

Mainstreet Australia: Survey of Members, Post-COVID-19



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Executive Summary

Mainstreet Australia is a membership-based not-for-profit organisation representing Australia's traditional Main Streets, High Streets, Town Centres and City Centres. These centres provide the opportunity for people and their communities to work locally, shop locally, be entertained, and access health and community services, among other opportunities. Importantly, these centres also enable businesses to establish locally and to operate, invest and provide jobs.

Mainstreet Australia undertook a survey of members in July 2022 in order to gain an up-to-date appreciation of the issues, challenges and opportunities that face members in their day-to-day, ongoing involvement in local centres. The main findings are summarised as follows:

Impacts of COVID-19 on Local Businesses and Main Streets

- 1 The impacts of the pandemic on local businesses in Main Streets and other local centres were typically severe, especially with a loss of on-street customers and a loss of staff due to mandated lockdowns. The increase in vacant premises, the shortage of staff, and the difficulties in paying rents were also noted.
- 2 However, many benefits for Main Streets are also evident as a result of the pandemic, including a strengthening of the Main Street neighbourhood shopping experience (as many in the labour force worked from home) and a greater appreciation by businesses of the importance of having an online presence. Many other small businesses found they were "savvy enough to survive" the pandemic.

How Main Streets are Recovering Since Lifting of COVID-19 Lockdowns

- 3 The most successful campaigns are those that reinforced the value of shopping locally, reminding the community of the importance of having access to good local services and why these local services need to be supported into the future.
- 4 In suburban centres in particular, the introduction of parklets (on-street car parking spaces adapted for outdoor dining) have also contributed to improved operating conditions for cafes and restaurants.
- 5 Placemaking projects have assisted also in expanding local sales in retailing, while an increase in local activities – such as festivals, local tours and activations – have assisted in getting shoppers and others back into local centres.
- 6 Overall, the view of Main Street business respondents is that these local centres are responding in a positive manner since the lifting of lockdowns, especially as traders and other businesses focus on attracting residents to "shop local".

Ongoing Issues for Traders and Main Streets Following COVID-19 Lockdowns

- 7 Many issues for Main Street trader groups involve supply issues, delivery, lack of staff, and burnout associated with workload and stress. Shortage of labour remains

as a short- to medium-term issue for many businesses and it is difficult to see this changing in view of current circumstances.

- 8 An ongoing issue is the increasing competition from online shopping, although this is a continuing technological and retail-related issue, not just associated with the COVID-19 lockdowns.
- 9 Some Main Streets continue to have an issue with a lack of long-term vibrancy in attracting and retaining customers. This is an ongoing issue in terms of the need to continually look at different ways to promote the local centre so that it stands out from competitors.
- 10 Re-engaging with consumers is a long-term issue for many centres, with anxieties in the community around returning to a pre-COVID social and spending environment.
- 11 Respondents also identify positive outcomes for local centres, including recognition that adverse outcomes associated with the pandemic are slowly retracting as people “slip into a new normal” in terms of day-to-day activities, including regular visits to their local Main Streets. This is reflected in local centres where business vacancies are now declining.

Sources of Information to Support Main Street Businesses

- 12 The primary source of information – about issues, challenges and underlying trends associated with Main Streets – involve discussions with local people involved in local businesses, and contact with Mainstreet Australia through their local association’s membership. These discussions assist Main Street businesses in understanding what’s important to their local centres, business owners, local workforce, and the public who support these local centres.
- 13 Another source of local information in addressing issues and challenges is to understand how other Main Streets are dealing with these matters, through examples of particular projects and other initiatives.

Key Actions for Local Councils and State Governments in Supporting Main Streets

- 14 Encourage Councils to provide holistic support for centres, rather than individual support from a variety of Council departments. Attract State government funds for Main Street marketing programs, recognising the economic and community benefits that Main Streets generate. Provide financial support directly to associations to use in the most effective way that is appropriate for a centre, and support community engagement activities and local trader workshops.
- 15 Fund and oversee appropriate localised place-making to create exciting places with ambience. Encourage beautification of shopping strips by removing the layers and layers of red tape to get anything done. Encourage the beautification of the street, with plants and other greenery, fix footpaths and provide other local amenities. Provide decorations in the street, both general and at Christmas, to enhance the visitor experience.

- 16 Develop, promote and deliver training programs for small business, including development of digital capabilities and online shopping for ‘bricks and mortar’ businesses.
- 17 Support Main Street management and marketing. Collect and assess data on shopper movement patterns and shopping regularity as input to infrastructure requirements and street beautification plans.
- 18 Encourage property owners to provide incentives that assist the operation and financial security of their tenants.

How Mainstreet Australia can Provide or Improve Assistance to Members

19 Respondents were asked to select – based on their experience with their Main Street or local centre – the three main areas from a list where Mainstreet Australia can provide or improve its assistance to members. The list of potential areas for the provision or improvement in assistance to members is shown below, indicating the proportion of respondent responses to each area.

Advocacy on high rents and other landlord issues	20%
How to better co-ordinate Main Street businesses to meet challenges and opportunities	18%
Advocacy on cost-of-living impact on consumer spend and small businesses	13%
Support for promotion and marketing of local businesses and Main Streets	9%
Initiatives to increase customer traffic	9%
Training and education to improve digital skills for Main Street businesses	7%
Assistance in finding, recruiting and training Main Street staff	4%
Other issues or matters where Mainstreet Australia assistance is required (<u>also, see listing below for examples</u>)	20%
Total Responses (Number of Responses)	100% (46)

- 20 In addition, respondents provided numerous comments in regard to the importance for Mainstreet Australia to continue to meet, collaborate and network among members. Other suggestions are to:
- Advocate to State Governments for funding opportunities to initiate projects in business-building, education and training, digital marketing, shopfront improvements.
 - Consider formal training for centre managers regarding Main Street issues/opportunities, including advocacy role.

- Liaise with businesses regarding training for staff in regard to management skills.
- Provide 'big picture' information regarding Main Street businesses and operations.
- Assist in marketing of Main Streets, business mix, rent issues, government support.
- "Educate" landlords in regard to property rentals and affordability.
- Indicate how local Councils can use macroeconomic and strategic planning projects and programs to create a regulatory, physical and community environment where business thrives.
- Encourage and support festivals and promotions.

21 The survey provided an opportunity for respondents to further highlight those areas where Mainstreet Australia can provide assistance to members. Respondents took the opportunity to expand on a number of areas summarised above, and these comments relate to:

- Meeting, collaborating and networking among members.
- Advocating to Councils and State Governments on behalf of members.
- Promoting digital skills and professional development.
- Undertaking case studies and other research in regard to the operation and outlook for Main Streets.
- Liaising with landlords and property owners regarding matters such as rent and property maintenance and the like.
- Finding a central location for Melbourne-based Association meetings and functions, noting that these events tend to be located in the East and this tends to disadvantage those members from the West.

22 In the words of one respondent, "*It's going to be a long, steady revival emerging from COVID – don't expect miracles in the first year or two*".

Introduction

Mainstreet Australia is a membership-based not-for-profit organisation representing Australia's traditional Main Streets, High Streets, Town Centres and City Centres. These centres provide the opportunity for people and their communities to work locally, shop locally, be entertained, and access health and community services, among other opportunities. Importantly, these centres also enable businesses to establish locally and to operate, invest and provide jobs.

To support these centres and contribute to their ongoing success, Mainstreet Australia provides a forum for education, networking, advocacy and professional development for the businesses, business associations and communities associated with these centres.

Mainstreet Australia undertook a survey of members in July 2022 in order to gain an up-to-date appreciation of the issues, challenges and opportunities that face members in their day-to-day, ongoing involvement in local centres. A copy of the survey form is provided as **Attachment A** to this report.

The survey responses indicate the main concerns that face local businesses and their trader groups and business associations; how local Councils and State Governments can assist our local centres; and ways in which Mainstreet Australia can provide assistance and advice to its members.

More specifically, the survey focuses on the following areas:

- Impacts of COVID-19 on local businesses and Main Streets since the pandemic became evident in early 2020;
- How Main Streets are recovering in the six months since lockdowns were lifted in early 2022, and actions that have been successful in "getting back to business";
- Ongoing issues for trader groups, business associations and local Main Streets, and the degree to which they are short-terms or longer-term issues;
- Sources of information and advice to support Main Street trader and business groups;
- Key actions for local Councils and State Governments to take in supporting the revitalisation` or upgrading of Main Streets; and
- An indication of the main areas in which Mainstreet Australia can provide or improve its assistance to members, including examples.

A total of 14 detailed survey responses were received from participants, representing 9% of the Association's membership. A total of approximately 100 individual comments were provided in the survey responses, and these are summarised in the following Sections of this report. Individual comments in the report are numbered by statement/paragraph to facilitate reference to survey results in any subsequent discussions by members.

1 Impacts of COVID-19 on Local Businesses and Main Streets

The survey of members of the Mainstreet Australia Association highlights many areas where negative impacts on local businesses were evident due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, survey respondents also noted numerous areas where positive outcomes are evident which are associated with the pandemic.

Principal among the **negative impacts** are the following:

- 1 Financial burden on businesses due to effective closure of shopping strips and centres, along with offices, schools, entertainment and so on.
- 2 Increase in vacant premises involving retail and other local businesses and services.
- 3 Loss of staff in retail and other businesses due to lockdowns and associated health matters.
- 4 Businesses operating fewer hours due to loss of staff.
- 5 Business owners working longer hours due to the loss of staff mandated to remain at home for a set time if ill with COVID-19.
- 6 Slow process of attracting customers back into the local Main Streets.
- 7 Increase in the level of competition from online businesses.
- 8 General downturn in business revenues with less foot-traffic in Main Streets.
- 9 Business stress in paying back deferred rents and other costs.
- 10 In regional areas an increase in the number of new residents occurred (who were leaving metropolitan areas which were in lockdown) and this led to an increase in residential costs in these regional areas, adversely affecting local housing affordability for retail and other workers and therefore contributing to a loss of Main Street workforce.

Despite the adverse impacts arising from the pandemic, numerous **positive aspects** also emerged, as highlighted in the following survey responses:

- 11 Local residents “re-connected” to their Main Streets and local centres, and “re-discovered” the opportunities to source their personal and household needs from local shops and other businesses.
- 12 Local centres benefitted during the pandemic (and thereafter) with people working from home and going to their local shops instead of travelling into the CBD.
- 13 Local businesses had to reflect on how they conducted their day-to-day businesses, and “those savvy enough survived”. They had to “embrace the digital world” in order to compete with online retail and other businesses.

- 14 Social media and online space became a priority as online audiences were no longer coming into local businesses. Businesses had to find customers online and engage with them.
- 15 The pandemic provided businesses the opportunity to address priorities that had not been addressed pre-COVID. For example, delivering workshops on social media, online marketing and visual merchandising. And with some business associations delivering 1-on-1 social media training exercises over a set period for participating members.
- 16 Local businesses recognised that they have a greater role to play in the health and well-being of the community. And local centres can now provide the opportunity for a 'break' for those working from home or office, or working in a hybrid 'home and office' situation. Businesses recognise the importance of reconnecting with customers at the tangible/shop level.
- 17 A number of business associations noted that their profile as an association increased as a direct result of their support to businesses during the pandemic.
- 18 In regional Victoria, the return of tourists and other visitors has supported local centres.

In summary, the impacts of the pandemic on local businesses in Main Streets and other local centres were typically severe, especially with a loss of on-street customers and a loss of staff due to mandated lockdowns. However, many benefits for local centres are also evident as a result of the pandemic, including a strengthening of the Main Street neighbourhood shopping experience and a greater appreciation by businesses of the importance of having an online presence.

2 How Main Streets are Recovering Since Lifting of COVID-19 Lockdowns

Survey responses highlight numerous ways in which Main Streets are recovering since the lifting of COVID-19 lockdowns in early 2022.

- 1 The most successful campaigns are those that reinforced the value of shopping locally, reminding the community of the importance of having access to good local services and why these local services need to be supported into the future. In this context, it is reported that more customers are now “shying away from shopping at hard-top centres” and preferring to “shop local”.
- 2 In Melbourne’s CBD, the return of weekend foot-traffic and office-based workforce has also contributed to improved sales in retail and other businesses, although the extent of the return to CBD shopping is not yet back to pre-COVID levels. In suburban centres in particular, the introduction of parklets (on-street car parking spaces adapted for outdoor dining) have also contributed to improved operating conditions for cafes and restaurants.
- 3 In other cases, placemaking projects have assisted in expanding local sales in retailing, while an increase in local activities – such as festivals, local tours and activations – have assisted in getting shoppers and others back into local centres. The use of shopping incentives in the form of gift cards has also assisted. With these types of initiatives, in many ways the local centres or precincts are ‘new’ for a lot of residents and visitors from other areas and they are drawn to assist the local businesses.
- 4 Another initiative has been the “bonus buy” campaigns in some centres which assist in attracting people to shop locally and more often.
- 5 A further activity has been the encouragement of business-to-business support in terms of locally-sourcing materials and products from within the centres and business precincts.
- 6 In essence, respondents note that continued marketing ensures that local centres “keep their local profile front and centre” for shoppers and others who visit these local centres. And that “any activity that encourages shoppers to come down to the local centre works well”, as one respondent notes. Another concludes that “there’s a clear movement to shop local”, and with a greater sense of community.
- 7 While respondents highlight that Main Streets and other local centres are typically responding in a positive manner to the lifting of the pandemic lockdowns, some centres continue to experience a lack of staff, particularly in retailing and hospitality. In this context, unemployment at the national level is currently around 3.5%, the lowest rate in many years, and this is due principally to the lack of job-seekers as a result of limited in-migration of new residents, seasonal workers, backpackers and students during the lockdowns.
- 8 Another negative and continuing feature for some local centres is that they have a higher-than-usual vacancy rate in retail, office and other activities, with the CBD in particular continuing to suffer from high office vacancy rates as office workers tend to work from home or work in a hybrid office/home situation.

Overall, the view of Main Street business respondents is that these local centres are responding in a positive manner since the lifting of lockdowns, especially as traders and other businesses focus on attracting residents to “shop local”.

3 Ongoing Issues for Trader Groups and Main Streets Following Lockdown

This survey of individuals involved in Main Street activities highlights a number of **ongoing issues** for trader groups and business associations, as summarised below:

- 1 Many issues for Main Street trader groups involve supply issues, delivery, lack of staff, and burnout associated with workload and stress.
- 2 Customers and staff fear of getting sick as variants to the COVID-19 pandemic emerge, and with individuals not complying with changing health regulations. Many shoppers remain reluctant to shop in their local centre and are also reluctant to travel to larger centres and the CBD.
- 3 Shortage of labour remains as a short- to medium-term issue for many businesses and it is difficult to see this changing in view of current circumstances.
- 4 The skills shortage is also an issue, both short-term and long-term. Planning to address these shortages is difficult as senior staff do not have time to train staff.
- 5 As a return to pre-COVID customer traffic levels is not clear for many businesses, planning for centre return to growth can be difficult.
- 6 The increasingly high cost of living is adversely affecting discretionary spend, with inflation recorded at 6.1% for the 12 months to the June 2022 quarter (source: Australian Bureau of Statistics)..
- 7 A lack of support from local Councils for training and other assistance in small business management and administration, in one respondent's experience.
- 8 An ongoing issue is the increasing competition from online shopping, although this is a continuing technological issue, not just associated with the pandemic lockdowns.
- 9 During this Winter period, foot-traffic and sales are at low levels and this limits the post-pandemic revival of centres.
- 10 Some Main Streets continue to have an issue with a lack of long-term vibrancy in attracting and retaining customers. This is an ongoing issue in terms of the need to continually look at different ways to promote the local centre so that it stands out from competitors.
- 11 Landlords are creating pressure by wanting to increase rents in centres – this is widespread and “something needs to be done”, as highlighted by a number of respondents. This pressure means that businesses are going to face an increase in the cost of doing business, leading one respondent to note that “we need to check with Councils and State Governments if there are any relief grants or other opportunities that can be tapped into”.
- 12 With so many businesses seeking financial support grants or delayed payments, it is important that Councils adopt a slow re-introduction of local government fees and

permits, particularly as businesses are likely to be recovering for a long period of time.

- 13 Re-engaging with consumers is a long-term issue for many centres, with anxieties in the community around returning to a pre-COVID social and spending environment.
- 14 There is also a continuing need to ensure that centres are well-maintained, clean and safe so that they present a welcoming environment for shoppers and other users. Wayfinding, streetscaping and placemaking are areas for ongoing attention in centres, as identified in the survey.
- 15 A comment associated with vacancy rates in Main Street businesses was made in the survey response: *“Stop using the vacancy rate as the be-all-and-end-all metric for measuring centre performance. Focus less on business attraction, and more on macro-economic and strategic planning to create an economic and physical environment where businesses thrive instead of shoe-horning new business anywhere to bring down vacancy rates”*.

Mainstreet Australia’s response to this particular comment is that vacancy rates are normally not used in this manner as the *“be-all-and-end-all”* measure of a Main Street’s business performance or economic condition. However, in a positive context, measuring floorspace in areal terms (square metres) results in the following positive outcomes that allows centre managers and individual businesses to better understand the roles and performance of their centres:

- (a) the calculation of vacant floorspace is a far more appropriate measure of a centre’s performance than simply measuring numbers of vacant premises, noting that vacant premises can range from small shops (say, 50 to 80m²) to much larger premises (500m² and above);
- (b) the estimation of total floorspace and percentage share by retail/business type (e.g., share of retail floorspace occupied by food & beverage, hospitality, clothing & footwear, etc);
- (c) the estimation of total retail sales in a centre by retail category (i.e., retail floorspace measured in sq metres multiplied by average annual sales per sq metre provides estimates of annual retail sales); and
- (d) the estimation of market share of resident catchment spending (i.e., retail sales measured as a share of available catchment spending).

Mainstreet Australia also supports the contribution of business associations and their members in respect to local Council and State Government efforts to improve the planning of local centres, enhance the physical environment, and promote economic development through the activation of local businesses, service delivery and employment.

In addition to the above issues, respondents also identify **positive outcomes** for local centres, as described in this report. These outcomes include recognition among many respondents that adverse effects associated with the pandemic are slowly retracting as people “slip into a new normal” in terms of day-to-day activities, including regular visits to their local Main Streets. This is reflected in local centres where business vacancies are now declining.

4 Sources of Information and Advice to Support Main Street Businesses

Survey respondents highlight a number of main sources for information and advice on matters relating to Main Streets and local businesses. These sources of information and advice include the following:

Specific information sources listed by most respondents

- Speaking with members of the local trader/business association
- Mainstreet Australia, including access to committee members, website and newsletters
- Local Councils, including information provided by ward councillors and Council officers.

Other information sources

- Business Victoria website
- Australian Retail Association website
- State Government Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions / JobsVic
- Melbourne Innovation Centre
- Startup Shakeup (comprising North East Victoria municipalities)
- LaunchVic (independent start-up agency)
- Media reports.

Survey responses indicate that the primary source of information – about issues, challenges and underlying trends associated with Main Streets – involve discussions with local people involved in local businesses, and contact with Mainstreet Australia through their local association’s membership. These discussions assist Main Street businesses in understanding what’s important to their local centres, business owners, local workforce, and the public who support these local centres.

Another source of local information in addressing issues and challenges is to understand how other Main Streets are dealing with these matters, through examples of particular projects and other initiatives.

5 Key Actions for Local Councils and State Governments in Supporting Main Streets

Respondents provided a wide range of suggestions when asked to identify the key actions for local Councils and State Governments in supporting the upgrading and revitalisation of Main Streets. These suggestions are listed below under the main areas of recommended support:

Support to Main Streets and their businesses

- 1 Encourage local Councils to provide holistic support for centres, rather than individual support from a variety of Council departments.
- 2 Attract State Government funds for Main Street marketing programs, recognising the economic and community benefits that Main Streets generate.
- 3 Provide financial support directly to associations to use in the most effective way that is appropriate for a centre, and support community engagement activities and local trader workshops.
- 4 Take a more strategic and targeted approach to attracting businesses that add support to weekend trading and the night-time economy.
- 5 Continue the provision of grants and other funding for local businesses to enable them to further invest in their brand and their shop experience.
- 6 Continue to reduce fees over five years in order to assist businesses as they continue to emerge from the adverse financial impacts of COVID-19.
- 7 Provide grants to support our local businesses.
- 8 Listen to the associations and offer financial support where traders and other businesses seek it.
- 9 Continue to support local businesses through special rates schemes. Assist in removing 'roadblocks' to local business success.
- 10 Provide access to funding for local businesses and Main Street centres where necessary.
- 11 Provide support with marketing for smaller centres that don't have a centre coordinator.

Support centre improvements, place-making and events

- 12 Make it easier for local centres to plan and undertake events.
- 13 Fund and oversee appropriate localised place-making to create exciting places with ambience.

- 14 Encourage beautification of our shopping strips by removing the layers and layers of red tape to get anything done.
- 15 Encourage the beautification of the street, with plants and other greenery, fix footpaths and provide other local amenities. Provide decorations in the street, both general and at Christmas, to enhance the visitor experience.
- 16 Provide security in centres, such as lighting in car parks and cameras in the street.
- 17 Promote streetscaping and wayfinding in and around our centres.
- 18 Provide suitable streetscape upgrades in line with the character of the area.
- 19 Plan and develop functions in local settings to attract people to the centre.
- 20 Identify and understand that Main Streets are places where people want to shop, meet, eat etc and the importance of long-term investing in these precincts, and continue to make them places of interest through revitalisation.

Develop, promote and deliver training programs for small business

- 21 Provide training and business support for those in need.
- 22 Streamline applications for street activity, events etc.
- 23 Provide for trader/staff training.
- 24 Provide businesses starter programs.

Main Street marketing and management

- 25 Support collaborative marketing and management of Main Streets.
- 26 Understand the patterns of visitor movement through Main Streets.
- 27 Collect and assess data on shopper movement patterns and shopping regularity in order to highlight infrastructure priorities and street beautification plans.
- 28 Use discretion and common-sense in parking enforcement.
- 29 Provide "linger moments" in high traffic areas to encourage retention of shoppers, based on foot-traffic data, not just a hunch.
- 30 Stay informed, continue to collaborate and engage with the community and traders in the Main Street.
- 31 Make Main Streets accessible for people of all mobility and ability levels. Make Main Streets safe for women.

- 32 Prioritise the consumer experience which, in turn, will contribute to the economic viability of a Main Street.

Vacancy rates

- 33 Don't use the vacancy rate as the *be-all-and-end-all* metric for measuring centre performance. Focus less on business attraction, and more on macro-economic and strategic planning to create an economic and physical environment where businesses thrive instead of shoe-horning new business anywhere to bring down vacancy rates.
- 34 Incentivise businesses to invest in shopfront locations, and to assist with the reduction of vacancies where possible.

Property owners

- 35 Encourage property owners to provide incentives that assist the operation and financial security of their tenants, where possible.

6 How Mainstreet Australia can Provide or Improve Assistance to Members

Respondents were asked to select – based on their experience with their local main street or local centre – the three main areas from a list where Mainstreet Australia can provide or improve its assistance to members. The list of potential areas for the provision or improvement in assistance to members is shown below, indicating the proportion of respondent responses to each area.

Areas where Mainstreet Australia can provide or improve assistance to Members

Advocacy on high rents and other landlord issues	20%
How to better co-ordinate Main Street businesses to meet challenges and opportunities	18%
Advocacy on cost-of-living impact on consumer spend and small businesses	13%
Support for promotion and marketing of local businesses and Main Streets	9%
Initiatives to increase customer traffic	9%
Training and education to improve digital skills for Main Street businesses	7%
Assistance in finding, recruiting and training Main Street staff	4%
Other issues or matters where Mainstreet Australia assistance is required (also, see listing below for examples)	20%
Total Responses (Number of Responses)	100% (46)

As noted above, a total of 20% of respondents highlighted “other” important initiatives where Mainstreet Australia can provide or improve its assistance to members. These areas are listed below:

- Consider formal training for centre managers regarding Main Street issues/opportunities, including advocacy role.
- Liaise with businesses regarding training for staff and management skills.
- Advocate to State Governments for funding opportunities to initiate projects in business-building, education and training, digital marketing, shopfront improvements.
- Provide ‘big picture’ information regarding Main Street businesses and operations.
- Assist in marketing of Main Streets, business mix, rent issues, government support.
- “Educate” landlords in regard to property rentals and affordability.

- Indicate how local Councils can use macroeconomic and strategic planning projects and programs to create a regulatory, physical and community environment where business thrives.
- Encourage/support festivals and promotions.

In addition to specific questions, the survey provided an opportunity for respondents to further highlight those areas where Mainstreet Australia can provide assistance to members. Respondents took the opportunity to expand on a number of areas summarised above, and these comments include the following:

Meet/Collaborate/Network among Members

- 1 Provide opportunities for networking between business associations.
- 2 As individuals we can only get so far when advocating for our precincts, but there are wider opportunities when we can meet and collaborate on key issues.
- 3 Share marketing ideas through social media and LinkedIn connections; continue to provide networking opportunities for people to share ideas.
- 4 Shared complexities are easy to solve as a collective.
- 5 Develop and present a campaign for shop owners to make their shops more attractive.
- 6 Having access to the broader industry gives members a measure of how our centres are tracking and what we can learn from others.
- 7 Encourage the sharing of events and activations as early as possible with other visitor economy stakeholders (eg, places of accommodation) so that visitors staying locally can know what is on in the nearby Main Street and add to spending in local businesses.

Advocacy

- 8 Ensure Mainstreet Australia can advocate for Main Street businesses on cost of living, rents and landlord issues, and to advise on member concerns in a coordinated way.
- 9 It is vital to have an organisation that represents our industry, advocates for the most relevant support, and educates members involved in ensuring that our local business precincts survive and thrive.
- 10 Advocate for special rate schemes.
- 11 Undertake research and advocacy into the effects of rising costs on local businesses.

Support to Trader Groups and Businesses

- 12 Provide support to trader groups and Council officers on how to create and run successful associations and continue to support these organisations.

- 13 Promote resilience-building among small and medium-size enterprises.

Promote Digital Skills and Professional Development

- 14 Provide easy access to digital workshops that can be viewed online at any time.
- 15 Digital skills don't need to take business away from 'bricks and mortar' businesses.
- 16 Deliver professional development program for centre managers.

Research/Case Studies

- 17 Undertake case studies and provide support in undertaking research to develop programs for members.
- 18 Provide examples of successful strategies employed by other Main Streets and local centres.
- 19 Develop examples of the benefits that flow from shops collaborating on campaigns to promote their Main Street.
- 20 Recognise that urban design and community projects help to create vibrant places and stimulate foot-traffic.
- 21 Continue to investigate and benchmark for further improvement in Main Streets.
- 22 Encourage combined advertising – Shop Buy Dine Local.

Landlord/Property Owners

- 23 Provide advice and advocacy in regard to landlord and rent issues; we need to communicate with landlords on a larger level (beyond individual businesses) to help them understand how ongoing upkeep of properties and consideration of financial issues are helpful for landlords' long-term investment and viability.
- 24 Assist in connecting with landlords and in providing them with information on our Main Street opportunities.

Other Comments

- 25 It would be good for a representative of Mainstreet Australia to regularly visit local members/businesses along with the representative from the local traders' group as a way of lifting the profiles of both groups.
- 26 Let's find a central location for meet-ups and conferences – staff in Melbourne's West are at a disadvantage as events always seem to be in the East, which is a barrier for attendance.
- 27 Encourage authorities to fast-track visa applications for international workers, including backpackers
- 28 It's going to be a long, steady revival emerging from COVID – don't expect miracles in the first year or two.

Attachment A: Survey Form

Mainstreet Australia: Survey of Members, Post-COVID-19, July 2022

Mainstreet Australia

Mainstreet Australia is a membership-based not-for-profit representing Australia's traditional main streets, high streets, town centres and city centres. These centres provide the opportunity for people and their communities to shop, work locally, be entertained, and access health and community services, among other opportunities. Importantly, these centres also enable small, local businesses to establish, operate, invest and provide jobs.

This Membership Survey

To ensure the ongoing success and survival of our centres, Mainstreet Australia is undertaking a survey of members in order to gain an up-to-date appreciation of the issues, challenges and opportunities that face our members in their day-to-day, ongoing involvement in local centres.

We are keen to hear about the effects of COVID-19 on centres, the main concerns that face local businesses and their trader groups and business associations; how local and State governments can assist our local centres; and ways in which Mainstreet Australia can provide assistance and advice to its members.

Kindly provide your responses to the questions provided below. Your responses will be **confidential** to your organisation and only reflected in the overall results in the context of the operation of Main Streets. And use extra space for your survey comments if necessary.

- Q1: What have been the main outcomes of COVID-19 on local businesses and the role of your main street or local centre?
- Q2: How is your local main street recovering in the six months since the COVID-19 lockdowns were lifted? What actions have been successful in "*getting back to business*" in your local centre?
- Q3: What are the main ongoing issues for your traders' group, business association or local main street? Indicate if these concerns are generally short-term or longer-term issues to address.
- Q4: Where do you currently go to get information and advice to support your traders' group or business association and your main street businesses?
- Q5: What do you identify as the key actions for local Councils or State government to take in supporting the continuing revitalisation or upgrading of main streets?
- Q6: In your experience with your local main street or local centre, please CIRCLE the three main areas from the list below where Mainstreet Australia can provide or improve its assistance to members.

Main 3 Areas for Mainstreet Australia Assistance (Tick 3 boxes)

- 1 How to better co-ordinate main street businesses to meet challenges and opportunities
- 2 Support for promotion and marketing of local businesses and main streets

- 3 Initiatives to increase customer traffic
- 4 Advocacy on cost-of-living impact on consumer spend and small businesses
- 5 Advocacy on high rents and other landlord issues
- 6 Assistance in finding, recruiting and training main street staff
- 7 Training and education to improve digital skills for main street businesses
- 8 Other issues or matters where Mainstreet Australia assistance is required

Q7: For each of the three main areas you have selected above, please provide examples of the types of assistance sought from Mainstreet Australia.

Q8: Any other comments or observations that may assist Mainstreet Australia in its role working with small businesses and local centres?

Q9: Your full name (not for publication)

Q10: Your organisation name, as registered with Mainstreet Australia membership

Q11: Your relationship to your local Main Street (eg, in local business; member of traders' group; centre manager; local government officer; etc - not for publication)

Q12: Date

Thank you for your participation in this survey. We look forward to assessing the results and providing a report to our Mainstreet Australia membership.