



Strategic Plan 2024-2028

Introduction

Purpose and Impact

The 2024-2028 Strategic Plan recognises SSDP Australia's unique position and ability to support, unite, and mobilise young people to lead drug law reform.

Each strategic pillar (Community, Sustainability, Knowledge, Activism) is structured with progressive goals across four horizons, representing a shift from establishing foundational resources and networks to a sustained, coordinated movement for systemic drug policy reform.

Case for Change

Young people are the most likely age group to use illicit drugs and the most likely to want drug policy reform, yet we are the least likely to be involved in decision-making about policies which affect us and our future. A growing number of people are recognising the need for change, with shifts from criminal to evidence-based approaches. This strategic plan responds to the rapid evolution of drug policy worldwide and a shifting national landscape. Now more than ever, our strategy is essential to ensure that young people, with their unique expertise and position, are resourced, amplified, and empowered to lead meaningful change.

Horizons Framework

This framework introduces a multi-layered approach, recognising the progress required to achieve strategic objectives, and the importance of adequate resourcing, engagement, and groundwork to manage and sustain larger objectives.

This approach enables SSDP Australia to balance immediate priorities with long-term vision, fostering adaptability and resilience in an evolving landscape.

Strategic Plan Development

The 2024-2028 Strategic Plan was developed through an extensive co-design and consultation process with students and young people in our network, key stakeholders and allied organisations, our alumni, and advisors. People were invited to develop and/or review the Strategic Plan directly, via a consultation survey, and through workshops. At each stage, our co-designers revised the Strategic Plan to dually reflect the visions of our volunteers with the possibilities for SSDP Australia identified through wider consultation and research.

About SSDP Australia

About Us

SSDP Australia is the only independent youth organisation in Australia advocating for harm reduction and drug law reform; proudly led by young people with diverse lived and living experiences of drug use.

Our work spans the local to the global; from university campuses, to festivals, to parliaments and the United Nations. We are laying groundwork for an intersectional youth movement to change the conversation around drugs and empower the next generation of drug policy leaders.

Vision

We envision an Australia beyond drug prohibition with empowered youth, respect for drugs, and justice for all.

Drugs aren't going anywhere, despite a century of prohibition. By respecting the potential risks and benefits of drugs and the rights of those who use them, over time we can unwind and repair harms and stigma. We can forge better approaches to drug use and policy based on youth empowerment, public health, and social justice.

Mission

We empower, coordinate, and represent a grassroots network of Australian students and young people to advocate for drug law reform.

Values

Social Justice

We recognise full First Nations sovereignty and self-determination.
We consider the history of contemporary drug policies.
We value approaches to justice that are reparative, restorative, and transformative.
We centre peoples' lived experiences in policy development: "nothing about us without us."
We value human rights and humanitarianism.
We believe in equal access to the benefits of drug regulation.

Public Health

We emphasise the social determinants of health.
We respect bodily autonomy and cognitive liberty.
We value community safety and wellbeing.
We respect drugs as complex tools with many risks and benefits.
We build cultures of collective care and individual accountability.

Youth Empowerment

We believe in the power of young people and future generations to drive change.
We believe that young people should be involved in conversations and decisions which impact us.
We create spaces for meaningful youth involvement in education, research, and advocacy.
We respect young peoples' rites of passage.
We honour young peoples' diversities.
We are inspired by young peoples' hopes for a better future.

Principles

1. Engaged Compassion

We show up without judgment, with openness and acceptance for ourselves and others. We listen respectfully to each other and treat everyone with kindness and compassion.

2. Yindyamarra

A Wiradjuri word meaning “go slowly, with honour”. We learn from the wisdom that the best work is often considered, careful, and strategic, and that meaningful change can often take time.

3. Peer-Led Activism

We centre those with lived and living experience in our activism, recognising that those who are most affected by drug policies are typically nearest to the solutions.

4. Evidenced-Informed Practice

We believe that promoting the unique contributions of lived experiences, expert consensus, and empiricism is the best way to design drug policies and inform our organisation’s directions.

5. Reflexive Practice

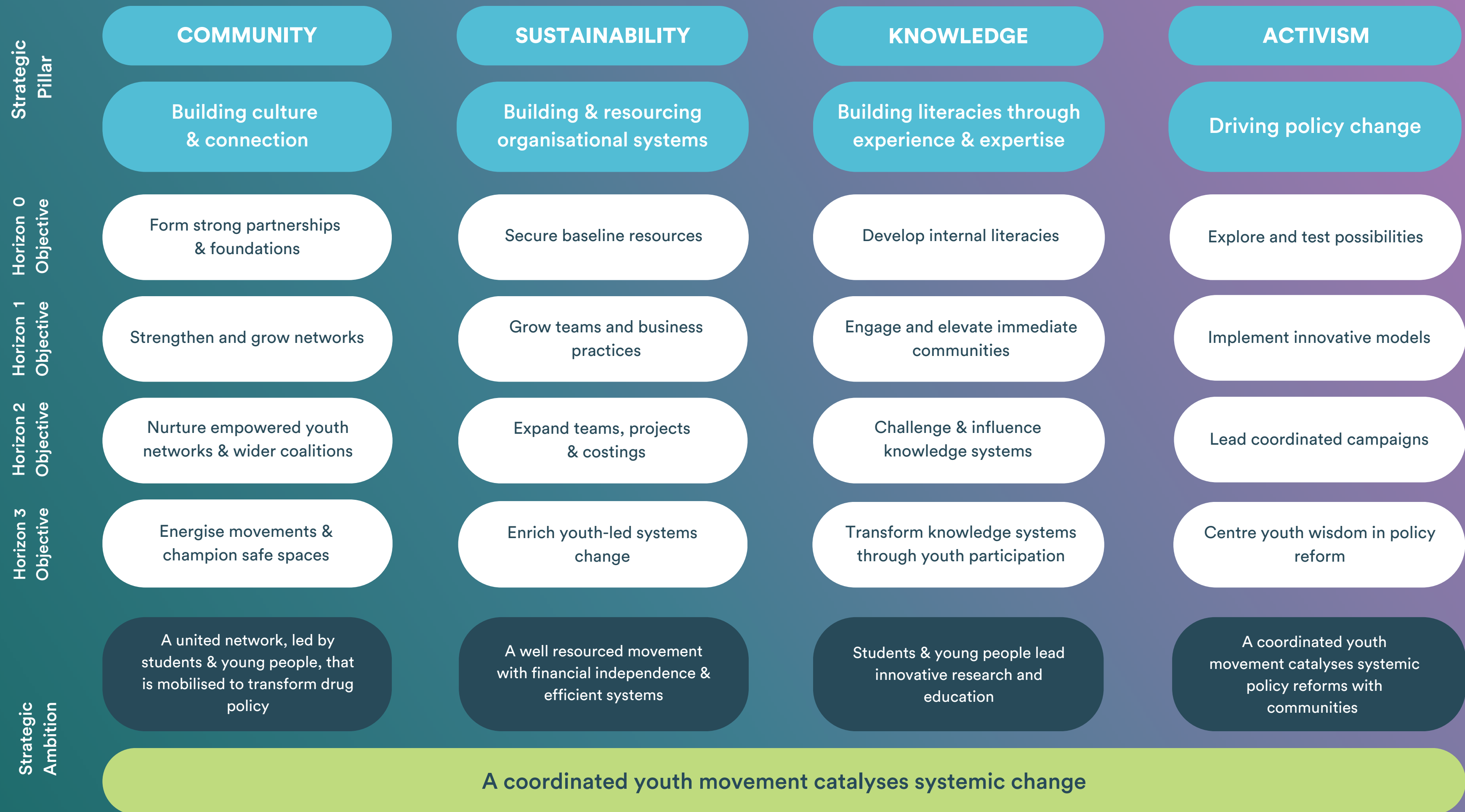
We acknowledge our lived experiences and our world views, and how these impact the way we represent our communities. We are critically reflexive and engage in ongoing reflection and evaluation to inform our practice.

6. Holistic Harm Reduction

We engage with people free of judgment to address the complex effects of drug prohibition and wider systems at the individual, community, and institutional levels.

7. Collective Collaboration

We create space for people to meaningfully participate, united in the pursuit of common goals. We do this with transparent systems of governance, clearly defined teams and strategies, and by fostering consent-based cultures of decision-making.



Elevating Communities

SSDP Australia is youth- and student-led organisation for young people and students. Young people are the most empowerable and potentially impactful demographic, but are the most systematically limited in their participation. We understand that students are the future professionals and that universities have long been hubs for activism and change. Guided by the diverse wisdom of youth, we strive to amplify all youth voices, regardless of their engagement with formal education.

Youth Positioning & Potential

Young people are the largest demographic of people who use drugs yet are consistently spoken about paternalistically through discourse of “safety” and “saving” youth. We strongly uphold the principle of “nothing about us without us”, and deeply value the wisdom and expertise of young people regarding their own experiences. Policy reform needs to be forward-thinking, reflecting the realities of young generations and their experiences of drugs. As future leaders, they will inherit the outcomes of today’s decisions and must be supported to speak for themselves—their firsthand experience is both empowering and transformative.

Community Voices

We are committed to engaging young people and young people who use drugs, including those who are First Nations, gender and sexually diverse, and those targeted and disproportionately impacted by criminalisation. We prioritise peer-led advocacy, collaborate with key organisations, and provide accessible training to equip affected communities with the skills to drive drug policy reform. Through leadership opportunities and inclusive events, we ensure lived experience remains central to decision-making and systemic change. Our Campus Teams provide local platforms for students of diverse perspectives and backgrounds to connect, learn, and lead change.

Drug Literacy

Drug literacy empowers young people with knowledge and context about drugs, drug policy, and the complex factors shaping substance use. Through our "Just Say Know" approach, we prioritise education that builds a foundational understanding crucial for people to make informed decisions about their and others’ wellbeing. Fostering drug literacy enables students and young people to challenge misinformation and critically engage with prevailing narratives, reduce stigma, and confidently participate in shaping better policies. This collective effort lays the groundwork for systemic change, powered by education and empathy.

Driving Change

We empower young people to drive drug policy reform through education, advocacy, and grassroots action. Our movement enables their voices to shape policies that prioritise health, human rights, and harm reduction. By building leadership and uniting advocates, we will create lasting change for a fairer, evidence-based approach to drug policy.

A United Network

We are building a united network of young advocates, people with lived experience, and allied organisations to drive drug policy reform. Spanning universities, TAFEs, youth groups, and community-led initiatives, this alliance will share resources, coordinate advocacy, and consistently elevate youth voices. This collaborative leadership ensures affected communities play a central role in shaping policy, enhancing grassroots leadership and maximising collective impact. We will actively bridge divides across geographic, social, and cultural lines to address the disconnection and isolation that can weaken grassroots efforts, to foster solidarity and mutual support.

Systemic Drug Policy Reforms

Stigma and criminalisation remain deeply entrenched in our systems, while the innovative harm reduction of the 1980s has been overshadowed by a medicalised policy debate, and incremental policy changes fail to address the root causes of harm. We call for a comprehensive and transformative overhaul, driven by the needs and aspirations of young people, to promote public health, foster positive relationships with the justice system, and create safe, empowered communities. This is not about tinkering at the edges - it's about reimagining our approach to drugs and drug use to build a healthier and more just society.