

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 09:00AM TUESDAY 21 OCTOBER 2025

Heartbeat Of Australia 2025: New ACM Research Reveals Why Local News Remains At The Heart Of Connection, Trust And Wellbeing In Regional Australia

National series launches across ACM's regional mastheads this week, including an 8-part feature exploring life, confidence and belonging in regional Australia.

Tuesday 21 October 2025 - ACM (Australian Community Media) has today released its latest Heartbeat of Australia report - the country's most comprehensive annual study into how regional Australians live, connect and feel.

Now in its fourth year, the Heartbeat study surveyed more than 7,300 Australians in partnership with a specialist research agency, Australian Regional Insights and the University of Canberra, offering a detailed picture of life, confidence and belonging outside the capitals.

The results show that regional Australians remain more connected, more content and more community-minded than those in metropolitan areas, even amid ongoing cost-of-living pressures.

The Heartbeat study reveals that those living in regional Australia continue to record higher satisfaction with life across key areas than city residents — 35% says they are very or completely satisfied with their relationships, compared to 31% in metro areas; 29% are very satisfied with the time they spend commuting to work (metro 24%) and 28% are satisfied with the standard of living (metro 25%).

Two-thirds of those surveyed who moved from cities to regional areas say their life has changed for the better (69%), with 45% saying their decision was driven by the desire for a lifestyle change, 28% were seeking more affordable housing and 27% wanted to live in a better community.

The survey also showed that regional Australians are significantly more connected to their communities, with almost 80% feeling that shopping locally and supporting local businesses helps them to feel a part of their community compared to 73% of capital city residents as an example. They're also much more likely to be home owners, business owners and work within their communities, so they're invested in knowing what's happening.

“Heartbeat is how we listen and connect with regional Australia,” said Laura Allen, Director of Research & Insights at Australian Regional Insights.

“Its aim is to deepen our understanding of how regional Australians stay connected, what they care about, what they are concerned about and their sense of belonging and wellbeing in their communities.

Heartbeat of Australia key findings include:

- Local news continues to be the most trusted source of news, with 60% of regional residents trusting the news found in their local newspaper (print or online).
- 78% of regional residents want to know what’s going on in their local area; 76% of regional residents want to understand the things that might affect them and 71% have an interest in the stories from their community.
- 60% say local newspapers - printed or online - are the most trusted news source, ahead of TV (57%), metro or national newspapers (53%) and social media (25%). 71% have an interest in the stories and information from their community.
- Local news is trusted because of its relevance and community care.
- 63% of respondents were ACM readers, representing 4.6 million Australians reached monthly across print, digital and social.
- 49% of ACM readers are more likely to buy from or consider brands advertised in local news, compared to 28 percent of those disengaged from news.
- 36% of ACM readers volunteer locally and 16 percent own a business, illustrating their influence within community networks and local economies.

The Heartbeat of Australia 2025 editorial series runs in print and online across ACM’s major mastheads, including The Canberra Times, Newcastle Herald, Illawarra Mercury, The Border Mail, The Examiner, The Courier and Bendigo Advertiser, as well as ACM’s network of community news websites.

The six-week series examines different aspects of the Heartbeat data and what it reveals about regional life, with local voices and journalist-led storytelling, supported by digital infographics and video content.

“Our journalists live and work in the communities they cover,” said Tony Kendall, Managing Director, Australian Community Media.

“Every day our local storytelling is capturing the heartbeat of Australia through real people, real places and real connection, and our latest research insights show the value of our regional commitment.”

Mr Kendall said the Heartbeat data reinforces the powerful link between trusted media environments, audience engagement and advertising effectiveness.

“The Heartbeat study demonstrates that local news isn’t just informative, it shapes how regional communities connect, spend and engage. Audiences trust their local publisher and that trust extends to the brands and messages they see alongside it.

“For advertisers and policy makers alike, these findings show that local media is not only trusted — it’s incredibly effective.”

To interpret the emotional undercurrent behind the data, ACM worked with Phillipa Brown, Founder of MeHelp Psychology, who says the findings reveal how deeply human connection and trusted storytelling contribute to resilience and wellbeing.

“Australians are craving meaning, simplicity and community — and that comes through clearly in these results,” said Phillipa Brown, Founder of MeHelp Psychology.

“Feeling informed and part of a local story is protective for mental health. When people feel seen and connected through trusted local media, it has a tangible impact on their wellbeing and sense of belonging.”

About Heartbeat of Australia

Heartbeat of Australia is ACM’s annual national sentiment study exploring how Australians — particularly those in regional and rural areas — connect with their communities, engage with local news and feel about the future. Now in its fourth year, the research is conducted by Australian Regional Insights in partnership with the University of Canberra, independently weighted to represent regional and capital city populations by age, gender and geography. Fieldwork for the 2025 edition took place between May 12 and June 19, 2025, capturing insights from 7,358 respondents nationwide.

Ends

For further information or interview requests, please contact:

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About Australian Community Media (ACM)

ACM is Australia's largest independent media company, collectively reaching over 5.2* million people each month. The ACM network comprises close to 100 brands, including leading regional news mastheads The Newcastle Herald, The Canberra Times, Illawarra Mercury, The Examiner, The Border Mail and The Courier.

Media Release



The agricultural division, ACM Agri, reaches 85%^ of Australian farmers each month with a national footprint of agricultural specialist brands (The Land and Queensland Country Life), marketplaces (Farmbuy and AgTrader), and events (AgQuip and FarmFest).

We are passionate about keeping our communities strong, informed, and connected.
ConnectNow with ACM.

Source: ^QARS, (Heartbeat of Australia), May 2025. *Roy Morgan Single Source, June 2025, P14+, Roy Morgan iris, ACM Cross Platform Audience.