NATIONAL CITIES RESEARCH PROGRAM STRATEGIC AGENDA

POPULATION

COMMUNITY & PLACE

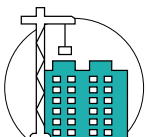**INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES**

ECONOMY

HOUSING IN URBAN POLICY

BUILT ENVIRONMENT & DESIGN

LAND-USE & DEVELOPMENT

INFRASTRUCTURE

TRANSPORT

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATIONS

GOVERNANCE & PLANNING

Australia is a highly urbanised nation. As we move into the 2020s, our cities are facing new challenges.

Flows of people, information, goods and services have accelerated. The question of how our cities can adapt to global challenges including the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change has come into sharper focus. **Australia's policy and practice responses need to be informed by a sound evidence base.**

AHURI has delivered the National Housing Research Program in partnership with our university network for over twenty years, gaining international recognition for the quality and depth of Australian housing research, and enhancing Australia's reputation for informed policy decision-making. **It is time for a platform to support coordinated, policy-focused Australian research into cities and urban issues.**

The Strategic Agenda

The purpose of the Strategic Agenda is to identify the scope of a National Cities Research Program. The twelve cities and urban research themes provide a framework to explore a broad range of emerging policy issues. Future research directions are identified under each of these themes to provoke discussion and collaboration in the development of a high quality evidence base.

Population

Australia is a highly urbanised nation. Until recently, population growth driven by immigration has been concentrated in the major cities, notably Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. Australian cities are also shaped by demographic changes, such as the ageing of the population and substantial decline in household formation rates and average household size. Managing varying population dynamics across cities situates urban policies between Federal, state and local governments.

Research directions:

- How will changes in immigration levels and programs impact cities, including labour and housing markets and urban development?

- What are the long-term population trajectories for rural, regional and urban Australia, and how might a national framework be implemented?

- How can Australian cities become more inclusive and provide access to amenities and services for a changing demographic, particularly the elderly and children?

- How can urban policies support population growth?

Community and Place

Urban policies reference varying spatial scales including streetscapes, neighbourhoods, precincts, central business districts, and the greater metropolitan areas of capital cities. Place-based urban policy objectives recognise that liveability, community participation, green space, accessible services and amenities and walkability contribute to people's health and wellbeing. Community participation and engagement in place-making is fundamental to urban policies that create successful places.

Research directions:

- How can urban form, built environment and social infrastructure support wellbeing and social inclusion?

- How is liveability delivered and enhanced in different urban settings?

- How do place-based approaches address spatial inequality and what are their effects on housing affordability and community outcomes?

- What is the role of community engagement in shaping urban development, evaluating outcomes and implementing strategies?

Indigenous Perspectives

Australia's cities are built on Indigenous land inhabited for thousands of years, which remains home to many Indigenous people. The representation and recognition of Indigenous perspectives could strengthen urban policies by meaningfully involving local communities and cultures in urban spaces and planning processes. There are opportunities to learn from Indigenous knowledge of sustainable practices in shaping the environment, reducing socio-spatial disadvantage and strengthening the cultural heritage of Australia's cities.

Research directions:

- How can Australian cities be understood as Indigenous places, and Indigenous connection to Country be represented in urban areas?

- What are success factors and challenges in Indigenous land title claims in urban areas and their implication for urban planning and governance?

- How do current policy frameworks (in Australia and internationally) provide social and economic infrastructure for Indigenous people in cities, and how could health, economic and social outcomes be improved?

- How could local Indigenous people be involved in creating and managing urban places?
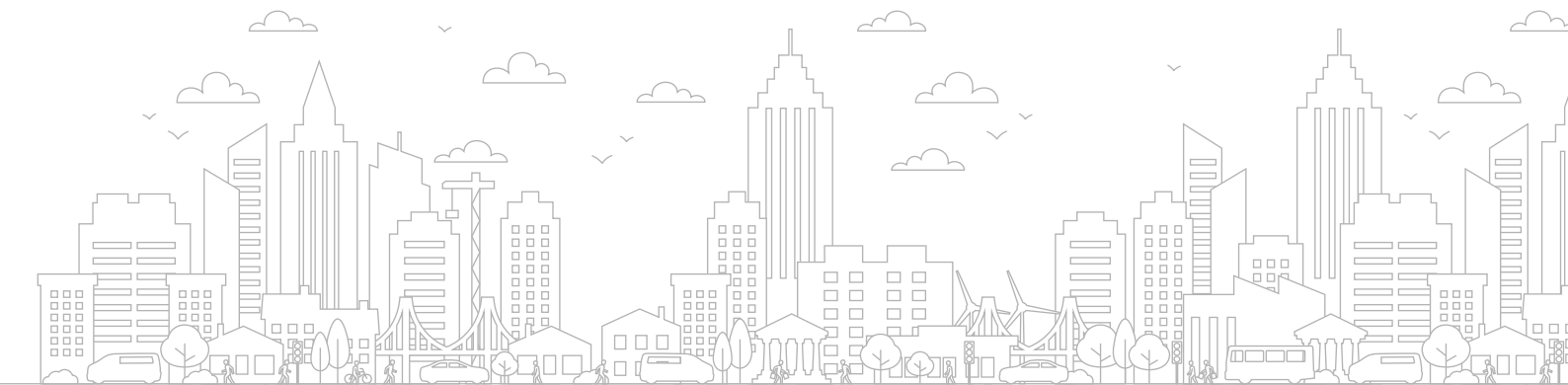

Economy

Australia's major cities are fundamental to productivity. Urban policies can have economic benefits through the development of precincts - clustering jobs, transport and housing. The structure of Australia's cities has changed, in part due to a shift from manufacturing to service- and knowledge-industries. Attracting human capital, and the investment of global companies to the central business districts is a cities policy objective. In this context, digital connectivity and Smart Cities technologies are increasingly important.

Research directions:

- How are urban precincts and economic agglomeration approaches being implemented in Australia to deliver innovation?

- How does the urban form of Australia's cities facilitate economic productivity?

- How can strategic urban and regional development support strong economic outcomes and connectivity?

- How are global economic transitions and transformations likely to affect Australian cities?

- In what ways could Smart Cities technology impact economic growth and productivity?

Housing in Urban Policy

Access to affordable, appropriate, safe and secure housing is foundational to the functioning of cities. Current urban policies include setting housing targets to deliver additional supply, coupled with other measures such as land use zones that focus growth in designated locations such as precincts. Long-term place based strategic planning processes and tools aim to manage urban consolidation and coordinate housing supply with employment, transport and infrastructure.

Research directions:

- How could the urban form of Australian cities best accommodate future populations sustainably and how might this transition be implemented?

- How might effective provision of appropriate, diverse housing integrated with transport, employment and social infrastructure be achieved throughout a metropolitan region?

- How can urban policies deliver social and affordable housing that contributes to tenure diversity and meeting housing needs in cities?

- What is the role for urban design and building codes to facilitate the quality of housing in Australia?

Built Environment and Design

Strategic planning policies in Australia contain objectives concerned with high quality urban design and built form. Heritage planning and urban design also guide the development of existing urban areas in Australian cities. However, urban design principles or protocols are not consistently incorporated into planning regulations. The role of built environment design is increasingly important in shaping our cities in the context of high rise residential developments and transitions to low carbon living.

Research directions:

- Which mechanisms are effective to achieve high quality urban design and public benefits through development?

- How could design achieve better outcomes and integration with statutory planning and building regimes?

- What are the opportunities to achieve better place design outcomes through the integration of Indigenous perspectives on place and cities in Australia?

- How will new technologies and innovation in the built environment support transitions to a low-carbon society and economy?

Land-Use and Development

Land-use planning policies address the provision of residential development, infrastructure, and commercial spaces. The re-zoning of land on the urban fringe, and the redevelopment and subdivision of property in existing urban areas, are viewed as essential to accommodate growing populations. To facilitate broader economic, environmental and social outcomes, the integration of land-use, transport and infrastructure planning between the three tiers of government and across state agencies is crucial.

Research directions:

- What are the land assets and other resources state and local governments have at their disposal to address the challenges facing Australian cities?

- What are the most effective strategies to allocate land-uses when residential development is invariably the 'highest and best use', in particular in high-value inner urban areas?

- What are effective mechanisms to enable a transition to a more consolidated urban form and mixed uses in Australian cities?

- How are good planning outcomes determined and evaluated?

- Which mechanisms are effective to achieve high quality urban design and public benefits through development?

Infrastructure

Vital infrastructure to support Australian cities spans the systems that provide water and energy to power cities, to social infrastructure in the form of education, health, recreation and justice facilities and social housing. A critical concern for cities policy is diversifying funding mechanisms and efficient delivery models for new infrastructure. New technologies will also play an increasingly important role in the systems that provide vital services to Australian cities.

Research directions:

- How can Australia's future water and energy systems be designed to meet increased demand and sustainability goals? What is the role for innovative technology?

- What steps are necessary to re-design waste management systems in Australia and reduce overall waste production?

- How is better coordination in infrastructure planning and funding contributing to the development of Australian cities and what improvements are still required?

- How can clear funding streams and improved coordination for social infrastructure delivery be achieved?

Transport

Environmental Sustainability

Transport infrastructure provides the connections between people's homes, services, employment and social opportunities. Airports and ports connect Australia's regions and cities to each other and to the global economy, and facilitate the transport of goods. Current policies highlight the need to invest in new transport infrastructure to combat congestion in Australia's growing cities. Investment in public transport, and facilitating active transport such as cycling and walking, is an increasing focus.

Cities policies in Australia will facilitate the transition to a more sustainable way of life. At present, urban policies address environmental hazards such as natural disasters and rising water levels. Current foci also include the management of natural resources including waterways, agricultural land and biodiversity and 'greening cities' to mitigate the urban heat island. Responding to emerging challenges posed by climate change is an urgent priority.

Research directions:

- What are innovative approaches to 'mobility as a service' and how do governments, particularly local governments, respond to this?

- What transitions are needed to lower congestion and adapt the transport networks of Australian cities to suit emerging technologies and meet future transport requirements?

- How can the uptake of active transport options be prioritised to retrofit Australian cities?

- How can the connectivity between cities be improved to achieve higher efficiency and lower emissions?

Research directions:

- What are possible trajectories for cities to move to zero-carbon emissions and what are the implications of these scenarios?

- What is the best practice in managing the preservation of natural environments, waterways, and biodiversity in the context of urban expansion?

- How can food and resource consumption and management practices be improved to meet the needs of future populations?

- How can the quality, diversity and provision of urban green space be retrofitted and improved in different urban environments?

Digital Transformations

The movement towards Smart Cities incorporating Internet of Things technologies in the built environment, and the use of data generated by new technologies in metropolitan governance, are evolving at a rapid pace. These innovations require high speed digital connectivity and a skilled workforce to be useful and effective. The changes brought about by living in digital cities are accompanied by issues of access and inclusion, equity and privacy for individual citizens.

Research directions:

- What are current best practice examples of the use of smart cities technologies in Australia, and what lessons have been learned through their implementation?

- Internationally, how has innovation, smart technology and access to big data transformed the way cities operate and improved quality of life for citizens?

- How have issues of data-governance been addressed internationally, and what frameworks are required across all levels of government in Australia?

- What are effective approaches to providing digital connectivity to people experiencing socio-economic or spatial disadvantages, what training and resources are required, and how is this best provided?

Governance & Planning

Urban governance in Australian cities involves multiple agencies with overlapping, and sometimes competing responsibilities and objectives. Local, state and federal government all have a role to play in the development of Australia's cities. State land development agencies working in partnership with private sector developers are also influential. Successful long-term planning strategies and spatial policies entail effective cooperation and coordination within and across each level of government.

Research directions:

- How are urban governance frameworks contributing to the development of Australian cities and what are the particular strengths of the Australian model?

- What are the assets and resources state and local governments have at their disposal to address immediate challenges facing Australian cities?

- How are good place-based outcomes achieved in the context of multi-level governance and multiple dispersed, urban policy domains?

- What innovative approaches to strategic planning are implemented internationally? How could these be translated into the Australian context?

- How can a coherent future vision for Australian cities be articulated within the current governance context?

AHURI's reputation is built on high quality, independent, peer-reviewed research.

As a network organisation involving universities across Australia, AHURI has extensive expertise in cities and urban research.

AHURI conferences, events and publications ensure that research findings are widely accessible.

AHURI staff are experts in knowledge transfer – with highly refined processes for engagement with government, industry, and third sector organisations.

Recent AHURI Cities Research Projects include:

Local government co-ordination: metropolitan governance in twenty-first century Australia

Metropolitan governance is increasingly understood to include a broad range of processes and actors engaged in managing the city. Urban development and growth does not conform to local or state administrative boundaries. This research explored examples of bottom-up, informal metropolitan or sub-regional cooperation structures. These included attempts at representation, collaboration and engagement between all tiers of government.

Innovative responses to urban transportation: current practice in Australian cities

Current travel mode share in Australia's major cities is dominated by cars, which is increasingly costly. New approaches to transport are emerging, and this project investigates drivers and processes of change within Australian metropolitan transport systems. Innovation is explored in terms of: technology, travel behaviour, shifting urban structures, climate change and pricing, and infrastructure procurement.

New housing supply, population growth, and access to social infrastructure

Government and industry in Australia lack a shared understanding of required social infrastructure facilities, networks, and services. Using geo-spatial mapping, quantitative estimation of housing and potential population growth, this project develops a monitoring framework and tool to assist policy coordination of social infrastructure delivery with residential supply in greenfield sites in Sydney, Brisbane and Perth.

Next steps

- AHURI will work closely with the Australian Government, state and territory governments and the councils of large cities, to progress the policy development research model for the National Cities Research Program.

- AHURI will continue to progress the cities research agenda through its regular activities to advance knowledge transfer between the policy, research, not-for-profit and commercial sectors.

- We will partner with other interested organisations to deliver new research, events and research dissemination activities.

To discuss how your organisation can help AHURI deliver a National Cities Research Program contact:
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