

EVERY ONE OF US MAKES USE OF A LOCAL GOVERNMENT PROGRAM, SERVICE OR FACILITY.

Local government maintains our way of life. From coast to coast, in the bush and in the cities, all over Australia, we drive on council-built roads or ride our bicycles on council paths to work or school.

In summer, we walk in the shade of council-planted trees and cool off in council swimming pools, where the kids learn to swim and toddlers laugh in the paddling pools. In winter, kids play sport on council playing fields.

Local government libraries give us free access to the internet, CDs and DVDs, to books, magazines and newspapers. Our kids get help with their homework there and the younger ones get story time. The local library is an important community meeting place.

For those that are house-bound, many councils deliver books, videos, CDs and DVDs and for the ill, aged or disabled they deliver meals on wheels and provide a range of community services.

Local government has been looking after the needs of Australian people since 1840, when it first began providing roads, bridges, and public buildings. Today, it still provides these services as well as many more. Local government provides community infrastructure facilities, such as libraries, health centres, neighbourhood centres, swimming pools, recreational parks, sports facilities, as well as critical physical infrastructure such as roads, bridges, stormwater drains, footpaths and waste collection. It also provides

community services, including aged care, welfare, health services and children's services. Some councils deliver gas and electricity, and in some states provide bus, water and sewerage services.

They do all this, using only 6 per cent of total public sector funds, raised through fees and charges and the only tax local government has: property rates. Local government is the lowest-taxing level of government in Australia.

Unlike state and federal taxes, the community can clearly see where its rates are going - on the facilities and services that we use every day of the year.

Many of us take local government and all the vital services it gives us for granted. Yet, the safety of roads and stormwater drains, access to parks and sports facilities, maintenance of footpaths and cycle paths, and regular collection of waste and recycling are key priorities in the community. Without adequately funded local government, these services could stop.

That is why certainty of funding and incorporating local government into the Australian Constitution is so important. Constitutional recognition will ensure the continued stability of local communities across Australia.

Inside this brochure you will find examples of the people who are working for your local community, providing essential services to Australians every day, every month, every year.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT: DELIVERING VITAL COMMUNITY SERVICES

In many communities, local government is one of the largest employers and purchasers of local goods and services, significantly underpinning the local - and regional - economy.

Of the 565 local government bodies nationally, 152 are in New South Wales, 141 in Western Australia, 79 in Victoria, 74 in South Australia, 73 in Queensland, 29 in Tasmania and 16 in the Northern Territory. Each council is different because it responds to the unique needs of its community, but every council shares a common goal - to achieve the best possible outcomes for its community.

There are a few exceptions. In the Australian Capital Territory, the ACT government undertakes the responsibilities of both state government and local government as well as delivering municipal services. In certain remote areas, municipal services are provided by Indigenous community organisations or by state governments. However, the vast majority of Australians have their neighbourhoods shaped and services delivered by their local council.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT DELIVERS VITAL COMMUNITY SERVICES

FACTS AND FIGURES

- Local government owns and manages more than 80 per cent of the nation's road network by length – almost every trip begins and ends on a local government road.
- Local government employs around 178,000 people, or almost 10 per cent of the public sector nationwide. Council employees are drawn from around 400 professions including engineers, town planners, aged care workers, rangers, building surveyors, librarians, youth workers, social workers, waste collectors, and many more, all working for their local community.
- Only 3 per cent of Australia's total taxation revenue is raised by local government. Of the estimated 260 taxes nationally, local government has just one tax – the rates levied on property.
- Local government is diverse. For example, Murchison Shire in West Australia has a population of 110. Brisbane City Council has a population of 1,027,847. Peppermint Grove Council in Perth covers an area of 2 square kilometres, compared with the East Pilbara Shire in West Australia which covers 371,696 kilometres.
- Local government owns and manages around \$212 billion worth of physical assets including roads, bridges, footpaths, museums, libraries, community halls, swimming pools, sports fields, golf courses, camping grounds and caravan parks.
- Local government's 5,200 councillors are elected by local communities to provide the best mix of services for their needs.
- Local government's only tax, property tax, equates to between 1.3 and 1.9 per cent of household income, or an average of \$1645 per household per annum.
- Over the last decade local government has consistently raised more than 80 per cent of its total revenue from its own sources.
- Councils spend around \$25 billion, or 6 per cent of total public sector expenditure each year.
- An independent report by PricewaterhouseCoopers in 2006 estimated the impact of under-funding of local government was a \$14.5 billion backlog in repairing ageing infrastructure such as roads, swimming pools, libraries and town halls.

Local Government Association of NSW





LOCAL GOVERNMENT DELIVERING VITAL COMMUNITY SERVICES

AUSTRALIAN LOCAL
GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION



LOCAL GOVERNMENT DELIVERING VITAL COMMUNITY SERVICES



**ROAD AND
WATER ENGINEER**

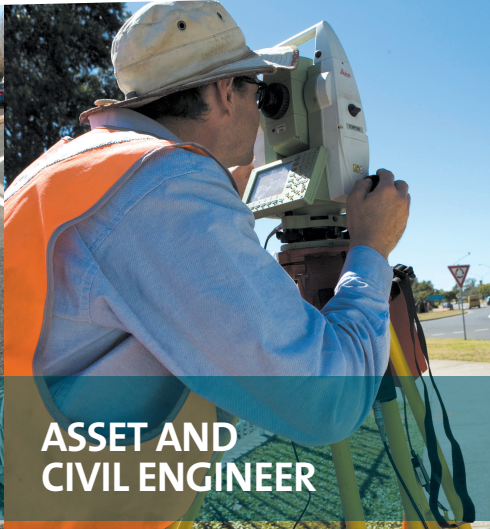
John is responsible for council's most valuable infrastructure.

Ranging from constructing bridges, building roads, and overseeing water, wastewater and stormwater systems, John's job is one of the most visible for the council.

He is "hands on" for a large number of major infrastructure decisions for the council, as they come through his area for either direct project management or for advice.

A constant problem-solver, John ensures essential water and wastewater services are maintained, roads are kept open, and provides comments on a development application for a new subdivision.

"Seeing a project from conception and design through to completion is thrilling. I help people quite literally travel from one side of the region to the other."



**ASSET AND
CIVIL ENGINEER**

Responsible for traffic lights, speed reduction initiatives and the new bus shelter rollout, Lee ensures the local traffic system is working smoothly and safely.

After finishing his studies, Lee knew he wanted to use his skills in the local community.

Lee and his family came to Australia as refugees from Vietnam, and as well as being an engineer, he helps the Asian community with any business problems they are having, many of which are due to language barriers.

"Council gave me an opportunity to work with the community I am passionate about – to know I was helping them and contributing to the area I grew up in was really satisfying. Working for local government offers choice and diversity while making a real contribution to communities."



**YOUTH
DEVELOPMENT OFFICER**

Establishing youth services in a remote and disadvantaged area has made a huge difference to the young people in this local community.

Geoff has put an extraordinary amount of effort into helping the marginalised and disadvantaged youth in his community become more involved and engaged with the community.

He has built the youth development team from one worker to 10 people, and developed a range of services that respond to local youth needs.

He has encouraged young Indigenous people to embrace their Aboriginal culture and helped them to make positive changes.

"Young people who were completely disengaged, who would not have looked a council worker in the eye, now sit around the table with the General Manager and make a difference in their community – how rewarding is that?"



**SENIOR
WEEDS OFFICER**

Bob has worked in weed management for 10 years and as a result of his work, there has been monumental progress in the management of noxious weeds in the far west of NSW.

He plays an important role on several government committees and has established one or two groups himself, where he could see urgent action was needed, such as the NSW Prickle Bush Working Group.

He has been highly successful in getting funding for noxious weed management.

He discovered, and helped control, the largest infestations of Parkinsonia and Mesquite ever found in NSW. He was presented with an award for his outstanding contribution to weed management in NSW.

“Noxious weeds do enormous damage to our country, our agriculture and our water systems – control and management is urgent and I will continue to talk to everyone I can about it.”



SOCIAL WORKER

Rachael is supervising a program which helps older people stay in their homes as long as possible.

The program matches a volunteer to each client. The volunteer regularly visits the client and provides low-level care and companionship.

Rachael needs to negotiate with many departments and work within many programs to assist the number of older people who require help.

“I love working with the community. My work makes a definite impact on the local community and it has been fantastic.”



PLANNING OFFICER

The job of the planning officer is to provide information to the public on residential home planning, natural resources and the social and environmental impact of building in the community.

Kate looks after the management of residential dwellings, parkland trees, streetscapes and applications for any changes.

An important part of her job is to make sure that the council is providing the best place to live and listening to the views of residents about their neighbourhoods.

“It’s definitely rewarding knowing that I’m contributing to the future desired character of the area. For me to play a small part in that, as well as maintaining the streetscape and neighbourhood amenity – to make the big decisions about how to shape the community – is so rewarding.”



LIBRARIAN

Louise loves her job as librarian at the council-run library.

Libraries are for the whole community – from babies attending story time to older housebound residents who can have books delivered to their homes.

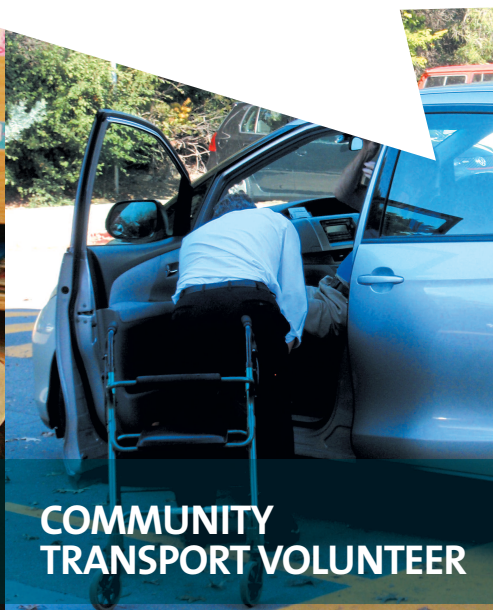
They cater for all the main language groups in the community and assist new migrants to learn English.

Libraries are an important community hub and meeting place.

They foster literacy and the joy of reading.

They are the gateway to the world of the Internet for those who don't have access from home – providing free access to the great range of information now only available online.

“Libraries have the capacity to change and enrich people's lives in many ways and that is why I enjoy working there.”



**COMMUNITY
TRANSPORT VOLUNTEER**

For many provincial towns, a trip to a medical specialist or hospital can be several hours' drive. In many areas there is no public transport available and local residents, particularly the elderly, rely on community transport as the only way to get the medical services they need.

Community transport is generally provided by a group of dedicated volunteers, with the support of councils, local businesses and non-profit organisations such as the Lions Club and Rotary.

Community transport provides a door-to-door service to take residents to appointments and back. In many cases, there is no way an elderly person would be able to make the journey without this service, to receive vital medical services.

There is also a need for community transport in metropolitan centres, where public transport is not an option for the sick and elderly after surgery, and a relative or friend is not available.

“People have been good to me so it's my turn to put back.”



**RECYCLING
INFORMATION OFFICER**

Looking after the environment, reducing landfill, recycling and water conservation are things we all realise are important for the future.

Clare is passionate about recycling and believes the way to change the behaviour of adults is to educate their kids. She travels to schools and home education groups to deliver her message on the importance of recycling.

The enormous amounts of rubbish that find their way to the rubbish dump can be reduced by separating the recyclables from the waste. The local tip has already had a major reduction in the tonnage of landfill through recycling and is now called a 'recycling plant' rather than a 'rubbish dump'.

Clare explains recycling and sustainability for the future to school groups in a simple to understand and effective way, and believes that education is the key to continued improvement.

“If you educate the kids, they in turn educate the parents. The kids are great ambassadors for recycling.”