time with friends and family, they were more likely to feel able to have a say and feel heard, and feel safe in their community, compared to most rural and regional Australians.

- **Barwon South West**: This region had above average or average scores for most wellbeing related measures, with residents more likely to report feeling safe in their community, having an attractive landscape, and high environmental health, as well as high confidence in their human capital; but having lower than average household financial wellbeing and community involvement.

**Queensland**

Rural and regional Queenslanders had poorer than average scores for many wellbeing related measures, particularly with regard to indicators of community wellbeing. They reported lower Community Wellbeing Index scores than the national average, and much lower community economic wellbeing than those in all other states. Household financial wellbeing, sense of belonging, safety, leadership and collaboration, inclusiveness of local communities, attractiveness of the landscape, environmental health and access to telecommunications were all lower than average for Queensland residents compared to the national average. Queenslanders were more likely to have considered migrating in the last three years, but not shifted, than those in most other states:

- **Southern Coastal Queensland**: This region had average or below average scores for most wellbeing related measures. Residents reported poorer than average community wellbeing, sense of belonging, household financial wellbeing, health, and confidence in their skills and education. However, they had better than average access to skills and infrastructure, and confidence in having a say and being heard.

- **Darling Downs and South West**: This region had average scores for most wellbeing related measures, but not all. While having higher confidence in their local economy than those in other regions, and greater confidence in their skills and education and ability to have a say and be heard, residents of this region reported poorer than average environmental health, and were less likely to find their landscape attractive, compared to those in other regions. Access to telecommunications was also rated lower than average.

- **Central Queensland**: This region had poorer than average scores for the majority of the wellbeing determinants examined in the Regional Wellbeing Survey, particularly economic wellbeing, institutional capital, physical capital and environmental health, and sense of
belonging. Both Global Life Satisfaction and the Community Wellbeing Index were below the average. This region is experiencing extended drought together with a downturn in mining, and both of these issues are likely to be contributing to these poorer than average scores across the whole community

- Far North Queensland and Torres Strait: This region had average scores in most areas, but some above and below average scores. Residents reported better personal health, but poorer community economic wellbeing, lower community inclusiveness, safety and leadership, and poorer access to telecommunications than the national average.

**South Australia**

Rural and regional South Australians were more likely to feel safe, to volunteer, and to be satisfied with their access to telecommunications, than those living in other states. They also reported poorer than average household financial wellbeing and general health, and were more likely to be planning to migrate in the next 12 months than those in most other states (with the exception of Western Australia):

- Limestone Coast: This region had above average or average scores for most wellbeing related measures, despite having a lower average global life satisfaction score when compared to the national average. Residents were more likely than most other rural and regional Australians to report high financial wellbeing, confidence in their skills and education, feeling able to have a say and be heard, good access to services and infrastructure, and good environmental health. However, they also reported lower social capital and community inclusiveness.

- Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island: This region was similar to the national average for most wellbeing related measures, but residents reported higher levels of physical capital in the form of feeling safe, having an attractive landscape, and access to services, infrastructure and telecommunications.

- Barossa and Adelaide outskirts: This region had average or above average scores in all wellbeing related areas. Residents were more likely than average to feel safe, report good health, and to frequently spend time with friends and family and be involved in community activities.

- Murraylands and Riverland: This region had several areas in which wellbeing related measures were lower than the national average, many in which it was similar to average, and none in which it was above average. Residents had poorer than average financial wellbeing, health, confidence in skills and education, and were less likely to feel their local landscape was attractive or that they had good access to services and infrastructure.

- Yorke and Mid North: This region had a mix of outcomes, with residents reporting below average scores for some wellbeing related measures and above average scores for others. Residents were less likely than other South Australians to feel their community was inclusive and collaborative, reported poorer general health and household financial wellbeing, and had lower levels of social capital; but also felt safer than average, and reported higher than average community economic wellbeing and access to telecommunications.
Western Australia

Western Australians were more likely than those in other states to report having high levels of household financial wellbeing, confidence in their skills and education, high leadership, collaboration and inclusiveness in their community, and high levels of community involvement and volunteering. They were less likely to spend time with friends and family or to feel safe in their community, and more likely to report poor environmental health. They were also the most mobile, being more likely to have recently migrated, and to be considering shifting to a new community, than those living in other states:

- **Goldfields Esperance**: This region had higher than average scores for household financial wellbeing, confidence in skills and education, having a say and being heard, community involvement, sense of belonging, and access to telecommunications; and lower than average health, inclusiveness, time spent with friends and family, community safety, and perceived environmental health.
- **Great Southern**: This region was mostly similar to the national average, with better than average access to services and infrastructure, but lower than average time spent with family and friends, sense of belonging, confidence in skills and education, inclusiveness, access to telecommunications, and perceived environmental health.
- **Wheatbelt**: This region was mostly similar to the national average, with higher than average levels of community leadership and collaboration, being able to have a say and be heard, and involvement in community activities; and lower than average household financial wellbeing, access to services, infrastructure and telecommunications, and perceived environmental and landscape health.
- **South West, Perth and Peel**: This region had higher than average scores for most wellbeing related measures examined except life satisfaction.
- **Mid West Gascoyne and Pilbara**: This region had lower than average scores for community economic wellbeing, inclusiveness, time spent with friends and family, community safety, access to services and infrastructure, and environmental health; and higher than average scores for community involvement, leadership and collaboration, having a say and being heard, sense of belonging and telecommunications.
- **Kimberley**: Together with the Northern Territory, this region had lower than average scores for many wellbeing related measures, including community economic wellbeing, most aspects of institutional and social capital, and physical capital. However, it had higher than average health, confidence in skills and education, household financial wellbeing, and community involvement.

Tasmania

Tasmanians on average reported poorer household financial wellbeing than those living in other states, but higher satisfaction with their lives. They were the least likely of those in any state to be considering moving to a new community in the next 12 months, or to have recently migrated. They were more likely to feel safe in their community, to find their landscape attractive and their local environment healthy, and reported better than average access to telecommunications. Conversely, they had lower than average community economic wellbeing, confidence in skills and education, time spent with friends and family, community inclusiveness, and community leadership and collaboration.
The number of Tasmanians participating in the survey did not permit detailed analysis of different regions within the state, although the data suggest generally higher scores for most wellbeing related measures in southern parts of the state, and lower than average scores in northern parts.

**Wellbeing for different people**

No community or region is experienced the same way by everyone. Within any community, it is likely that some people feel more included than others, some are experiencing financial hardship while others are financially well-off, and some are better able to have their views heard than others, to name just a few examples.

Throughout this report, we have compared people by gender, age and farming status. In addition to these groups, there are many other groups of people who may experience living in rural and regional areas of Australia in different ways: for example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, those identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and those who have migrated from non-English speaking countries, to name just a few. As noted earlier in this report, survey results for many of these groups will be published after more detailed analysis of the data for each group.

**Adult youth: 18 to 29 year olds**

Younger rural and regional Australians had life satisfaction within the average range, and better general health than those in older age groups, but were more likely to report psychological distress, and had less confidence in the wellbeing of their communities than older people. Younger people were less likely than older people to find their landscape attractive, to feel included, or to feel like they belonged in their communities. They had particularly poor scores related to crime and safety, being more likely to report that many people misuse drugs and alcohol in their community, that there is a high crime rate, and that they feel unsafe. They were also less likely to feel their communities had strong leadership and collaboration, believe they could have a say and be heard in their community, or to be involved in community activities or volunteering.

The survey results highlight that, irrespective of location, younger people feel less connected to and able to be a part of their rural and regional communities. The results also suggest that, when considering the challenges of being young in rural and regional Australia, it is important to consider not only those who are in their teenage and young adult years, but also ‘older youth’ in their mid to late 20s.

Young people rated their access to services and infrastructure, economic wellbeing, and environmental health, similar to the national average. This is different to some previous studies, which have found that amongst the key issues for rural youth are access to economic opportunity, and having a wide variety of services (see for example Pretty et al. 2003). The lack of differentiation regarding economic opportunity may be in part due to our definition of ‘youth’ as extending to the late 20s.

Many of the differences identified between younger and older Australians in the Regional Wellbeing Survey are not unique to rural and regional areas. They do, however, present a real challenge to rural and regional communities, as young people are more likely than other rural and regional people to migrate to new communities, and are most likely to choose to migrate to places where they feel a greater sense of belonging and safety – thus contributing to loss of population from
regional areas. While shifting to a new place is a common ‘rite of passage’ for young rural and regional Australians, it is important to consider how to increase the likelihood that they will choose to migrate to a rural or regional community, rather than to a large city. Addressing the wellbeing challenges young people experience in rural communities can reduce the net loss of younger people from rural communities, through either encouraging younger people to stay living in rural and regional communities, or to return to them after periods of study or work in larger cities.

Improving the quality of life that rural and regional communities provide to this group requires better integrating young people into local decision making processes and community organisations. Whereas older people feel included in their community, our results suggest many younger people feel excluded from their community, and have a poorer sense of belonging. Bridging the age divide requires finding ways to include younger people and give them a sense of belonging, and of being able to have a meaningful part in rural and regional communities.

Improving wellbeing of younger people also requires addressing how they experience the physical space they live in: young people were less likely to find the buildings and landscape they lived in attractive or safe compared to older people. More work is needed to understand what factors contribute to this difference, and how rural communities can design places and spaces that better meet the desires and needs of young people.

The ‘young middle’: 30 to 49 year olds
Youth-related wellbeing research often focuses on those aged in their teens and early twenties. Our results suggest that in rural and regional Australia, some wellbeing related issues associated with youth also continue for people in their 30s and 40s.

People aged 30 to 49 reported lower life satisfaction than those in other age groups (a result common across rural and urban surveys). They also spent less time with friends and family than any other age group. This age group had higher household financial wellbeing than younger or older age groups, were more involved in community activities and volunteering, and had a stronger sense of belonging than those aged under 30. However, similar to the under 30 year age group, they were less likely than older people to feel their communities were safe or inclusive, to feel they could have a say and be heard, or to feel they lived in an attractive landscape. They were also least likely to report they felt their local environment was healthy.

These results suggest that there is a need to address the ability of this age group to have meaningful input into community decision making processes as, despite their high attendance at communities activities and in volunteering, they remain less confident they can ‘have a say and be heard’. There is also a need to understand how experience of crime, safety and the physical environment intersects with age in rural communities, with those aged under 50 much more likely to feel unsafe and that they live in an undesirable physical setting than those aged over 50.

The ‘older middle’: 50 to 64 year olds
Those aged 50 to 64 were more likely to feel positively about many aspects of their lives than those aged under 50, but less likely to feel positive than those aged 65 and older. They were on average less distressed, but experiencing poorer general health, than younger age groups. They were more likely than younger rural and regional Australians to find the landscape they live in attractive and safe, and to feel a strong sense of belonging to their community, but reported poorer access to
telecommunications. This age group felt more confident about being able to have a say and be heard, and about the inclusiveness and leadership of their communities, than younger age groups, although not as confident as those aged 65 and older.

**Older people: those aged 65 and older**

Rural and regional Australians aged 65 and older were more positive about almost all aspects of their lives and the community they lived in than younger people. They rated almost every aspect of their lives – whether it was their access to financial, human, physical, social or natural capital – better than those in younger age groups. There were only two exceptions: people aged over 65 on average reported poorer general health, and poorer household financial wellbeing, than younger age groups. These results are very similar to those of other recent studies, which have also found that older rural and regional Australians report higher wellbeing, but poorer general health, compared to younger people (Inder et al. 2012).

The much more positive views of those aged 65 and older are likely to be the outcome both of this age group experiencing their communities differently to younger people, and of having different expectations of their communities than younger people. A higher proportion of the rural and regional population is aged 65 and older compared to the urban population (Inder et al. 2012), and this may mean that rural communities are better oriented to meeting the expectations of their larger proportion of older residents compared to their younger residents. Older rural and regional Australians are also often argued to have a culture of stoicism and hardiness (Davis and Bartlett 2008), which has been associated in some studies with a reduced likelihood of seeking assistance for health problems (see for example Judd et al. 2006). If a culture of stoicism can reduce a person’s likelihood of seeking assistance for health problems, it is also likely to influence the likelihood of a person reporting wellbeing-related difficulties when completing a survey.

That said, the positive views reported by those aged 65 and older are likely, at least in part, to be a result of their greater ability to influence decision making in their communities, and greater sense of belonging and being included compared to younger people. This raises the important question of how this sense of inclusion and belonging can be extended to younger age groups.

**Women and men**

The survey results suggest that, in many cases, differences between women and men are smaller than those between people of different ages. Consistent with many other rural and urban studies, women on average reported higher life satisfaction, community wellbeing, general health, and community involvement, and spent more time socialising with friends and family than men. Women were also more likely than men to report concerns about the health of the environment in their local region. Men reported slightly poorer life satisfaction, health, and community wellbeing, and were less involved in their community or in socialising with friends and family.

Men and women had few differences in their perceptions of their local landscape, of crime and safety in their local community, financial wellbeing, of access to services and infrastructure, in the leadership or inclusiveness of their community, or in their confidence in being able to have a say and be heard.

The Regional Wellbeing Survey focuses on community related determinants of wellbeing, and our results suggest these often do not differ substantially for women versus men. The survey did not
include questions about several areas in which more gendered differences typically occur, such as individual income levels (the survey asks only about household income), distribution of household responsibilities, or experience of domestic violence, to name a few. Thus there are likely to be important gender related differences in areas other than those examined by the survey. Additionally, the appearance of equality can mask unrecognised gender inequality: for example, Pini (2005) found that despite the emergence of many strong female rural leaders in Australia, many women in rural leadership role reporting having to adopt masculine behaviours and cultures in order to access and maintain these leadership positions.

Farmers
The wellbeing of farmers will be examined in more detail in the second report from the 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey, which focuses on farming and agriculture in rural and regional Australia. The survey result suggest that dryland farmers report better wellbeing than non-farmers and irrigators on many fronts: dryland farmers had particularly high levels of social capital, financial wellbeing, and confidence in community inclusiveness, leadership and collaboration. Irrigators were also more likely than non-farmers to feel their community was inclusive, and to have a strong sense of belonging, but were not as confident in community leadership and collaboration, or in being able to have a say and be heard, as dryland farmers.

While farmers typically reported higher life satisfaction than non-farmers, and positive views of their community, similar caution is needed in interpreting these results as that noted for older Australians. Farmers are noted to be less willing to discuss health and wellbeing issues or seek assistance for them (Schirmer et al. 2013); as such, they may be less likely to rate their community or their own life as having negative aspects when answering a survey compared to a non-farmer living in the same community and experiencing the same types of stresses.

Despite the potential for farmers to rate their lives more positively than non-farmers due to these differing cultural norms about what is an acceptable way to experience or discuss difficult times, farmers had consistently poorer outcomes compared to non-farmers for some wellbeing-related measures. The first was access to services and infrastructure: dryland farmers on average reported having much poorer access to services and infrastructure than non-farmers. This is not unsurprising, given that dryland farmers live predominantly on rural properties which are located a distance from the nearest town, and in less densely populated regions where there is less investment in infrastructure compared to densely populated regions. Irrigators, who are often clustered in regions that are less remote than many dryland farming communities, did not report poorer than average access to services and infrastructure.

Both irrigators and dryland farmers reported having poorer than average access to telecommunications compared to non-farmers. While the ‘digital divide’ between rural and urban Australia is commonly discussed, this highlights the large gap in access between farming and non-farming rural Australians. With farmers increasingly relying on technologies that require telecommunications access, this ‘town versus rural property’ rural digital divide is critical to business success in farming, an issue discussed further in the Farming and agriculture report of the 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey.
Dryland farmers and irrigators were also less likely to feel confident that their skills and education were in demand, or were sufficient for their needs, compared to non-farmers. This difference was also noted in results of the first Regional Wellbeing Survey. It suggests a need to better understand how farmers perceive their skills and experience, and how this translates to being able to seek new opportunities both on and off the farm, a topic also examined in the *Farming and agriculture* report.

**Conclusions**

The Regional Wellbeing Survey is a long-term project committed to better understanding the wellbeing of people and places in rural and regional Australia. It complements other work that examines the health of rural and regional Australians in-depth, and can add different perspectives to information from sources such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics that examine the social, economic and demographic changes occurring in rural and regional communities.

The Regional Wellbeing Survey has been conducted for only two years, and as such, there is limited scope to identify change over time in the wellbeing of people and places in rural and regional Australia. Between the two surveys average levels of wellbeing remained stable for both individuals and for communities, a finding that was not surprising given that large changes in wellbeing are typically seen only in association with highly disruptive changes in a household or community. There were a small number of exceptions. A decline in both individual and community wellbeing was identified in the Central Queensland region between the two surveys, as well as in the Orana region of New South Wales. In both these communities, extended drought is occurring, together with downturn in the mining industry. Both the drought and the mining downturn have been associated in the news media with declining wellbeing in these regions, and our results are consistent with the many reports of hardship in these regions. Importantly, our results show that poorer wellbeing is occurring not only for farmers experiencing drought, or those directly employed (or previously employed) in the mining sector, but across the entire community, which experiences the flow-on effects of changes in these industries. The Darling Downs and South West (QLD) region, despite also experiencing drought through a significant proportion of the region, did not have a decline in wellbeing, possibly due to relatively strong employment in the coal seam gas (CSG) sector during the survey period, with decline in CSG-related employment reported to be occurring from early 2015 in this region, after data had been collected for the survey (Moore 2015). As more data are collected over a longer time period, it will be possible to analyse in more depth the short- versus long-term changes associated with shifts in wellbeing in rural and regional Australia.

Concerns about net loss of young people from Australia’s rural communities have been recorded for several decades. While it is common and expected for younger people to spend time in different communities, attracting younger people to live in rural communities, and retaining them once they arrive, remains a common goal for Australia’s rural communities. Ensuring that communities support the wellbeing of their younger adult residents is a core part of achieving this goal. The findings of the survey suggest that successfully supporting wellbeing of younger Australians requires more than providing employment and education opportunities, two areas often focused on when discussing youth outmigration from rural areas. Our results, like those of other studies, do show that employment and education are critical drivers of migration for younger people. However, the areas in which young people report less satisfaction with their rural communities are not the economy, but being able to be meaningfully involved in, feel safe in, and belong to their community. Younger
people are less likely to get involved in volunteering, or in community events and activities, feel less able to have a say and be heard, and feel less like they belong in rural communities, compared to older people. This suggests that decision making processes often exclude younger people, and that greater investment is needed in actively including the views and desires of younger rural and regional Australians in decision making processes. This sense of exclusion from community decision is present not just for those in their twenties, but extends to people aged 30 to 49, suggesting that in rapidly ageing rural communities the definition of ‘youth’ may need reconsideration. Many current programs targeting youth in rural Australia focus on those aged in their teens and early twenties; our results suggest it is important to also focus on improving outcomes for the ‘older youth’: those aged in their twenties and thirties in particular.

Younger Australians – particularly those aged under 30, but also those aged 30 to 49 – report greater concerns about drug and alcohol abuse, crime and safety in their community. Many current programs seeking to address youth-related crime in rural areas are targeted to younger demographics; our results suggest a need to address crime, safety, drug and alcohol use concerns experienced by those in the older youth demographic in addition to those aged in their teens and early twenties.

Bridging the ‘age divide’ in rural communities is important not only for the wellbeing of younger residents of these communities, but also for the welfare of older residents. While older people typically are more engaged, feel better able to be heard, and are highly involved in community activities, ageing of the rural population is likely to reduce the capacity of this older demographic to continue their often very high levels of investment in community involvement and leadership in rural communities. Building capacity in younger age groups is thus critical to maintaining strong leadership and involvement in rural and regional communities.

Volunteering is critical to the survival of many rural and regional communities, and concerns are regularly raised about the sustainability of this volunteering, particularly in the many rural communities where the average age of the population is growing more rapidly than average. Most rural volunteers, including those who volunteer frequently and across many groups, find their volunteering a positive experience. However, those who volunteer more frequently are more likely to report experiencing negative outcomes such as stress, supporting the notion that volunteering and wellbeing are not always positively associated. To reduce the potential burden of frequent volunteering, a greater pool of volunteers is needed. While lack of time remains the greater barrier to getting involved in volunteering, the relatively high proportion of non-volunteers who reported not knowing about volunteering opportunities, or not being asked to volunteer, suggest that volunteering rates can be increased through better and wider communication about opportunities to volunteer. Doing this has potential both to better sustain volunteering, and to include those who feel more isolated and less included in rural communities, such as younger rural and regional Australians, in activities that may increase their sense of belonging, and through this their wellbeing.

This report summarises key findings from the 2014 survey. More in-depth analyses of the survey data are being conducted, and will be made available at www.regionalwellbeing.org.au. The Regional Wellbeing Survey is an ongoing project. Organisations interested in becoming survey partners, or in accessing more detailed analysis of the survey data, are encouraged to contact the survey team at regionalwellbeing@canberra.edu.au.
References


mentioned journals and articles.


Appendix 1 Sampling protocol used by region

Across Australia, flyers were sent to a randomly selected sample of rural and regional Australians, and rural and regional organisations were encouraged to promote the survey. However, in some regions communities were more intensively sampled in order to achieve a larger number of responses. This principally occurred in regions for which explicit funding was received from survey partners to enable additional flyers and surveys to be posted to households in the region. Table A1.1 lists the local government areas across Australia in which intensive sampling occurred for the 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey. These were predominantly located in Victoria, New South Wales, and Queensland.

Table A1.1 Local governments intensively sampled as part of the 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey

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Appendix 2: RDA and LGA regions

This Appendix provides a guide to

- Which Regional Development Australia regions are included in the ‘RDA reporting regions’ shown in this report, and for which data can be downloaded at www.regionalwellbeing.org.au (shown in Table A2.1)
- Which local government authorities are included in the ‘LGA reporting regions’ for which data can be downloaded at www.regionalwellbeing.org.au (shown in Table A2.2).
Table A2.1 Regional Wellbeing Survey reporting regions for RDAs – correspondence table

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Appendix 3 Comparison of Global Life Satisfaction and Personal Wellbeing Index scores

Figure A3 Average scores for two indicators of individual subjective wellbeing (Personal Wellbeing Index, and Global Life Satisfaction), 2014 - by state