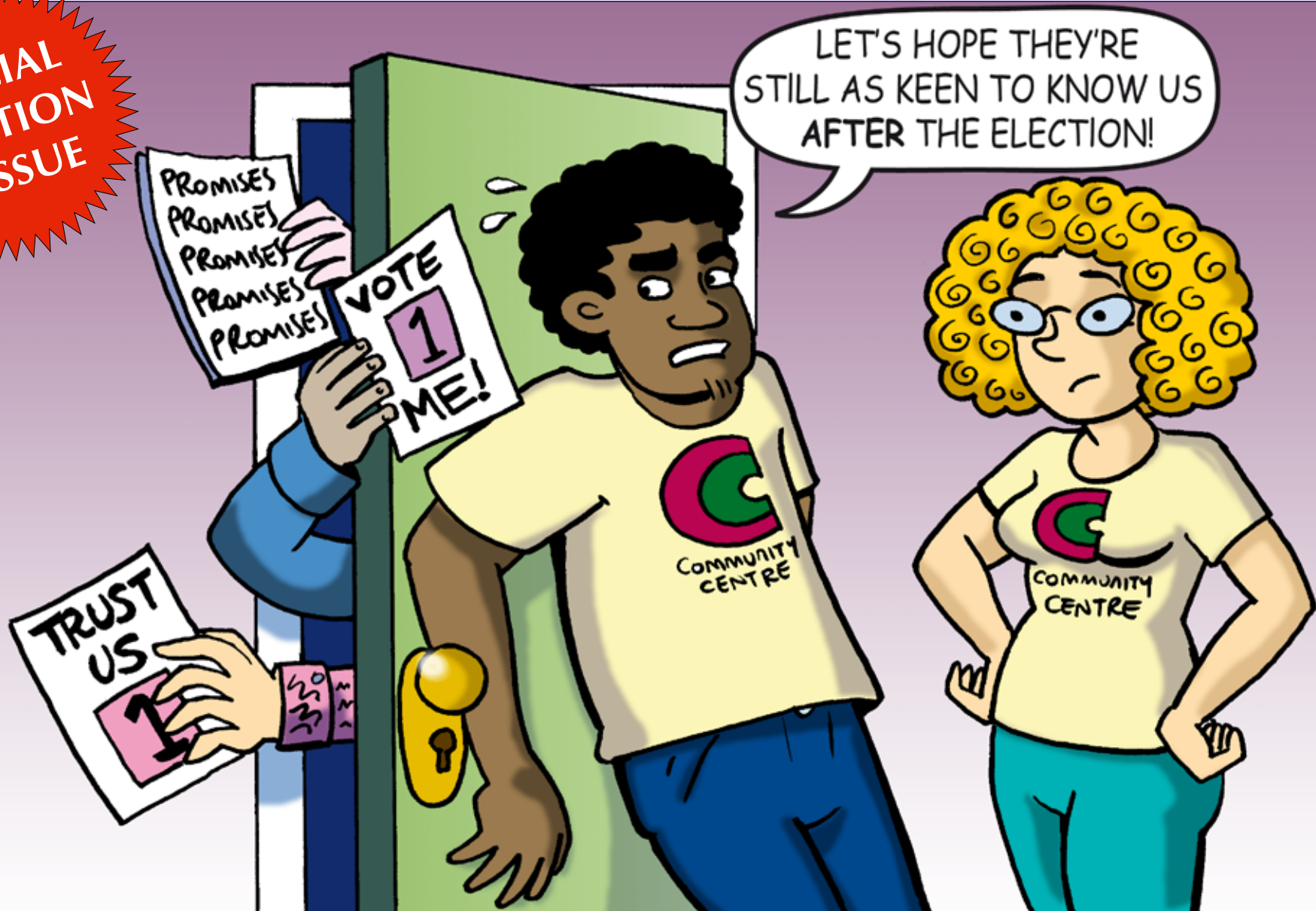




# NCOSS News

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**SPECIAL  
ELECTION  
e-ISSUE**



**INSIDE:** Will the election bring us a fairer NSW? p2 | Vote 1 Fairness in NSW: Political Party Announcements p3-15



# Will the election bring us a fairer NSW?

When *Vote 1 Fairness* in NSW was launched twelve months ago, NCOSS said that it was a call for all current and aspiring politicians to agree to support measures that will contribute in a real and meaningful way to a fairer, more just and sustainable society. It was also a call for the sector to advocate for a better deal for the people we are working with and on behalf of and it was a call for us to make sure that when we vote in the State Election we are voting for fairness not just for ourselves but for us all.

This special electronic edition of *NCOSS News* provides an analysis of what the major parties have said in response to the recommendations in our election platform. It does not cover announcements on other matters, which we have reported on the NCOSS website. As we have gotten closer to Election Day, there have been many announcements, public events and policy launches. These will continue right up to the last minute and NCOSS will endeavour to keep you informed about the latest developments through our website [www.ncoss.org.au](http://www.ncoss.org.au)

Despite this flurry of activity though, there has been little public attention on many of the issues that matter to us and the people we are working with and on behalf of - those on low incomes, those living with disadvantage and those who are vulnerable and at risk. In some cases this is because the major

*"This election, just like others before, is a chance to consider what sort of society we want to be."*

parties have a bi-partisan approach to the issues in *Vote 1 Fairness*. Unfortunately, in some cases, it is because the major parties have not focused on these issues or that they have been lost in the traditional big announcements about hospitals, roads and railways.

The analysis also shows that for some issues, while there is support for what was recommended, there is little concrete detail about funding or how this will be implemented. This does not mean, however, that these issues are lost causes. What it does mean is that we must redouble our efforts after the election in advocating for policies and programs that will make a difference for people and communities who deserve better.

This election, just like others before, is a chance to consider what sort of society we want to be. *Vote 1 Fairness* sought to address the inequities that exist in our communities that mean far too many people do not enjoy the opportunities most of us take for granted. Our analysis of the major parties responses shows that while there are small glimmers of hope, we still have a great deal of work to do before we can answer the question "Are We Fair Yet?" with a resounding **yes!**

*NCOSS will be providing a full analysis of the implications of the election outcome for social policy in the April edition of NCOSS News.*

Content for this issue of *NCOSS News* was written by Alison Peters, Samantha Edmonds, Christine Regan, Dev Mukherjee, Solange Frost and Warren Gardiner.

This PDF issue of *NCOSS News* has live links that, when clicked, will take you to relevant webpages. Additionally, each section in this issue references chapters from **Vote 1 Fairness in NSW** - it is possible to download the associated factsheets by clicking on the red triangle symbol. The factsheets are also available from: [ncoss.org.au/vote1fairness/factsheets](http://ncoss.org.au/vote1fairness/factsheets)



## Contents

- Aboriginal Self-Determination.....3
- Improved Child Wellbeing .....3
  - Improved Child Wellbeing and Child Protection Services.....3
  - Increase Funding for Early Intervention and Prevention Services.....3
  - Better Access to Early Childhood Education .....4
- A Fair Go for People with Disability.....4
  - Improved Community Living for People with Disability .....4
  - Equipment to Support People with Disability to live in the Community.....4
- Active and Connected Older People.....5
  - Supporting Older People at Home.....5
  - Planning for an Ageing Population.....5
- Strong Communities .....5
  - Community Strengthening .....5
- Improving the Justice System.....6
  - Less Young People Held on Remand.....6
  - Preventing and Reducing Violence Against Women and Children .....6
  - Access to Appropriate Legal Assistance, Representation and Information .....6
  - Reducing Crime .....6
- More Affordable Housing and Less Homelessness .....7
  - Growth in Housing Supply .....7
  - New Programs Linking Housing and Support.....7
  - Reducing Homelessness .....8
  - Better Protection for Boarders and Lodgers .....8
  - Improved Aboriginal Housing.....8
- Better Health and Well Being .....8
  - Giving Women Choice .....9
  - Improving Oral Health.....9
  - Recognising the Importance of Community Health .....9
  - Access to Health and Related Services.....9
  - Supporting People to Stop Smoking.....10
- Fairer Concessions .....10
  - Fairer Rebates for Energy .....10
  - A Simpler Framework for Transport Concessions .....10
  - Equitable Access to Senior's Card Benefits for Aboriginal People .....10
- An Effective Transport System .....11
  - Integrated Fares and Information .....11
  - Improved Access to Transport for Disadvantaged People and Communities.....11
- Better Planning and Infrastructure .....12
  - Regenerating Communities .....12
  - Make Housing and Public Facilities More Accessible.....12
  - Improve the Planning System.....12
- Strengthening the Community Sector.....13
  - A Sensible and Whole of NSW Government Funding Policy.....13
  - An Industry Plan for the Sector.....13
  - An Effective Compact/Relationship between the NSW Government and the Sector .....13



# Vote 1 Fairness in NSW: Political Party Announcements

website: [www.ncoss.org.au/vote1fairness](http://www.ncoss.org.au/vote1fairness)

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This analysis is based on policy announcements up to and including 16 March 2011. NCOSS will provide an updated analysis on any further policy announcements in the last days of the election campaign through our website. A final analysis will be provided in the April edition of *NCOSS News*.

## 1 Aboriginal Self-Determination



**Vote 1 Fairness** is seeking a commitment from all political parties to work with Aboriginal people to develop, implement and fund a plan towards autonomous Aboriginal services and Aboriginal input and participation in policy development and planning at all levels of Government.

The NSW Greens are the only political party to clearly articulate a policy on Aboriginal Self-Determination through their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy. This policy lays out the Green's commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the Green's support for Aboriginal control over their services, land and culture.

In particular the Greens note that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island People's right to self determination must be supported and actively implemented. They also state that Aboriginal people must have control over decisions that affect their wellbeing and that this must be adequately resourced and accountable.

It is disappointing that neither the Liberals and Nationals nor the Labor Party have clear policy statements in regards to Aboriginal self determination despite rhetoric about 'closing the gap' and meeting the needs of Aboriginal people.

The Green's policy aligns with the NCOSS *Vote 1 Fairness* recommendations.

## 2 Improved Child Wellbeing

### 2.1 Improved Child Wellbeing and Child Protection Services



**Vote 1 Fairness** is seeking a commitment from all political parties to implement the recommendations of the Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services.

The Labor Government developed the *Keep Them Safe* action plan which sought to implement the recommendations of the Special Commission of Inquiry. NCOSS welcomed this plan and the associated funding when it was announced in March 2009. As part of its Community Services Policy, Labor has recommitted to the *Keep Them Safe* action plan.

Labor's Community Services Policy commits to stabilising and reducing the number of children entering out-of-home care (OOHC), especially Aboriginal children. A re-elected Labor Government would commence the transfer of 70 percent of OOHC services to the non-government sector in a planned and sustainable way, commencing in the second half of 2011.

NCOSS welcomes this recommitment to the *Keep Them Safe* action plan including the budget and the commitment to the transfer of OOHC to the non-government sector.

The Liberals and Nationals have supported the recommendations of the Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services. In response to *Vote 1 Fairness*, the Liberals and Nationals have committed to:

- stopping the growth in the number of children placed in OOHC by 2015 and reduce the rate of removal from over 9 children per thousand children to no more than the current national average by 2019; and
- continuing the handover process of out-of-home care to non-government organisations.

NCOSS welcomes these commitments, particularly the ambitious target regarding the growth of out-of-home care placements. NCOSS expects, and looks forward to seeing, detailed plans and funding required to implement these commitments.

The Greens in Parliament supported the legislation to implement many of the recommendations of the Special Commission of Inquiry. There has been no specific commitment from The Greens regarding this issue during the election campaign.

### 2.2 Increase Funding for Early Intervention and Prevention Services



**Vote 1 Fairness** calls for increased funding for existing services and to provide additional Family Support and Early Intervention Services for families.

Under the *Keep Them Safe* action plan, Labor has already increased funding for Brighter Futures and increased funding for elements of the Early Intervention and Placement Prevention Program. Labor has recommitted to these programs. Unfortunately most of the funding increase is not at the 'early' part of the intervention spectrum but for Brighter Futures, Intensive Family Support and Intensive Family preservation. *Vote 1 Fairness* calls for additional funding for services operating at the earlier end of the spectrum.

Labor has announced a Family Literacy Program tailored to Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. There are four components to the program,:

- child literacy education;
- adult literacy education;
- parenting education; and
- parent and child time together where parents spend time most days in the classroom or centre with their child.

continued on page 4 ▶

## Improved Child Wellbeing

◀ continued from page 3

The program is meant for families in community services early intervention and prevention programs and focuses on adults who did not finish school.

The Liberals and Nationals have committed to put greater emphasis on increased early intervention such as intensive family support and family preservation services to help prevent children most at risk from entering foster care.

NCOSS welcomes this announcement but would also like to see a commitment to earlier intervention services that focus on families requiring lower levels of support and are of a less intensive nature than those provided under intensive family support and family preservation services.

No specific announcement has been made by The Greens. The Greens Children and Young People policy indicates The Greens support an increase in funding to programs which are likely to prevent child abuse such as early intervention, respite care, child care for children at risk and home visiting programs.

**"...we remain concerned that affordability remains a significant barrier for low income families."**

## 2.3 Better Access to Early Childhood Education

**Vote 1 Fairness** calls for subsidies to provide 15 hours a week free early childhood education for all children from low income and disadvantaged backgrounds in the year prior to school.



Labor's Community Services Policy includes a section on children's services. The policy re-commits Labor to the goal of 95% preschool participation in the year before school by 2013, in line with the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) target. The additional funding provided under the Preschool Investment and Reform Program will become recurrent funding from 2013 to fund the additional 10,500 places created under the Program.

While NCOSS welcomes these announcements, we remain concerned that affordability remains a significant barrier for low income families. Our specific goal of removing preschool fees for low income families (in possession of a health care card) has not been addressed.

On 13 March 2011, The Greens announced their plan for two

years of free preschool education, for two days per week, for all children in NSW. The first stage of the Greens' preschool plan is to offer 10,000 children the opportunity to enter a government pre-school for an additional year. These students would then experience two years of preschool for two days per week. These places would be initially targeted to Aboriginal families and disadvantaged communities.

NCOSS supports the goal of increasing access to preschool education for Aboriginal and disadvantaged communities without charging fees. However, NCOSS believes the priority should be given first to increasing the number of children from low income and otherwise disadvantaged families free access to preschool in the year before school.

The Liberals and Nationals are considering moving the responsibility for early childhood education and care to the Department of Education and Training. The Coalition parties, if elected to Government, have agreed to consult with the sector about any change in administrative arrangements. They have agreed that responsibility for all children's services will be maintained in one agency.

There has been no announcement to date on preschool affordability from the Liberals and Nationals.

## 3 A Fair Go for People with Disability

### 3.1 Improved Community Living for People with Disability

**Vote 1 Fairness** calls for:

- people with disability to have greater control and for increased self directed support funding;
- a Supported Living Fund to enable people to live in the community;
- at least 4,000 new supported accommodation places; and
- disability friendly environments and an acceleration of transport accessibility upgrades.

Labor announced its *Stronger Together 2* (ST2) Plan late last year. This contains more than \$2.2 billion in spending measures over 5 years commencing in July 2011. This effectively doubles the disability service system. ST2 contains a range of improvements including 300 places for a Supported Living Fund and a commitment that from July 2014, all people receiving government funded disability services can choose to



convert these services to an individualised funding approach. ST2 also delivers 1,750 additional supported accommodation places for people with disability. NCOSS welcomed the announcement of the ST2 Plan at the time. Labor have also promised \$4m to improve the health and wellbeing of people with intellectual disability.

The Liberals and Nationals have made a commitment to delivering both the funding and all of the places under ST2. NCOSS welcomed this announcement when it was made late last year. The Liberals and Nationals have also promised to increase individualised funding to give people with disability greater "choice, voice and control", institute comprehensive and transparent stakeholder engagement and build capacity in the non-government sector.

The Greens have made a commitment to increased funding for supports to people with disability as well as a broad range of rights and services, including a diverse range of supported accommodation, improved access to health and

other infrastructure. The Greens have promised increased provision of case management, employment, advocacy and communication technology as part of their commitment to increase funding for supports for people with disability. They have also made a commitment to choice for people with disability but make no specific mention of individualised or self directed supports.

#### Transport Accessibility

In their Transport Policy the Greens call for the Easy Access program to be accelerated and appropriate access for people with disability and mobility issues to be extended across all stations. However there is little detail about how this will be achieved. The Greens are also committed to creating and enforcing standards of disability access to public spaces, public and private buildings and facilities in addition to public and privately operated public transport.

The Liberals and Nationals have announced an Easy Access Program Boost to increase the roll out of this program. They

continued on page 5 ▶

## A Fair Go for People with Disability

◀ continued from page 3

will increase funding for upgrades by over 50%, committing an extra \$60m towards this program. This additional funding will be partly sourced by expanding the revenue obtained through transport advertising by increasing the use of currently un-used advertising space. While this is a welcome increase it is disappointing the additional money is based on getting more advertising, especially when some advertising providers in stations have noted that they are finding it difficult to sell existing space. There is also a need for additional workers to implement an increased roll out of this program. The Liberals and Nationals have also announced an additional \$12m for the Community Transport program to improve access.

NSW Labor has not released a specific policy on increasing or improving the Easy Access Program, which they are already committed to and rolling out. It is the slowness of the rollout that is of concern to NCOSS. Labor has also announced they will provide an unlimited number of Wheelchair Accessible Taxi (WAT) licences as well as continuing the existing incentives for WAT drivers.

### 3.2 Equipment to Support People with Disability to live in the Community

**Vote 1 Fairness** called for an increase in funding for the PADP to \$100m per annum and that the program be entitlement based with the co-payment requirements be removed.

Labor have committed to a \$12m increase to the PADP and to abolishing the co-payment for full pensioners and capping contributions for others. The Liberals and Nationals have

given in principle support to improving PADP but have made no specific announcements. The Greens have pledged to provide at no cost and in a timely manner the

required equipment to people with disability to enable their full participation in the community. While NCOSS is pleased to see the support for improving PADP, only the Greens, so far, have supported the changes NCOSS has called for.

**"While NCOSS is pleased to see the support for improving PADP, only the Greens, so far, have supported the changes NCOSS has called for."**



## 4 Active and Connected Older People

### 4.1 Supporting Older People at Home

**Vote 1 Fairness** calls for:

- Accelerated growth in home support services for older people, people with disability and carers;
- Improved services to Aboriginal older people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and people in rural and remote areas;
- A person centred, individualised approach to supports for older people;
- A better integration with other support systems; and
- Improved integration and responsiveness of the Home Care Service of NSW.

The Greens have promised to increase the Home and Community Care Program by 20% and have made a commitment to improve the funding, services and support available to Aboriginal people. The Greens have also committed to improving the integration of service systems supporting older people.

Neither Labor or the Liberals and Nationals have released policy on these matters, although the Liberals and Nationals *Better Life for Seniors* Policy indicates that these are priority goals for an incoming Liberals and Nationals Government to progress at a future COAG meeting.

### 4.2 Planning for an Ageing Population

**Vote 1 Fairness** calls for:

- Mandatory targets with designated deadlines and funding to be included in *Towards 2030* (the NSW plan for an ageing population);
- ComPacks to be extended to all hospitals and an increase in their number to meet demand;
- Planning processes to consider the needs of older people
- Improve the Taxi Transport Subsidy scheme; and
- Extend public and community transport.

The Greens have committed to improved involvement of older people in a wide range of planning processes. They also support improved public transport, integrated ticketing and



keeping fares affordable. Many of the Greens policies align with *Vote 1 Fairness* priorities.

The Liberals and Nationals, in their *Better Life for Seniors Policy*, outlines commitments to increase funding for Community Transport (\$12m) and the station easy access upgrades (an extra \$60m), free photo ID for self funded retirees and pensioners, incentives for safe drivers (to reduce licence fees) and standardising retirement village contracts. They have previously announced their policy to give carers recognition and a voice in government.

At the time of writing, Labor had no specific seniors policy although they have previously reaffirmed their commitment to *Towards 2030*. Labor have announced policies to cap increases to public transport fares, introduce integrated ticketing and guarantee the pensioner excursion ticket price at \$2.50.

## 5 Strong Communities

### 5.1 Community Strengthening

**Vote 1 Fairness** is seeking increased funding for the Community Builders program, neighbourhood centres and other organisations involved in community strengthening.

As part of the 2010-11 NSW Government budget, Labor increased funding by \$10m per annum to neighbourhood and community centres in NSW. Labor's Community Services Policy commits to working with the Federal Government to implement the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion.

The Greens have made no announcements regarding funding for neighbourhood and community centres.

The Liberals and Nationals have made no announcements regarding funding for neighbourhood and community centres but have said they intend to return as much decision making as possible to local communities. There is little detail about support for local communities or organisations to be able to do this.



## 6 Improving the Justice System

### 6.1 Less Young People Held on Remand

**Vote 1 Fairness** calls for a comprehensive residential bail support program.

The Greens Criminal Justice Policy includes a number of commitments that will, if implemented, reduce the number of young people held on remand. The Greens policy commits the party to:

- support amendments to the Bail Act to ensure Police consider alternatives to arrest in relation to failures to comply with bail;
- support bail or community-based supervision regimes for juveniles charged with all but the most serious of offences;
- support amendments to the Bail Act to reduce the amount of time young people are kept in custody including following minor breaches of bail conditions; and
- fund a residential bail support program to assist homeless young people in meeting their bail conditions.

NCOSS welcomes the inclusion of a residential bail support program in The Greens' Criminal Justice Policy.

The Liberals and Nationals have committed to a review of the Bail Act as it applies to children. They have agreed to consider the *Vote 1 Fairness* call for a residential bail support program.

In Government, Labor established a trial of a bail support hot line targeted at providing services to young people granted police bail but not those granted conditional bail by the Courts. Labor has not agreed to funding a comprehensive residential bail support program.

### 6.2 Preventing and Reducing Violence Against Women and Children

**Vote 1 Fairness** is seeking:

- a service audit to identify gaps along the continuum of care;
- an increase in the level of priority given to women escaping domestic violence when applying for social housing; and
- improved research, resourcing and targeted capacity building to improve capacity to respond to the needs of people experiencing domestic violence and sexual assault.

The Greens address preventing and reducing violence against women and children through two of their policies. The Greens Older People Policy refers to issues of abuse and neglect of Older People. They recommend an investigation and adoption in NSW of initiatives such as the Queensland Elder Abuse Prevention Unit and the incorporation of elder abuse in domestic violence legislation.

As part of their Criminal Justice Policy the Greens also call for an adequately funded and integrated approach to domestic violence and call for specific programs to address hate crimes against people on the basis of their race, religion, gender identity or sexual orientation.

Both policies are a positive step towards addressing under-resourced domestic and family violence services. The specific focus on elder abuse is also welcome as this is an increasingly recognised issue that needs solutions. However as noted in Vote 1 there is a need to audit and evaluate services to identify and address gaps in service delivery and to ensure successful services are appropriately resourced.

The Labor party has previously developed a NSW Domestic and Family Violence Strategic Framework and has funded a range of services to address domestic and family violence in their last budget. This includes the roll out of a range of successful programs such as "Staying Home, Leaving Violence". NCROSS has supported these moves. However there has been no specific policy announcement during the election and there are some concerns about the appropriate ongoing funding of existing and new services and poor coordination.

The Liberals and Nationals have not made any policy announcements in relation to addressing domestic and family violence during the lead-up to the election. However in 2008 the Liberals and Nationals did announce that they would introduce legislation to enable local courts, which hear domestic violence cases, to have the same powers as the Family Court to compel counselling and dispute resolution. The concern is that this would be applied to domestic violence cases, which is highly inappropriate. No woman should have to face mediation with the person that was abusing her. No other person who faced abuse would be expected to do this.

*"Both policies are a positive step towards addressing under-resourced domestic and family violence services."*

### 6.3 Access to Appropriate Legal Assistance, Representation and Information

**Vote 1 Fairness** is seeking:

- increased funding for Community Legal Centres;
- introduction of alternative court processes; and
- strategies to improve the expertise of lawyers in the areas of intellectual disability and mental illness.

In their Criminal Justice Policy the Greens call for increased funding for Legal Aid, Community Legal Centres and Aboriginal Legal Services to increase their capacity for advice, representation, community legal education and law reform. This policy aligns with NCROSS call for increased funding for these services. It does not address the need for alternative court processes or improving the expertise of lawyers working with people with disability or mental illness.

Neither the Liberals and Nationals nor Labor have given strong policy commitments to this recommendation from Vote 1. The Liberals and Nationals have touched on this issue in their response to the Community Justice Coalition but this was in terms of review and consideration rather than a definite commitment.

### 6.4 Reducing Crime

**Vote 1 Fairness** calls for:

- increased investment in problem solving courts and diversionary schemes;
- better utilisation and expansion of alternatives options to prison;
- increased funding for post release services and inmate rehabilitation and training; and
- regular evaluation of programs.

The Greens policy commits them to prioritise programs that reduce entry into the criminal justice system and provide alternatives to imprisonment. They commit to strategies such as access to education, training and work, drug and alcohol treatment and breaking the cycle of disadvantage.

continued on page 7 ▶

## Improving the Justice System

◀ continued from page 3

The Greens specifically recognise the need for programs for Aboriginal people, people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, people with mental illness and people with disability. The policy also recognises the need for early intervention programs and post release services. There is also a call to trial justice reinvestment especially in disadvantaged communities to address the causes of crime and recidivism. There is also a call for effective programs within prison to reduce recidivism. The Greens policy aligns with all the NCOSS Vote 1 recommendations under 'Reducing Crime'.

The Liberals and Nationals have made a number of specific policy announcements on reducing crime. They have stated that they will 'step up the fight' on drug addiction and re-offending by creating a Metropolitan Drug Treatment for 300 inmates. It will be aimed at those who are convicted of minor drug related crimes with a focus on treatment, education and therapeutic services. The Liberals and Nationals also announced that they would build a second Drug Court in Sydney, which would

**"Of particular note are the increase in alternatives to prison, review of bail laws and a reduction in the time spent on remand..."**

include detoxification, drug testing, monitoring and treatment facilities. They have also promised an additional \$20m over 4 years to fund prison education programs and greater use of non-custodial punishments for 'less serious' offences.

The Liberals and Nationals have also released their response to the Community Justice Coalition election questionnaire and while this is not a specific policy announcement it does provide some indication as to the Liberals and Nationals law and

justice focus. The responses are largely that the Liberals and Nationals say they will 'consider, review, attempt, engage and encourage' rather than actually committing to actions. Some of the areas that they touch on include a needle exchange program, an increase in alternatives to prison for minor offences, lower sentences and a review of bail and sentencing laws.

Despite this, NCOSS welcomes the Liberals and Nationals announcements as many align with the general direction of the NCOSS Vote 1 recommendations. Of particular note are the increase in alternatives to prison, review of bail laws and a reduction in the time spent on remand as well as the additional Drug Court and education programs. However without further

details it is difficult to know what alternatives are being proposed and what outcomes the Liberals and Nationals are seeking from the numerous reviews and considerations. For example a review of sentencing laws could mean an increase in length of punishment rather than a decrease. NCOSS is also concerned that the Drug Treatment Facility is in reality a specialised prison rather than a diversionary or alternate option to prison.

Labor has committed to investing an additional \$3.6m in a new Drug Court based in the Downing Centre in Sydney. However, the bulk of Labor's policies regarding Justice appear to be a series of re-announcements about current commitments including increasing the strength of the police force and new equipment for police. They have also announced that they will introduce new laws including tougher penalties for criminals who engage police in dangerous pursuits and new unexplained wealth laws that give police new powers to target organised crime suspects. As with previous years there is a focus on 'getting tough' rather than actually addressing the underlying causes of crime and reducing recidivism. NCOSS, while welcoming additional funding for a new Drug Court program, is disappointed that this is the ongoing focus for Labor.

## 7

## More Affordable Housing and Less Homelessness

### 7.1 Growth in Housing Supply

**Vote 1 Fairness** is seeking:

- construction of new social housing under the Commonwealth's stimulus package be completed by June 2011;
- an additional 3,000 social housing dwellings be built in conjunction with the Commonwealth by 2014-15; and
- measures to ensure NSW receives its fair share of additional subsidies under NRAS.

In its housing policy statement and its written response to the NCOSS election platform, the Liberals and Nationals do not commit to any specific targets for the growth of either social housing or affordable housing under the National Rental Affordable Housing Scheme (NRAS). The main thrust of its housing policy is to accelerate the release of housing blocks by Landcom, in the hope that this will improve access to home ownership.



In its housing policy Labor commits to build all remaining new social housing dwellings under the Stimulus Package by March 2012. It does not commit to a further social housing growth program once the Stimulus Package is completed. Through the Stimulus Package and stock transfer programs, it promises to grow community housing to 30,000 dwellings by 2016. While committing to further growth of affordable housing under NRAS, it does not commit to any specific target or state share of national growth.

Labor says it will fund a business case creation of the 'Homes for Homes' model of funding new community housing, using voluntary contributions of 0.1% from the sale of private housing.

The Greens support expanding social and affordable housing, including community and co-operative housing. They have not committed to a specific target. They support using developer levies to generate new affordable housing.

### 7.2 New Programs Linking Housing and Support

**Vote 1 Fairness** calls for:

- building on the outcomes of the trials under the Housing and Human Services Accord to improve access to housing for clients with complex needs;
- allocation of \$80m over four years for joined up service delivery projects; and
- termination of the Joint Guarantee of Service (JGOS) and development of a new agreement in close consultation with the NGO sector.

The Liberals and Nationals recognise the importance of service integration but has not committed to any specific new programs that link housing and support services.

Labor's mental health policy statement promises an additional \$20.8m over four years to double the number of places



continued on page 8 ▶

## More Affordable Housing and Less Homelessness

◀ continued from page 7

available under the Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI). This would take the total number of HASI places to 2,200.

The Greens say that people with special needs should be housed with adequate support but have not outlined any specific details.

### 7.3 Reducing Homelessness

**Vote 1 Fairness** is seeking:

- development of a comprehensive strategy to ensure people leaving prison are not discharged into homelessness;
- development of clear pathways into long term housing for young people leaving out of home care and juvenile detention centres; and
- expansion of assertive outreach and street to home programs in areas outside inner Sydney and Newcastle.

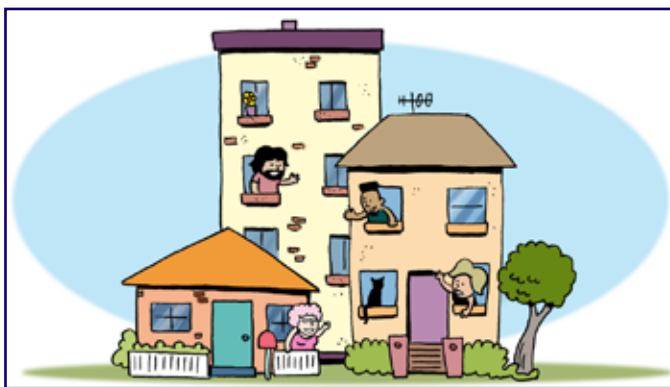
In its response to Homelessness NSW, the Liberals and Nationals commit to the White Paper targets of halving homelessness by 2020. It does not commit to any new spending measures. It has promised to introduce legislation raising to 17 years the age limit for Community Services to investigate reports that a young person is homeless. It has not specified what additional resources will be available to assist young people in this situation.

In its housing policy statement Labor commits to continue to work to reduce homelessness and to honour its commitments under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, the NSW Homelessness Action Plan and ten Regional Homelessness Action Plans. It makes no new commitments.

The Greens have committed to building or acquiring new permanent supported accommodation to reduce homelessness.

### 7.4 Better Protection for Boarders and Lodgers

**Vote 1 Fairness** calls for the introduction of occupancy agreements and better regulation of licensed boarding houses. *Vote 1 Fairness* also calls for targeted financial assistance for essential fire safety works and more beds as well as an expansion of support services available to boarding house residents.



The Liberals and Nationals have not made any specific election commitments on the issue of boarders and lodgers. It has been critical of ADHC's performance in regulating the quality of care in licensed residential centres.

Labor has not made any specific election commitments on the issue of boarders and lodgers. Its Affordable Rental Housing SEPP encourages the development of new model boarding houses and provides for funding for new boarding house places.

The Greens have committed to introduce tenancy rights in law for boarders and lodgers and students living in university or college accommodation.

### 7.5 Improved Aboriginal Housing

**Vote 1 Fairness** is seeking the maintenance of the Aboriginal Housing Office as an autonomous planning and funding body that is accountable to an all Aboriginal board and that Aboriginal housing programs obtain a fair share of funding to expand supply.

The Liberals and Nationals have not made any explicit commitments regarding the growth of Aboriginal housing, including Aboriginal community housing.

In its housing policy, Labor commits to complete the 310 new houses that the Commonwealth is funding under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing and to continue its Build and Grow Strategy for Aboriginal community housing. It has not made any new commitments.

The Greens support adequately funding an Aboriginal housing plan to address unmet need but have not outlined any details.

## 8 Better Health and Well Being

### Overview

Health has been a strongly contested election issue, with more than 20 announcements by the major parties so far. The NCOSS *Vote 1 Fairness* priorities have been addressed to varying extents, although the health dollars continue to be dominated by hospitals. Labor has committed \$2.3bn in new health facilities funding as part of a \$4bn package, and the Liberals and Nationals have committed to an additional \$885m with a total investment of \$3bn.

Mental health has received some increased attention from the major parties, albeit significantly less than hospitals. NSW Labor have announced a \$98m policy that includes establishing a new Mother and Baby inpatient unit, piloting three community-based child and youth intervention teams, and doubling the number of Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI) packages. The NSW Liberals and Nationals have said they will establish a Mental Health Commission with a quarantined mental health budget, and has committed additional recurrent funding for LifeLine. The NSW Greens have committed to a range of measures including increased funding for public hospital and community-based mental health services across the care continuum. These policies are all positive measures in a significantly under-resourced area.

On national health reform, the NSW Government has given in-principle support for a revised COAG agreement. The NSW Liberals and Nationals have reserved their position until the full agreement is finalised in mid-2011. The Shadow Health Minister has said that the Liberals and Nationals remain committed to their own reform policy 'Making it Work' to introduce Health Districts governed by Local Health Boards. In keeping with this policy, they will revise the new Local Health Network boundaries and the new governance arrangements, including Governing Council composition and the Clinical Support Divisions.

While both NSW Labor and the Coalition have commented on increasing clinician engagement in the health system governance, only the NSW Greens have advocated for increased representation of patients and local community members, which NCOSS believes is important to ensure responsive and appropriate health services.

continued on page 9 ▶

## Better Health and Well Being

◀ continued from page 8

### 8.1 Giving Women Choice

**Vote 1 Fairness** is seeking that abortion be removed from the Crimes Act and that funding be provided for a state wide Pregnancy Options Counselling and Support Service.



The only party to have addressed the issue of giving women choice and removing abortion from the Crimes Act is the Greens who have launched a campaign with women's organisations seeking support for removing abortion from the Crimes Act. The Greens support the Victorian model.

The other outstanding issue is that no party has addressed the need for increased access to a full range of support services for pregnant women.

### 8.2 Improving Oral Health

**Vote 1 Fairness** calls for the reform of the public oral health system, including workforce initiatives as well as investment in public dental infrastructure.



Despite significant and persistent inequities, only the NSW Greens have made oral health a priority. Their policy aligns with the NCOSS recommendations in *Vote 1 Fairness NSW*, and includes increased funding of an additional \$100m over three years for public dental services, funding targeted initiatives for those most in need, and investment in comprehensive workforce development.

Labor has committed to some increased funding of \$12.5m over four years to provide nearly 20,000 more free dental services and procedures for concession card holders. While NCOSS welcomes these targeted initiatives, the funding package is grossly inadequate. It would not address the chronic under-funding of the public dental system or workforce maldistribution and would still leave almost 100,000 people on the public waiting list.

Disappointingly, the NSW Liberals and Nationals have not released an oral health policy, despite previously acknowledging the urgent need for action and committing funds during the 2007 election. In response to *Vote 1 Fairness*,

**"...the issues are already well-documented and that the future NSW Government must take immediate action to address them..."**

they have advised that they will continue to work with NCOSS to develop oral health policy. The Shadow Health Minister has publicly stated that they will establish a Taskforce on oral health. NCOSS believes that the issues are already well-documented and that the future NSW Government must take immediate action to address them.

### 8.3 Recognising the Importance of Community Health

**Vote 1 Fairness** has called for a shift in the balance of investment towards community health, particularly early intervention and prevention services provided by NGOs, to deliver a fairer, more sustainable health system. There have been piecemeal promises from both parties, but these are far outweighed by hospital funding commitments.



Labor has maintained existing commitments to health prevention and promotion programs and community health investment in its Right Care, Right Place, Right Time policy. A small, but welcome inclusion is an additional \$7m to employ 15 refugee health nurses as part of the new NSW Refugee Health Plan.

Just under half of Labor's mental health policy funding (\$42.8m) is directed to community-based supports, including HASI, Assertive Community Response Teams, and the NGO Family and Carer Mental Health Program. They have also committed to fund a new mental health project delivered by ACON and to establish a new Ministerial Advisory Committee on GLBT health and wellbeing.

The NSW Liberals and Nationals have committed to establish an Office of Preventative Health to manage existing health promotion funding. They will increase funding for Chronic Disease Management in a community setting and Community Health Checks through local pharmacies. Other commitments include \$10m in new funding for government and NGOs to provide drug and alcohol treatment and rehabilitation programs, additional recurrent funding for Lifeline, and continuing the Pharmacy Needle and Syringe Programs, which is strongly supported by NCOSS. While these commitments are all welcome improvements, they are not enough to deliver a health system focused on wellness and community-based care recommended in *Vote 1 Fairness NSW*.

The Greens' platform emphasises preventative health care in line with *Vote 1 Fairness*. It has a range of measures on primary health care and population health, including increasing funding for health promotion and prevention, and improving access to community health, although lacks specific details. NCOSS is particularly pleased that the NSW Greens have recognised the broader responsibility for health by committing to develop an integrated whole of government framework for good health, and conduct public health impact assessments for major developments.

### 8.4 Access to Health and Related Services

**Vote 1 Fairness** is seeking:

- planning for health services to include access issues;
- transport to be a key consideration; and
- adequate funding for health related transport and associated expenses.



Labor has announced that they will provide an additional \$1m in funding for the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS). In addition they will have NSW Health review the IPTAAS policy to ensure that it provides the necessary levels of assistance to people in need. In addition from the 1 January 2011 patients who need to regularly travel and accumulate distance of 200km or more per week to access renal dialysis will be eligible for financial assistance. In all 300 patients on dialysis are expected to benefit.

While this is a welcome increase it only goes part way to addressing the many issues and problems faced by people utilising IPTAAS and health related transport in general, specifically the low levels of reimbursement for travel and accommodation costs, the administration fee for those without a pension card and the requirements for upfront payments. There are also a range of other groups who face similar travel issues as those on renal dialysis such as people undergoing chemotherapy. This policy also fails to address the ongoing issues in health related transport.

The Liberals and Nationals have also announced that they will boost the IPTAAS budget by 50% increasing the travel and accommodation rate for the average claim by approximately \$100. This will mean an additional \$28m in funding over four years. The Liberals and Nationals have also stated that they

continued on page 10 ▶

### 9.1 Fairer Rebates for Energy

**Vote 1 Fairness** called for the energy rebates to be extended to all low income households (as measured by possession of a Health Care Card).



Labor met this call in March 2010 by extending the energy rebate to all households with a Health Care Card. Further Labor increased the rebates from \$130 per annum to \$145 per annum from 1 July 2010.

Having already met the NCOSS call for fairer rebates, the Labor policy announcement of Delivering Fairness for Families has gone further. Labor has committed to increasing the Energy Rebate to \$250 per annum from 1 July 2011 for low income households in possession of a health care card. Labor also committed to extending the energy rebate to households earning less than \$150,000.

While NCOSS welcomes the increase for health care card holders we still request that energy rebates be moved in line with energy prices so that the value is not eroded over time. NCOSS does not support the extension of energy rebates to households earning up to \$150,000 pa. NCOSS believes that this money could be better spent on energy efficiency measures for low to medium income households.

The Liberals and Nationals Plan for an Affordable and Sustainable Energy Industry includes an increase in the Energy Rebate for low income households (in possession of a health care card) each year for the next four years starting at \$200 per annum from 1 July 2011 to \$235 per annum from 1 July 2014. The plan also proposes an expansion of eligibility to families in receipt of Family Tax Benefit Part A or B. This will start at \$75 pa from 1 July 2012 increasing to \$150 per annum from 1 July 2014. Low income households with children who possess a health care card and are in receipt of Family Tax Benefit will be eligible for both rebates up to \$250 per annum from July 2012.

NCOSS welcomes the proposal to increase the Energy Rebate for households in possession of a health care card. However, NCOSS believes that widening the eligibility for the rebate to families in receipt of Family Tax Benefits (earning up to \$150,000 pa) is not the optimum use of these funds. NCOSS would prefer greater assistance be provided to struggling households to reduce their energy consumption.

The Liberals and Nationals scheme may be slightly better targeted than the Labor's Fairness for Families announcement

**"The current concession system is complicated and adding more concessions and extending them only makes it more so."**

but it suffers from the same problem of not matching expected energy price increases over time.

On 1 March, The Greens announced their Affordable and Sustainable NSW plan. The plan aims to reduce household energy and water bills by up to \$1,000 per year through

a combination of reducing capital expenditure on energy networks, closing the desalination plant and energy efficiency measures for households and businesses.

NCOSS supports the ambitious goal of reducing household energy and water bills. However, NCOSS would like to see a commitment to energy rebates for low income households and targeted energy (and water) efficiency measures for low income households.

### 9.2 A Simpler Framework for Transport Concessions

**Vote 1 Fairness** calls for a simplified two type concession system, applied equitably across rural and regional areas and all transport types.



The Greens have called for the retention and extension of concession ticket provisions, including periodicals, across all private providers of public transport. The Liberals and Nationals have indicated its support for the existing transport concession system and has no plans for changes. Labor has not made any announcements regarding transport concessions other than the retention of the \$2.50 Pensioner Excursion Ticket.

The current concession system is complicated and adding more concessions and extending them only makes it more so. It is this complicated system that has been one of the barriers to an integrated ticketing system in NSW.

### 9.3 Equitable Access to Senior's Card Benefits for Aboriginal People

**Vote 1 Fairness** calls for the eligible age for the Seniors Card to be lowered to 45 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



While the Liberals and Nationals have said they will consider this, should they be elected to Government, neither the Greens nor Labor have made specific commitments on this issue.

### Better Health and Well Being

◀ continued from page 9

will review the charging of an administration fee, distance eligibility criteria (especially for those with chronic diseases), parking arrangements and form complexity. They have also stated that they will consider the implementation of the recommendations from the Senate Review of Patient Assisted Travel Schemes.

These are welcome announcements and the additional funding will bring NSW more in line with other States. It is also a good step towards achieving the recommendations that NCOSS has in its *Vote 1 Fairness*. However, reimbursement of \$60 per night is still well below average accommodation costs and does not assist people who cannot pay upfront. As with Labor there are no announcements around addressing health related transport.

### 8.5 Supporting People to Stop Smoking

In line with our recommendation in *Vote 1 Fairness* NSW, NCOSS is pleased that concession card holders will have access to nicotine patches on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) following the Commonwealths announcement in December 2010.



Neither major party has specifically committed to the second recommendation made to fund a smoking cessation trainer. However both parties have indicated their support for on-going tobacco control initiatives. The NSW Liberals and Nationals have stated that they are committed to maintaining QuitLine and to reducing smoking prevalence in high risk disadvantaged groups. Labor has also said they will further restrict smoking in workplaces, outdoor dining and other public places.

# 10 An Effective Transport System

There have been extensive announcements by both the Coalition and Labor in relation to transport infrastructure including the roll out of rail lines such as the North West and South West rail links. While these are all important announcements these are not issues that have been highlighted in the NCOSS Election Document Vote 1 and as such they have not been analysed in this document.

## 10.1 Integrated Fares and Information

**Vote 1 Fairness** is seeking an integrated ticketing system and an extension of the passenger information system to rural areas.

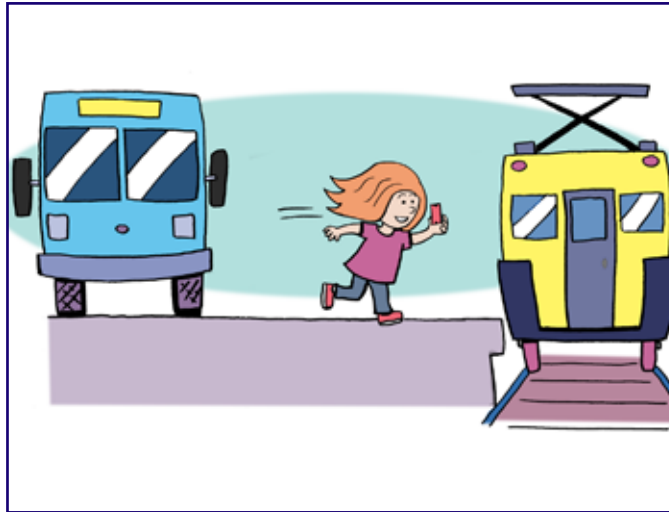


The Greens policy on Transport makes a series of statements about improvements to make the public transport system more affordable and accessible. It also states that there needs to be improvements in public transport within and between regional centres. The policy also outlines the need for information to be provided in print and by phone and in other languages and it calls for integrated ticketing.

The Greens announcement for integrated ticketing is welcome, but would be complicated for their calls for more concessions (see Fairer Concessions). While NCOSS also supports the need for information to be provided in a range of formats and languages there is a need for the existing information service to be expanded across the whole of NSW, especially rural passengers.

Labor have made a number of policy announcements that are associated with integrated fares and ticketing. They have restated their implementation of MyZone, which applies across the entire CityRail, State Transit, Sydney Ferries and private bus networks in the greater Sydney region including the Blue Mountains, Southern Highlands, Illawarra, Central Coast and Hunter. While MyZone has been a positive step towards an integrated ticketing system there are still a number of steps to go before it can be considered a fully integrated system including the addition of the monorail, light rail and private ferries, more cost-friendly 'all zones' ticket, integrated tickets for travel other than into the city and the roll out of MyZone across rural and regional NSW.

Labor has also announced that they would cap increases in public transport fares to the rate of inflation (Consumer Price Index) to ease the cost of living pressures on NSW families.



This would be in place of the current fare determination process carried out by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART). This announcement is considered to be a further step in Labor's aim to reduce public transport fares, which commenced with MyZone and continued with a fare freeze in December 2010.

As with the MyZone announcements there are still a number of issues that need to be addressed if this is truly about delivering fairness to families across NSW. For example rural fares tend to be higher than metropolitan fares and this change will still maintain that disparity. Cheaper fares do not address the vexed issue of an integrated ticketing system and a fairer concession system. These must be addressed if fairness in public transport is to be achieved.

The Liberals and Nationals have announced they will create an Integrated Transport Authority to do transport policy including planning, infrastructure, fares, ticketing and customer information. Under this structure, the operational transport agencies, such as RailCorp, State Transit Authority and Sydney Ferries, will be focused on front line service delivery. However they will still play a lead role in their specific transport mode. An Independent Board comprising a panel of experts will oversee the new Authority. The Board will be at 'arms length' from the day-to-day running of transport services but will play

a critical role in keeping the State Government accountable on transport policy and providing expert advice.

Labor has already created an integrated transport authority with the creation of Transport NSW. This has primary responsibility for coordination, policy and planning, transport services and infrastructure. Its operating entities are Railcorp, STA, RTA, Sydney Ferries, TCA and Country Rail Authority. Transport NSW has also announced the creation of a Transport Advisory Council. The Liberals and Nationals policy does not appear to include the RTA, which could lead to competition between roads and public transport. However Transport NSW does not have the independence that the proposed Coalition Authority will have.

## 10.2 Improved Access to Transport for Disadvantaged People and Communities

**Vote 1 Fairness** calls for additional funding for the Community Transport Program and that this funding be available to all community transport providers.



The Liberals and Nationals have announced that they will double Community Transport Program funding by \$12m dollars over four years. They will also establish a "one stop shop" within Transport NSW for Community Transport providers to improve communication, efficiency and reduce unnecessary administration costs. They will also establish an appropriate driver accreditation framework to ensure Community Transport providers can enhance their services and ensure utmost safety of volunteers, employees and clients. The Liberals and Nationals have also committed to appropriate data collection so that proper assessment is made on an ongoing basis of unmet community transport needs in both health and non-health related services.

This announcement is strongly supported by NCOSS. It recognises the ongoing poor levels of funding under the current CTP along with increasing demand as well as the importance of better administration, driver accreditation and strong data collection. However it is unclear as to whether the increased funding will be rolled out across NSW so that all community transport providers have CTP funding.

Neither Labor nor the Greens have made announcements specifically on funding for community transport.

## 11.1 Regenerating Communities

**Vote 1 Fairness** calls for:

- testing of a range of models for mixed tenure communities;
- developing a formal protocol for engagement with tenants and other stakeholders in redeveloping social housing areas;
- development of a shared equity scheme to assist social housing tenants maintain a modest mortgage;
- work in partnership with the Commonwealth and others to improve training and employment opportunities for social housing tenants; and
- conduct a scoping exercise to identify communities with large concentrations of disadvantaged private tenants that may be suitable for regeneration.

The Liberals and Nationals have not made any commitment about the extent of redevelopment of public housing estates that they have in mind or about engagement with tenants, NGOs and councils in the redevelopment process.

In its housing policy Labor commits to continuing efforts to deconcentrate public housing estates at Airds/Bradbury, Bonnyrigg, Glebe, Minto, Telopea, Riverwood and Villawood. It promises there will be no net loss of social housing stock as a result of the redevelopment process. It makes no explicit commitment about engagement with tenants, NGOs and councils.

The Greens have not released a formal policy on the redevelopment of housing estates but are opposed to the use of Public Private Partnerships.

## 11.2 Make Housing and Public Facilities More Accessible

**Vote 1 Fairness** calls for:

- 10% of all new multi unit residential developments be adaptable;
- all new multi unit housing be visitable; and
- a formal plan of action to improve access to public facilities.

The Liberals and Nationals have promised to invest \$60m to deliver easy access upgrades for an additional eight City Rail

stations. They have not indicated a specific timetable for the completion of these upgrades.

The Liberals and Nationals have not made any commitment to introduce any mandatory requirements for new multi-unit residential housing to be adaptable or visitable.

Labor has not made any commitment to introduce any mandatory requirements for new multi-unit residential housing to be adaptable or visitable.

The Greens have not made any commitment to introduce any mandatory requirements for new multi-unit residential housing to be adaptable or visitable.

## 11.3 Improve the Planning System

**Vote 1 Fairness** is seeking:

- plans for development in new areas happen in conjunction with the provision of new rail services;
- maintain the capacity of local government to require developers to meet the capital cost of agreed community facilities;
- require Government human service agencies to work with the Department of Planning to develop forward plans for human services in line with population growth targets;
- new urban areas and major redevelopments include formal health impact assessments based on healthy urban design principles;
- develop a comprehensive whole of government food policy to guide decision making; and

- mitigate against the impact of climate change for low income households through an expanded refit program and an expansion of NILS to include solar hot water, solar panels and rainwater tanks

**"The Liberals and Nationals response ... does not contain any specific commitments to better link land use planning and human services..."**

The Liberals and Nationals have promised to completely overhaul the State's planning legislation to return control to local communities. In its response to the Local Government and Shires Association it claims the Affordable Rental Housing SEPP is having extremely deleterious effects on communities and is not reflective of the Liberals and Nationals strategic

planning approach. It does not specifically indicate whether any replacement policies will be implemented governing the provision of boarding houses, group homes, social housing or affordable housing.

The Liberals and Nationals response to the NCOSS state election platform does not contain any specific commitments to better link land use planning and human services, to promote healthy urban design, or promote food security. It has indicated that it will change the Metropolitan Strategy to place greater emphasis on population growth in urban fringe areas, and to divert growth to regional areas.

At the time of writing Labor has not responded to this element of the NCOSS state election platform.

At the time of writing The Greens have not responded to this element of the NCOSS state election platform. They support a complete overhaul of the state's planning legislation.

For more information about the parties' respective policies go to the following websites:

### The Coalition

[www.nsw.liberal.org.au/policies](http://www.nsw.liberal.org.au/policies)  
[nsw.nationals.org.au](http://nsw.nationals.org.au)

### Labor

[www.nswalp.com/policies](http://www.nswalp.com/policies)

### The Greens

[nsw.greens.org.au/policies/nsw](http://nsw.greens.org.au/policies/nsw)



<http://www.>

## 12 Strengthening the Community Sector

### 12.1 A Sensible and Whole of NSW Government Funding Policy

**Vote 1 Fairness** calls for a common funding policy, and practice, negotiated with the sector, that applies across Government.



### 12.2 An Industry Plan for the Sector

**Vote 1 Fairness** calls for funding to develop and implement a state wide industry plan by the sector for the sector.



### 12.3 An Effective Compact/Relationship between the NSW Government and the Sector

**Vote 1 Fairness** calls for a revitalised Compact between the Government and the sector that allows for greater collaboration in the development of policy to social issues, recognition and utilisation of the sector's networks and expertise as well as a process that is resourced with clear outcomes and a process for review.



Labor, in its Community Services Policy, has committed to:

- in conjunction with NCOSS, reviewing and revitalising the Government/community sector compact Working Together for NSW;
- seek the Federal Government's cooperation in a project to streamline national regulation in recognition of the red tape burden for agencies that operate across state and territory boundaries;
- further reduce red tape by cutting unnecessary rules and regulations that impact on the non-government sector's ability to deliver services to the community; and
- work with NCOSS and FONGA on a Workforce Reform Agenda to support a strong and sustainable sector including: worker qualifications, consistency in classifications across organisations and attraction and retention of staff.

The Liberals and Nationals have, in other policies, recognised the role of the non-government sector in both delivering services and representing and advocating for the needs of

individuals and communities. In responding to *Vote 1 Fairness*, for example, the Liberals and Nationals clearly indicate that they will engage with NGOs as stakeholders when considering disability service provision. It is also implied that the commitment to return as much decision making as possible to local communities would involve NGOs in those communities. However, there is no specific proposal to have a formal relationship with the sector through a revitalised Compact or other process that addresses the specific issues identified by the sector over many years.

The Greens have made no formal announcements regarding the Community Sector and NGOs although there is a recognition of the role in many of their policies.



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# NCOSS Community Jobs

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**contact:** 02 9211 2599 x115 | [jobs@ncoss.org.au](mailto:jobs@ncoss.org.au) | [www.ncoss.org.au/jobs](http://www.ncoss.org.au/jobs)

# New South Wales State Election 2011

# VOTE



## FAIRNESS IN NSW

[www.ncoss.org.au/vote1fairness](http://www.ncoss.org.au/vote1fairness)



Please show your support and LIKE us on Facebook: <http://on.fb.me/gHWWQs>

### The next New South Wales state election will be held on 26 March 2011...

NCOSS believes a fairer society is a better society for us all. It is, therefore, in everyone's interests to care about what happens to the most vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalised in our communities. The NCOSS 2011 State Election Platform – **Vote 1 Fairness in NSW** – calls for a range of measures that will make a difference for those people and communities that are doing it tough. Real, practical ideas that deliver improved outcomes and build a fairer society.

**Vote 1 Fairness in NSW** is a call for all current and aspiring politicians to agree to support measures that will contribute in a real and meaningful way to a fairer, more just and sustainable society. It is a call for us to make sure that when we vote in the State Election we are voting for fairness not just for ourselves but for us all.

Our website will be updated frequently throughout the coming months, including our policy documents, fact sheets, submissions and media releases. We'll also have links to party policies, a summary of party announcements as they apply to **Vote 1 Fairness in NSW** recommendations and links to party websites.

