

Attachment C

Environmental Strategy Engagement Report 2024



Environmental Strategy focus groups

Engagement Report

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Cred Consulting acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we operate.

We pay our respects to the Traditional Owners, Ancestors and Elders past and present.

We recognise the strength, resilience and contributions of First Nations Peoples, and the eternal and spiritual connection held in the lands, skies and waters, through cultural practices and beliefs.

Our team is proud to live, learn and thrive in the place we now call Australia, and recognise sovereignty has never been ceded by First Nations Peoples of this continent.

As embedded in our values, we are committed to building connected, healthy and resilient communities and creating purposeful outcomes that reflect our deep appreciation for the peoples and cultures that make us who we are and shape where we are going — together as one.

Table of contents

- 1. Introduction 4
 - 1.1 Background 4
 - 1.2 Purpose of engagement..... 4
 - 1.3 Engagement program..... 4
 - 1.4 Recruitment to the focus groups 5
 - 1.5 About the focus groups 5
 - 1.6 Participant profile..... 6
- 2. People with household incomes between \$50,000 and \$90,000 7
 - 2.1 What we heard 7
- 3. People who rent apartments..... 12
 - 3.1 What we heard 12
- 4. Mandarin speakers 16
 - 4.1 What we heard 16

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The City of Sydney (the City) is revising its environmental strategy. The City is committed to reducing the environmental impact of their operations, buildings, people and transport on the local area and this document outlines the City's plans for a sustainable Sydney over the next 5 years.

The current 2021 – 2025 Environmental Strategy focuses on reducing emissions and energy use, using alternative water sources, supporting the growth of the circular economy and introducing better performance standards for buildings. The strategy also looked at how the City can mitigate the impacts of climate change and protect biodiversity, green spaces and waterways. This strategy is now approaching the end of its lifecycle and work is underway to revise the strategy and develop the next iteration through to 2030.

The City of Sydney, as part of the development of the next Environmental strategy 2025 – 2030, wants to consult with the community, particularly climate vulnerable groups, to better understand what they think the new environmental strategy should cover and the support they need to contribute to a Sydney that is more sustainable and resilient.

1.2 Purpose of engagement

The purpose of the engagement was to engage with climate vulnerable groups to better understand community perception of what an environmental strategy should deliver and what support people need to contribute to the achievement of sustainability targets.

This was achieved through a series of focus groups that explored community priorities, community experiences with climate impacts, what people do in their day-to-day life to be more sustainable, and how the City of Sydney can better support them to do that.

Learnings from community engagement will be combined with learnings from data from research projects to identify priorities for the revised strategy

1.3 Engagement program

The engagement program consisted of a series of three focus groups with targeted community cohorts who could be considered more vulnerable to climate impacts:

- People with a household income between \$50,000 and \$90,000 (considered low income for the LGA)
- People who rent apartments
- Mandarin speakers

Two focus groups, a focus group with people with disability and First Nations people is yet to be conducted.

This report provides a summary of findings from all focus groups listed above. Findings in this report have been summarised by focus group cohort.

1.4 Recruitment to the focus groups

Two focus groups (people who rent apartments and people with a household income between \$50,000 and \$90,000) were independently recruited by Taverner Research, and one focus group (Mandarin speakers) was independently recruited by Multicultural Marketing and Management, a specialist multicultural market research agency. The purpose of the independent recruitment approach for these focus groups was to ensure a demographically representative group of the community were in attendance. Community members expressed their interest in participating in the focus groups and were screened according to their demographic characteristics.

The selection process was designed to ensure each group of participants aligned with the specific cohort, reflected the City of Sydney local area and were a diverse mix of the community. A range of demographic factors were considered, including suburb, age, gender, housing tenure, dwelling type, language spoken at home and ability. The focus was on ensuring a broad mix of representation.

1.5 About the focus groups

Focus group 1: People with a household income between \$50,000 and \$90,000

This focus group was facilitated by Cred Consulting over Zoom from 5.30-7.30pm on Tuesday 10 December 2024. 12 community members attended the focus group.

Participants were independently recruited by Taverner Research to ensure community members within this income bracket were represented.

Focus group 2: People who rent apartments

This focus group was facilitated by Cred Consulting over Zoom from 5.30-7.30pm on Thursday 12 December 2024. 10 community members attended the focus group.

Participants were independently recruited by Taverner Research to ensure people who rent apartments in the City of Sydney were represented.

Focus group 3: Mandarin speakers

This focus group was facilitated by Multicultural Marketing and Management, a specialist multicultural market research agency from 6-8pm on Wednesday 11 December 2024. 12 community members were represented.

Participants were independently recruited by Multicultural Marketing and Management to ensure people who spoke Mandarin were represented.

Focus group 4 (people with disability) and focus group 5 (First Nations) have yet to be conducted.

1.6 Participant profile

A total of 34 participants attended all three focus groups. All participants were residents of the City of Sydney local area. Figure 1 provides a demographic snapshot of the participants who attended.

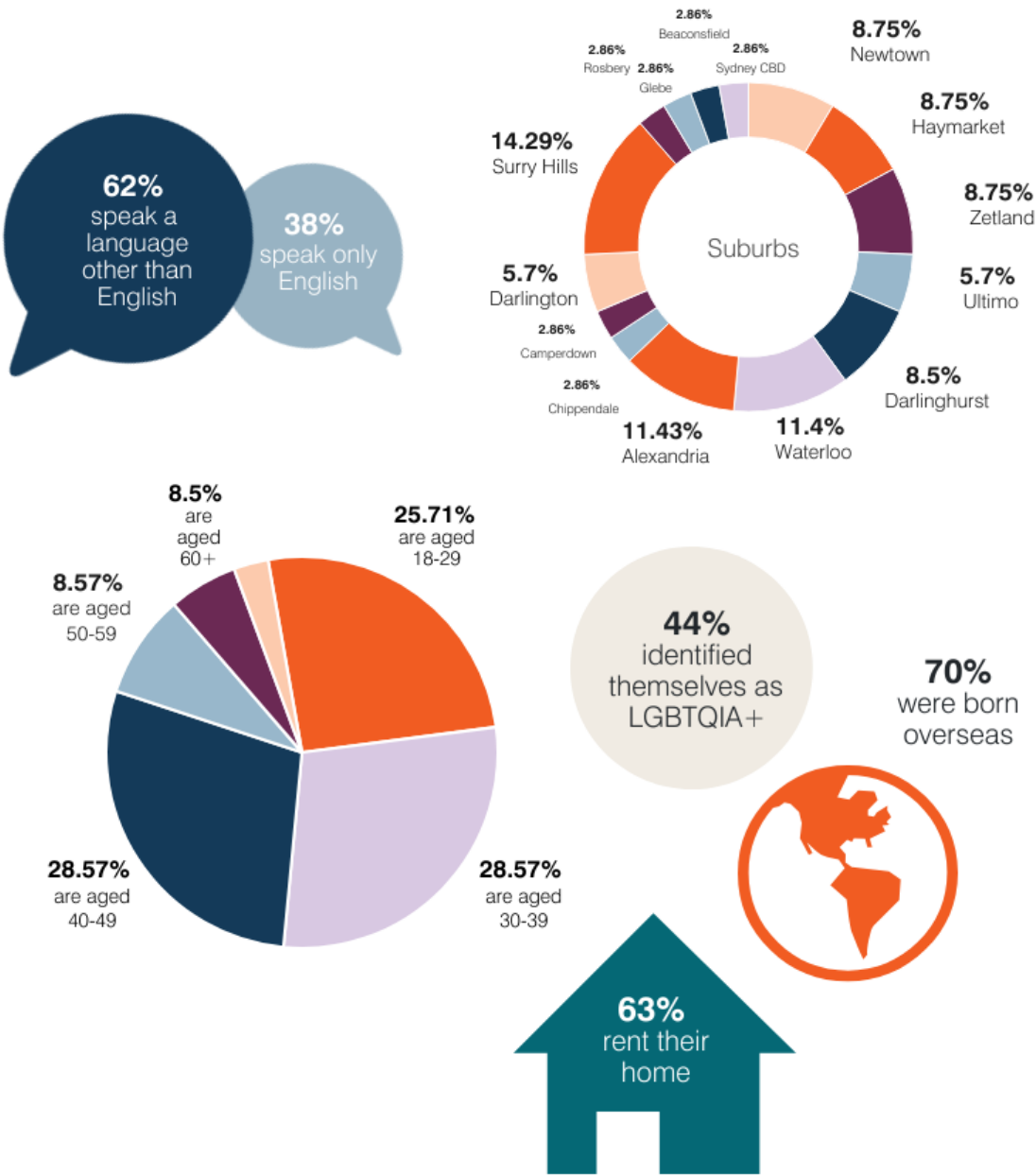


Figure 1 City of Sydney Environmental Strategy demographic snapshot

2. People with household incomes between \$50,000 and \$90,000

2.1 What we heard

Feedback on priorities

The City of Sydney has identified four key priorities to help achieve their vision of a sustainable and resilient Sydney. These priorities are:

- Resilient and efficient operations: Ensuring our work and suppliers reduce energy, water and waste in our buildings, pools, parks and other facilities.
- Efficient and climate resilient buildings: Reducing the reliance on fossil fuels by supporting electrification to cut emissions, encouraging the use of renewable energy sources and helping people make their homes more climate resilient.
- Regenerative and inclusive city: Regenerating the waterways and land. Ensuring everyone can access zero carbon transport and has the ability to reuse and repair instead of buying new.
- Strong foundations: Communicate our progress and use data to drive informed decision making.

The priorities were presented to participants and they were asked to share their feedback and identify any other priorities that they feel are important to achieve the vision of a sustainable Sydney. Feedback provided by participants is summarised below:

Waste management

Participants expressed a desire for more bins to allow adequate waste sorting. They want to see a faster rollout of green bins/FOGO bins for food waste, more frequent sorting of chemical waste and opportunities to recycle plastic.

Trees and greenery

Participants raised the need for more green space, native plants for streetscapes, and trees to provide shade and cool the environment. They also spoke about nesting boxes, native bee boxes and soft surfaces instead of hard pavements. Participants indicated that more soft surfaces would result in better drainage.

Public and active transport

Participants want to see more affordable public transport, bike lanes incorporated into the road instead of footpaths and more car parking and solar chargers for electric vehicles.

Energy efficiency

Participants expressed a desire for more consideration of energy efficiency. They suggested installing solar panels on Sydney Town Hall and City of Sydney buildings and they spoke about doing an

efficiency review of apartment buildings. Key issues that were raised included poor insulation of homes, lack of natural ventilation and how to make homes cooler without needing air conditioning.

Experience of climate-related impacts

Participants were asked what climate-related impacts they have experienced and how they were affected.

Participants primarily spoke about the impacts from erratic/unstable weather like heavy rain and storms. They mentioned humidity, mould, rising damp and flooding as key issues, along with the increased electricity bills associated with managing impacts. Participants also spoke about leaking roofs, flooding due to blocked or old drains and pot holes or obstructions on the road as a result of heavy rain.

Participants noted that there is a need for double glazed windows and building heights designed to accommodate sea breezes, to help reduce the impacts of humidity.

Barriers to responding to climate impacts

Participants were asked what barriers they face that make it harder to respond to climate impacts. Feedback provided by participants is summarised below:

Cost

Participants stated that cost is a major barrier to responding to climate impacts, particularly given the cost of living crisis and for those who live alone. Electricity bills are becoming more expensive and the cost associated with modernising buildings or making changes to respond to climate impacts results in more expensive strata fees, which are not affordable.

Challenges with strata, body corporate and landlords

Participants indicated that strata/body corporate and landlords are a key barrier. They shared experiences of strict strata bylaws, body corporate not accepting new ideas or approving changes, landlords refusing to install air conditioning or ceiling fans and strata committees not believing in climate change so being unwilling to make changes to the building. One participant mentioned that they are not permitted to use their air conditioner after 10pm and another noted that the City of Sydney rejected their strata committee request to install solar panels on the building.

Some participants stated that their landlord is not interested in making changes to the property to improve energy efficiency or climate resilience, and also refuses to let the tenant make their own changes. A participant indicated that they have no other option but to turn their oven on during winter to keep their house warm.

Participants ultimately spoke about feeling disenfranchised and unsupported by their landlord and strata committee due to the resistance they face when they make suggestions or ask for changes.

Building and infrastructure design

Participants stated that the design of buildings and the materials used are not fit for purpose when it comes to withstanding climate impacts like heavy rain. They felt that this is a common theme across the LGA, where infrastructure is outdated or poorly designed. Participants also spoke about their building not having sufficient space to install electric vehicle chargers.

Suggestions to improve sustainability

Participants shared a range of suggestions to improve sustainability and mitigate barriers. They suggested that development approval processes should be expedited for proposals that actively address climate impacts. They felt that this would be a good incentive to encourage more climate resilient buildings that can withstand climate impacts over time.

Participants also spoke about the need for high energy efficiency appliances, more native plants and less chemicals in the public domain (for example, swapping weed spray for steam or alternative options).

Participants suggested more comprehensive waste disposal options, including soft plastic recycling and allowing plastic milk bottles as part of Return and Earn. They also suggested making it easier for community groups to collect and recycle bottles as a fundraising initiative.

Participants spoke about having markets or an online council service where residents can share and swap their used goods and clothing with others.

Living sustainably – how participants do this now and what they want to do in the future

Participants were asked what they currently do in their everyday life to be more sustainable. Participants mentioned the following:

- Sorting waste, recycling and using Return and Earn
- Using the fan instead of the air conditioner
- Taking shorter showers
- Using public transport, active transport and carshare services instead of driving a personal vehicle
- Donating used goods, purchasing second hand goods and buying fewer new items
- Composting and using a food waste bin
- Avoiding single-use plastics and food waste
- Using rechargeable batteries or using solar power to charge batteries
- Carrying a reusable coffee cup and reusable grocery bags
- Buying local and Australian made items
- Sharing food with neighbours and using community gardens
- Only using washing machine on a full load and hanging washing up instead of using the dryer
- Collecting excess water in a bucket or water tank and using it to flush the toilet
- Reusing paper bags as bin liners
- Taking part in energy peak events to receive credits on electricity bill.

Participants who lived in apartment buildings were asked if their building has implemented any sustainability initiatives. Participants spoke about switching to LED lighting, motion sensor lighting, green waste bins, solar panels and working toward electric vehicle charging.

Participants were also asked what they would like to do in the future to be more sustainable. Participants mentioned the following changes:

- Use public transport more often
- Sort and recycle waste more effectively, including food waste and e-waste
- Have a compost bin
- Collect and reuse grey water
- Install in-ground heating
- Use 100% recyclable packaging
- Move to a fully electric lifestyle with a self-generating grid
- Use native plants.

Barriers to living sustainably

Participants were asked what barriers they face that make it harder to live sustainably. They reiterated the same barriers raised in terms of responding to climate impacts, namely cost and challenges with strata, body corporate, landlords and the City of Sydney council. Participants also spoke about the inconvenience aspect (particularly if they are time-poor) and not knowing what they can do and where.

Participants expressed concern about the lack of Return and Earn machines in the Sydney CBD, the excessive use of plastic in supermarkets, abandoned e-scooters and bikes, limited amount of green space in the Sydney CBD and no available compost collection options.

Participants noted that there are significant barriers in terms of implementing sustainability initiatives in apartment buildings, particularly cost. They stated that there are already costly ongoing maintenance tasks in many buildings and that means sustainability initiatives are pushed aside. Participants saw value in grant funding for strata titles to enable more sustainability initiatives.

Participants suggested that the City of Sydney offer free solar powered charging points in bus stops and benches. They also expressed a desire for free community thrift stores and for all phones and small electronics to use the same charging and accessory cord.

Support needed from the City of Sydney

Participants were asked if there is anything the City of Sydney can do to support them to live in a more sustainable way. The suggestions raised by participants are summarised below:

- More comprehensive waste disposal options, including e-waste recycling, compost collection and food waste disposal in the green bin
- Free apartment efficiency review
- More Return and Earn machines
- Rebates for households that use less electricity or produce less waste
- Incentives and subsidies for buildings to make changes and become more climate resilient
- More trees, greenery and community gardens

- Tool/equipment library, where people can borrow items like tools and sewing machines rather than purchasing new
- More electric vehicle charging and parking spots
- More affordable public transport costs
- Education and outreach (particularly to younger people and harder to reach groups) to promote sustainability and the options that are available
- Reduced car speeds in the city centre and more pedestrian space
- Community environment champions who can promote sustainability initiatives
- Businesses using compostable packaging.

3. People who rent apartments

3.1 What we heard

Feedback on priorities

The City of Sydney has identified four key priorities to help achieve their vision of a sustainable and resilient Sydney. These priorities are:

- Resilient and efficient operations: Ensuring our work and suppliers reduce energy, water and waste in our buildings, pools, parks and other facilities.
- Efficient and climate resilient buildings: Reducing the reliance on fossil fuels by supporting electrification to cut emissions, encouraging the use of renewable energy sources and helping people make their homes more climate resilient.
- Regenerative and inclusive city: Regenerating the waterways and land. Ensuring everyone can access zero carbon transport and has the ability to reuse and repair instead of buying new.
- Strong foundations: Communicate our progress and use data to drive informed decision making.

The priorities were presented to participants and they were asked to share their feedback and identify any other priorities that they feel are important to achieve the vision of a sustainable Sydney. Feedback provided by participants is summarised below:

Lack of trust with government on climate issues

Participants stressed that they have a lack of trust with all levels of government on climate issues. Participants suggested that to build this trust, they'd like to see what types of sustainable actions and changes they're undertaking to tackle environmental and climate issues. Participants suggested providing regular updates on what their goals are, what progress they're making and how does the City of Sydney compare to other local government areas.

Waste management

Similarly to other focus groups, participants expressed a desire for more bins to allow adequate waste sorting, particularly for food waste and soft plastics. Participants also raised that it's hard to dispose of furniture in a sustainable way. They also requested additional marketing material, particularly in apartment buildings, as participants raised that there is a lack of knowledge on waste sorting and what can/can't be recycled.

Accessibility issues to waste management

Participants mentioned they had a strong desire to recycle throughout this focus group, however aren't able to travel to City of Sydney recycling centres due to not owning a car or the recycling centre is too far from their home.

Green space and biodiversity

Participants encouraged the City of Sydney to improve their green space and increase biodiversity through the local government area. Participants were reminded of the *Greening Sydney Strategy* and that biodiversity and green space is covered within this document.

Initiatives and programs

All participants identified that the initiatives and programs provided by the City of Sydney are great, however the marketing of these programs are not accessible. Participants raised that there are onerous application processes to partake in them e.g. apartment household compost programs and this inhibits participants in participating in sustainable outcomes.

Types of priorities

A participant raised a specific comment on the types of priorities – identifying that the priorities are more geared towards large infrastructure priorities and not easily accessible, community priorities.

Experience of climate-related impacts

Participants were asked about the climate-related impacts they've experienced and how these have affected them.

Many discussed environmental challenges such as rising heat and humidity, as well as cold temperatures and flash flooding. A common concern was that their apartments were either too hot or too cold, with many lacking air conditioning or heating. Several participants mentioned that as renters, landlords are reluctant to provide these amenities. Additionally, many highlighted that their homes were poorly insulated, making them uncomfortable during both summer and winter months. The age of the apartment buildings in the local area was also noted, with many being outdated and ill-equipped to handle climate-related issues.

Participants expressed concern that these problems would only worsen over time and urged the City of Sydney to encourage landlords to install proper heating, cooling, and insulation. They also recommended that the City investigate drainage systems around the city to help mitigate flash flooding.

Barriers to responding to climate impacts

Participants were asked what barriers they face that make it harder to live sustainably. Similarly to other focus groups, many of the participants noted that the rising cost of living impacts hinder the adoption of climate-resilient measures.

Participants mentioned that they are unable to make any structural or design changes to their home, thus they need to spend additional money on heating, cooling to assist with ventilation. Participants raised with the rising cost of rent, and then paying for additional home materials, is a costly expense.

As noted earlier, participants also mentioned they are unable to access recycling services or Return and Earn chutes without a car.

Living sustainably – how participants do this now and what they want to do in the future

Participants were asked what they currently do in their everyday life to be more sustainable. Participants mentioned the following:

- Go op shopping – buying old, instead of new
- Advertising used products on Facebook marketplace and Gum Tree
- Walking and using public transport
- Carpooling
- Buying products in easy to recycle packaging
- Using reusable coffee cups
- Bulk shopping to reduce deliveries and packaging
- Not using soft plastics, paper towel or tissues
- Recycling as much as possible and giving things away
- Disposing of e-waste and batteries etc responsibly, and
- Having a vege gardens.

Participants also mentioned that their apartment building were undertaking the following sustainable initiatives:

- Recycling water for the gardens
- Signage for waste management
- E-water for cleaning, and
- Sensor lighting in common areas.

Barriers to living sustainably

Participants were asked what barriers they face that make it harder to live sustainably. Similarly to other focus groups, many of the participants noted that the rising cost of living impacts their response to climate impacts.

These barriers raised by participants are summarised below:

- Lack of information on available programs
- Apartment layout and design e.g. doesn't include space to dry clothes, natural ventilation
- Apartment doesn't allow for sharing of facilities e.g. recycling for soft plastics
- Landlord support for structural changes in apartments, and
- Bike share scheme is no longer appealing due to dumped Lime Bikes across the city.

One participant mentioned “Some of these problems are inevitable with climate change and there doesn't seem to be understanding around this, most people are doing all we can”.

Support needed from the City of Sydney

Participants were asked if there is anything the City of Sydney can do to support them to live in a more sustainable way. The suggestions raised by participants are summarised below:

- Improved access to existing recycling services e.g. places where you don't need to access via car
- More recycling support from the City
- No more use of single use plastic bags and only brown paper bags
- A reference sheet of local services/ resources
- Not many sustainability resources or initiatives that are for renters, only home owners e.g. solar panels
 - e.g. a participant raised that they'd like to explore splitting prices on cooling and heating appliances with their landlord.
- Ban use single use coffee cups
- Car share zones/pods – particularly in apartment buildings carparks
 - e.g. a participant raised that their apartment block had a carpark only full of car share no private vehicles.

4. Mandarin speakers

4.1 What we heard

Feedback on priorities

The City of Sydney has identified four key priorities to help achieve their vision of a sustainable and resilient Sydney. These priorities are:

- Resilient and efficient operations: Ensuring our work and suppliers reduce energy, water and waste in our buildings, pools, parks and other facilities.
- Efficient and climate resilient buildings: Reducing the reliance on fossil fuels by supporting electrification to cut emissions, encouraging the use of renewable energy sources and helping people make their homes more climate resilient.
- Regenerative and inclusive city: Regenerating the waterways and land. Ensuring everyone can access zero carbon transport and has the ability to reuse and repair instead of buying new.
- Strong foundations: Communicate our progress and use data to drive informed decision making.

The priorities were presented to participants and they were asked to share their feedback and identify any other priorities that they feel are important to achieve the vision of a sustainable Sydney.

Unlike other focus groups, the participants were divided and not in general consensus of the priorities provided. The majority of participants agreed on the second priority – efficient and climate resilient buildings.

In regards to the other priorities, the participants identified the following issues:

- Priority 1 – requires large scale investment, which may be hard for community to understand or is ready for
- Priority 3 – though the priority is important, participants mentioned that this priority felt less tangible, and
- Priority 4 – was viewed as beneficial but requiring broader community involvement.

Experience of climate-related impacts

Participants were asked about the climate-related impacts they've experienced and how these have affected them.

Participants shared how rising temperatures, wildfires, and unstable weather patterns have disrupted daily life, posed health challenges, and heightened environmental concerns. Many emphasised the struggle to adapt to these changes, particularly highlighting the increased risk of fires and the detrimental effects of extreme heat on personal well-being and community resilience.

“Recently, everyone in Sydney has experienced temperatures over 30 degrees Celsius, which seem to have set a historical record. This is what I find most difficult to adapt to.”

“Hot weather causes concentrated rainfall, which stops trains from running, making it impossible to travel green. Additionally, the rainfall can cause waterlogging on roads, posing a safety hazard to travelers”.

Participants also raised the instability with the dramatic increases of wild weather. Participants noted the following impacts of wild weather include:

- Train delays and traffic jams – which impact getting to work, home or other commitments
- Strong winds cause inconveniences in daily life, and sometimes outdoor activities need to be cancelled
- Drought or heavy rain lead to reduced crop yields and higher vegetable prices, and
- Smoke from fires have caused decline in air quality, and thus impacting health.

Barriers to responding to climate impacts

Participants were asked what barriers they face that make it harder to live sustainably.

Similarly to the other focus groups, participants highlighted the challenges, including the inability to modify living spaces due to renting apartments, limited access to relevant resources, and financial constraints that hinder the adoption of climate-resilient measures.

“The recycling locations are sometimes far away and difficult to reach. For example, if you want to recycle batteries at OfficeWorks, there are none near my address.”

“Central air conditioning requires additional fees, and the owner adds the maintenance costs to the tenant's usage fee, which has increased by three times”.

“The owners of investment properties are not actively investing in sustainable equipment. For tenants, facing the increasingly hot summer, this affects their sleep and quality of life.”

The discussion also underscored the impact of specific weather conditions, such as strong winds and heavy rainfall, which exacerbate daily challenges by raising safety concerns and restricting mobility, particularly in relation to taking public transport to work and home.

Living sustainably – how participants do this now and what they want to do in the future

Participants were asked what they currently do in their everyday life to be more sustainable. Many participants were actively adopting practices to reduce their environmental impact.

Participants mentioned the following:

- Driving electric vehicles
- Recycling and minimising the use of disposable items
- Using public transport and walking instead of driving
- Sorting of rubbish and recycling
- Picking up litter
- Use energy saving LED light bulbs
- Use own cloth carry bags, and
- Use less disposable tableware.

Participants also mentioned that their apartment building were undertaking the following sustainable initiatives:

- Garbage sorting in apartment buildings
- Energy saving motors lighting, and
- Sensor lighting in common areas.

“Our apartment recently launched a new sustainability project. Our residents recycle leftover food using food recycling bags provided by the City. The collected food, such as fruit peels and vegetables, is processed and degraded to be used as fertilizer.”

Barriers to living sustainably

Participants were asked what barriers they face that make it harder to live sustainably. Like the other focus groups, many of the participants noted that the rising cost of living impacts their response to climate impacts and restricted access to appropriate resources and difficulties in implementing modifications within rental properties.

“I want to buy a portable air conditioner, but it is difficult to install in my living situation, which will increase the installation cost. Besides, I also need to ask the landlord for permission.”

“An old apartment in the city where you cannot install air conditioning because these old houses need to be protected”.

Support needed from the City of Sydney

Participants were asked if there is anything the City of Sydney can do to support them to live in a more sustainable way. The suggestions raised by participants are summarised below:

- Increase frequency of buses and trains to encourage patronage and less reliance on cars
- Lower public transit costs
- Improve infrastructure to encourage walking and cycling
- Community based initiatives– outdoor nature experiences, workshops on waste transformation, sustainability focused events for children and teens
- Encourage targeted communication and training programs for building managers and non-English speakers to facilitate effective implementation of sustainable practices, and
- Government subsidies to encourage the adoption for renewable energy solutions.

“We provide free language tutoring to non-native English speakers, especially our parents, so that they can better integrate into and adapt to the Australian living environment.”

“We can continue to implement the \$2 cap on public transportation costs. This is because many people will give up low-carbon travel due to the high cost of public transportation. For example, if you have a long commute, you may prefer to drive a private car to save time.”

