

COVID-19 and Regional Population Growth in Australia

It's been almost four years since the COVID-19 pandemic stopped the world in its tracks and it feels like people are finally beginning to explore the world once again.

Overseas migration is one such way people crisscross the globe and it's a big driver of Australia's population. With strict border closures in place for almost two years during the height of the pandemic, international migration to Australia came to a standstill sending some capital city growth into the red.

Melbourne was hit harder than any other Australian city during the pandemic with population growth falling by 1.6 per cent in 2020–21. This was due to the lack of overseas migration and thousands of residents making the move across the border.

While the lack of overseas migration was a real downer for most capital cities, regional Australia was experiencing some of its biggest gains in population growth in over a decade.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, between 2021 and 2022 regional Australia's population increased by 1.2%. Much of this growth can be attributed to internal migration, both inter and intrastate.

Of all regional areas, Regional Queensland had the fastest growth rate during this period, reaching 1.9 per cent.

The Australian Government's Centre for Population says relocating can usually be closely correlated to age and key life events. However, during the pandemic they identified four key drivers that influenced the migration from capital cities to regional areas.

These drivers were the flexibility to work remotely, economic uncertainty, restrictions on international borders and the impact of young adults returning to their parental home while fewer young adults left regional areas for work and education opportunities.

So what does all this have to do with **RADIO** and **Audience Measurement**?

Put simply, the more people moving to or choosing to stay in regional areas means the more potential listeners your radio station will have.

While capital city growth has started to recover post-pandemic, regional growth remains strong.

According to the Regional Movers Index, a quarterly report by Commonwealth Bank and the Regional Australia Institute, there was a slight drop of 0.8 per cent in the number of people moving from cities to regional towns at the end of 2022. However, that figure is well below the typical rate of around 8 per cent normally experienced over the holiday period.

CommBank's Head of Regional and Agribusiness Banking Paul Fowler says it confirms regional hubs are continuing to attract thousands of metro movers. Fowler believes key centres like Geelong, Wollongong, and Townsville offer a wonderful mixture of attractive lifestyle benefits and significant business opportunities.

At a time when cost of living pressures are being felt by all age demographics, many people are attracted to the opportunities that thriving regional economies present. And a thriving regional economy can only be good news for radio's regional sales teams!

Sources:

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