

Mainstreet Australia Annual Report

President's Report

2022-2023



Mainstreet Australia's unwavering commitment to advancing the interests of its members through targeted advocacy work, engaging events and professional development, and strategic planning to drive better quality member services was cemented throughout 2022-23.

I am incredibly proud of our network of over 180 members across Australia for their ongoing leadership in tackling some of our most pressing challenges, including: labour shortages, inflation, and other post COVID recovery vulnerabilities.

The initiatives, hard work and outcomes outlined in this report are testament to our collective ability to make a meaningful impact on traders, small businesses, main streets, communities, and the broader economy.

Some highlights from 2022-2023 financial year include:

- Mainstreet Australia's signature events attracted 570 attendees, creating valuable opportunities for networking and collaboration.
- Through advocacy wins, the organisation has driven positive change for small businesses in Victoria, advocating for policies that support their growth and success.
- Hosted over 11 events, inspiring innovation and collaboration among Mainstreet Australia's community, including two conferences (one metro, one regional), three webinars via a new program launched for members called The Night Shift Sessions, one StreetShow, one national awards event, Main Streets of Australia Week campaign, and four networking events for Centre Managers and Business Associations.
- Social media engagement is growing from strength to strength for Mainstreet Australia. The total counts (across all social media platforms) for 2022-23 are a testament to the marketing efforts being put in by the organisation. We achieved:
 - Total Reach/Impressions = 712,650
 - Total Page/Profile Interactions = 14,212
 - Total Community Growth = 846
- We also achieved LinkedIn Community Growth of 527 new followers (a 35.1% increase), with 2,571 visits and 4,644 comments, reactions and reposts. On Instagram we attracted 143 new followers (29.8% increase), reaching 30,164 accounts (346% increase) and 1,636 page/profile interactions (186% increase)
- 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. See the full report [here](#).

- Ran a seminal event on mental health – with the awe inspiring ex-CEO of Beyond Blue, Dawn O’Neil OAM, as guest speaker. The Mental Health & Wellbeing dinner event was held in Kensington in July 2022, with Dawn sharing her tips and advice on supporting all those involved in our main streets and town centres.
- Held two Victorian Conferences in August 2022, in Hawthorn and Castlemaine. With well over 200 attending both the metro and regional conferences, we were proud to have had such a phenomenal response from the industry in the midst of another COVID wave. The networking, business connections and opportunity to engage with peers, suppliers and key stakeholders, was invaluable and appreciated by all conference attendees. It was also a great opportunity to celebrate and recognise the resilience of our main street businesses, and how much everyone has endured over the last couple of years.
- We were also excited that the Minister for Small Business, the Hon Jaala Pulford MP launched our Hawthorn Conference and took that opportunity to announce a third round of the *Business Chamber and Traders Grants* program.
- Our theme ‘From Adversity to Opportunity’ could not have been displayed more by all of our fabulous speakers including Jace Tyrrell, Amanda Stevens and Melanie Gleeson), and it was great to see a focus on how we can leverage the momentum, vibrancy, positive opportunities and lessons learned from the last two years.
- Held a President’s Network Dinner in Richmond in September 2022 and a Main Street Managers Dinner in October 2022 at Vasko restaurant.
- Lobbied State government for additional rounds of funding for trader groups and business chambers – resulting in Minister Pulford announcing a third round of the BCTG grants at the Mainstreet Australia Hawthorn Conference, August 2022
- Launched a first for Mainstreet Australia - an important plan to protect and enhance our Main Streets. “*Our Gathering Places Under Threat*” ([link here](#)), sets out a comprehensive vision to enable Main Streets to play a central role in galvanising and sustaining local communities around Victoria. As we headed to the Victorian State Government election in November 2022, we comprehensively set out areas we believe the next Victorian Government needs to address, in order to capture the potential of Victoria’s Main Streets, as follows:
 1. Recognise, embrace, and promote main streets to support local communities and grow the economy
 2. Develop & implement framework for robust main street governance and management
 3. Encourage improved property owner / small business relationships
 4. Alleviate staff shortages and skills gaps for small businesses, and
 5. Enable and support sustainable main streets.
- Capping off a big year of transformation for Mainstreet Australia, we also launched our new Strategic Plan at our November 2022 AGM. *Capturing the Potential of Main Streets, 2023 – 2026* ([link here](#)) sets out a dynamic agenda for achieving our vision. The plan builds on our strengths and embraces the opportunities ahead of us to further capture the potential that the revitalisation of main streets can bring. The strategic plan identifies four key pillars that will lead Mainstreet Australia into the future:
 1. Placing member services and membership growth at the core of everything we do

2. Forge purposeful partnerships with aligned champions who want to support and nurture main streets
 3. Become a strong and united advocate, promoting changes that are needed to support a thriving main street landscape in Australia
 4. Ensuring our organisational viability and sustainability with robust, professional management & governance and a strong innovative culture.
- After running Mainstreet Australia's highly successful *From Adversity to Opportunity 2022* conferences in Hawthorn and Castlemaine, we had numerous approaches from Local Councils and Trader Groups around Australia to provide additional professional development for their traders to help them innovate and revitalise their businesses. In 2023, Mainstreet Australia took a mini version of its renowned annual conference on the road, or to the streets, more aptly! The first *StreetShow* was held in Ipswich during Main Streets of Australia Week in May 2023, with over 100 local small businesses attending. The session combined a walking and talking tour of the town with retail experts Martin Ginnane and David Bateson who provided tips and advice, followed by a live panel session, breakout workshop, dinner and networking.
 - Our Exec Officer Liz Joldeski, provided an overview of Australian main streets to a European audience, in conversation with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, on Tuesday 29th November. In a special event facilitated live from Paris by Anna Rubin, Manager of the OECD Local Development Forum, Liz discussed the Australian perspective, providing an overview of the latest activities, challenges and trends shaping main streets across Australia and the new policy approaches that are needed in response. This webinar was proudly organised in partnership between the OECD and Main Street Australia.
 - Introduced a new on-line webinar program free for members, called The Night Shift Sessions with Mainstreet Australia, with our first event held in February 2023. The topic covered was planning your calendar of events for business associations, trader groups and local councils. Over forty people attended the first webinar, with strong feedback showing support for the format, the time of evening and the topic. Our second Night Shift Session followed in April on visual merchandising and how to implement current and best practice strategies that will make retail areas more visible, vibrant and accessible. Our third Night Shift Session was held in June: Meet the Small Business Commissioners from Federal Government (Bruce Billson), Victoria (Lynda McAlary-Smith) and Queensland (Dominique Lamb). The session was constructive in reinforcing how Small Business Commissioners advocate and enhance the operating environment for small businesses by providing practical information, support and assistance.
 - On Friday 19 May 2023 over 100 passionate Mainstreet Australia members and stakeholders gathered at the Greek Centre on Lonsdale Street, a vibrant main street in Melbourne's Greek Precinct, to celebrate the Mainstreet Australia Awards 2023. In 2023 we had a truly national spread of quality, high calibre entries, showing the growing movement and support for main street revitalisation. It was fabulous to see winners from Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania at the event to accept their award in person. Congratulations to the thirty-three finalists and ten winners for 2023. A big thank you to our sponsors without whom the Awards would not have been possible – the [City of Melbourne](#), [Renew Australia](#), [Dynamite Printing](#), [The Place Agency](#) and [Silver Lining Strategy](#).

- Thank you also to the businesses, trader groups and Councils that also helped to make Main Streets of Australia Week 2023 a success. There were over 50 events held nationwide celebrating a sector that supports hardworking local families. This is the second year that Mainstreet Australia has run the campaign and we are looking forward to reviewing the impact of the event to see how we can better brand and position awareness of the sector and encourage more people to shop locally in future years.

As the President of Mainstreet Australia, I have witnessed the incredible capabilities and growing positioning and influence of Mainstreet Australia. Despite the constantly evolving and challenging environment, Mainstreet Australia has consistently adapted and thrived. From hosting successful events and establishing valuable partnerships to advocating for important policies and developing strong relationships with governments and local councils, Mainstreet Australia has demonstrated its dedication to member support and progress.

2022-23 was another big year of activity and achievements for Mainstreet Australia. The 13 member Committee of management established at the November 2022 AGM comprised representatives from small business, centre business associations and coordinators, as well as local government. This dedicated and passionate group of volunteers met regularly and I thank them for their support, wise counsel and hard work – to Samantha Choudhary as Vice President, Olivia McLean as Secretary, Cameron Brown as Treasurer and to the General Committee Members of Stephen Sully, Lucinda Bakhach, Kerry Daly, John Henshall, Troy Stuchbree, Joyce Watts, James McInerney, Cinzia Crea and Denise Hall (who stepped down early in 2023).

I would also like to thank our Executive Officer Elizabeth (Liz) Joldeski who has been bringing greater strategic focus and advocacy development support, and is working enthusiastically to get significant results on the ground including implementation of the new Strategic Plan and advocacy statement, *Our Gathering Places Under Threat*. Alli Price, our admin and marketing support left the organisation in January 2023, with Joyce Watts providing digital marketing support for a period of four months after that.

Mainstreet Australia made some important advances in 2022-23, and our intention is to continue with an ambitious program of initiatives in 2023-24, including stronger advocacy and focus on implementing the new organisational Strategic Plan, *Capturing the Potential of Main Streets*. Thank you for your interest and support in the past year – we are looking forward to bigger things and greater collaboration with our members, partners and main street champions next year.

Georgina Pikoulas
President, Mainstreet Australia