



ncoss

NSW Council of Social Service

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION



About NCOSS

The NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS) works with and for people experiencing poverty and disadvantage to see positive change in our communities.

When rates of poverty and inequality are low, everyone in NSW benefits. With 80 years of knowledge and experience informing our vision, NCOSS is uniquely placed to bring together civil society to work with government and business to ensure communities in NSW are strong for everyone.

As the peak body for health and community services in NSW we support the sector to deliver innovative services that grow and evolve as needs and circumstances evolve.

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Message from the CEO

There are almost 900,000 people in NSW who are experiencing poverty today. More than one in five of those

people are children. Sydney has a higher rate of poverty (15%) than any capital city in Australia – largely due to our high cost of housing. We know that Aboriginal people, people from CALD backgrounds, people with disability, people who are unemployed, people with mental health concerns, older people and young people are at greater risk of experiencing poverty and disadvantage. We also know that everyone has different experiences, needs and aspirations, depending on the place they live, their culture and identity and their life experiences. And we know that any one of us is just one step away from this disadvantage.

But we also know that poverty is a choice – not of the people who experience it but of the society that creates it. And today, we say we need to choose a different way.

For 80 years NCOSS has made the case for a society in NSW where everyone can share in the opportunity and dignity created by being one of the richest places on earth. Our annual Pre-Budget Submission (PBS) is an important part of this advocacy, and an important demonstration of our partnership with the NSW Government to ensure their Budget delivers for everyone.

This year we have consulted more widely, and more deeply than ever before. We have drawn on the experience and aspirations of organisations working for and with people experiencing poverty and disadvantage, through workshops right across the state. We asked them to describe the sort of society they and the people they worked with aspire to. We asked them to identify the things that stood in their way of achieving that. Most importantly, we asked them to help us describe and shape the solutions and interventions that would make a real difference in the lives of the people they work with. And finally, we asked them to review and endorse this submission – and literally hundreds of them have!

I was so inspired by the wisdom and aspiration that came from this process. People are excited about our collective capacity to make a difference, and motivated to take their part in our shared advocacy. As a result, seven key priorities for this budget were identified, and seven recommendations that would make a real difference in the lives of people experiencing poverty. We kept it tight, because we wanted to focus on where we could make an impact.

I am sure these seven priorities will not be a surprise to you – ending homelessness and addressing the housing affordability crisis, preventing domestic and family violence and supporting people who experience it, making sure that poverty in childhood doesn't affect your future life chances, ensuring more people can share in the dignity and opportunity of work, creating a transport system we can be proud of, and building the mental health services of the future. These weren't the only issues that came up of course, but we heard time and again that this is where ours, and the NSW Governments, focus should be in 2016/2017. And each of the priorities identified by our members is clearly linked to one or more of Premier Baird's priorities identified in his Making it Happen plan for NSW.

I look forward to working with you, and with the NSW Government to see this vision for our state realised. Together, we can make a difference and really improve the lives of people experiencing poverty in NSW. Together, we can make bring opportunity to everyone.



Tracy Howe
CEO

Introduction

NCOSS prepared its first Pre-Budget Submission (PBS) for the NSW State Government in 1979. The original purpose of the PBS, which continues today, was to ensure that the needs and aspirations of people experiencing poverty were part of the NSW Government's agenda and that this was reflected in the allocation of funds in the State Budget.

Over the years our PBS has been the culmination of research, analysis, consultation, discussion and debate, and has reflected the skills, expertise, judgement and commitment of NCOSS staff and members. In 2015 we have retained this overall approach, but have added more extensive participation of members and community stakeholders in determining the focus of the recommendations.

For the first time we travelled widely across NSW and held multiple conversations with members and community stakeholders to gain a deep understanding of what they envisaged as the appropriate focus of this year's PBS. These conversations outlined the type of community that members wanted for their clients, the barriers they experienced in providing this, and the possible solutions that could improve the lives of people experiencing poverty and disadvantage.

At the conclusion of this process we were able to identify 7 key areas that our members and other stakeholders had consistently raised right across the State. In each of these key areas we crafted fully costed recommendations. The consultations had also raised several factors that became guiding principles in the development of our PBS recommendations and their costings. These included the need for better designed service delivery models and procurement processes so as to facilitate and enhance the diversity of the sector, its ongoing sustainability, and its ability to collaborate; and funding policies, pricing models, and future avenues to support a sustainable sector.

We know that the experience of different people, with different cultural experiences, from across the state have different aspirations and needs. This document aims to include these diverse needs, aspirations and perspectives in its content, rather than create separate recommendations for people from Aboriginal, CALD, LGBTI, regional or other backgrounds and experiences.

Anchored in extensive member consultations, bolstered by thorough research, and shaped with the knowledge and expertise of NCOSS staff and our advisory panels, we have developed seven recommendations endorsed by our members. Each recommendation targets a specific need with the goal of making a difference for people experiencing poverty and disadvantage here in NSW.

Finally, each of these priorities and recommendations is clearly linked to one or more of the priorities identified by the Premier in his Making it Happen strategy for NSW.



Recommendations Summary

1. Housing and Homelessness

A place to call home is central to everything for people experiencing poverty, disadvantage and homelessness.

Recommendation: Invest an extra \$711 million and make smart policy choices that deliver a significant increase in the social and affordable housing stock in NSW, reduce homelessness, and properly maintain existing social housing stock.

2. Domestic and Family Violence

We need to prioritise ending sexual assault and domestic and family violence.

Recommendation: Invest \$106 million over the next three years in specialist, trauma-informed and trauma specialist responses to sexual assault and domestic and family violence including specialist community legal assistance.

3. Disability

People with disability must be included in the cultural, social and economic life of our state.

Recommendation: Invest \$15 million over three years in a Disability Inclusion Fund to ensure the representatives of people with disability can work with the NSW Government to make all NSW Government services (like health, education and transport) work for people with disability, deliver on the government's inclusion and participation agenda, and amplify the voice of people with disability in the cultural, social and economic life of our state.

4. Children, Youth and Families

Poverty in childhood shouldn't affect your life chances.

Recommendation: Invest \$543.2 million in key initiatives to ensure the life outcomes of NSW children aren't determined by their socio-economic status and the poverty they experience in childhood.

5. Employment

We need to use everyone's talents to build our shared opportunity and prosperity.

Recommendation: Invest \$83 million each year for three years in a comprehensive Local Jobs Partnerships program that resources local councils and community organisations to work with the most disadvantaged jobseekers to get them into work.

6. Mental Health

People experiencing mental ill health want support in their own communities.

Recommendation: Invest an additional \$469 million over four years into community based mental health services that offer a range of sub-acute, clinical and non-clinical services across NSW.

7. Transport

Transport services should be available, accessible and affordable for everyone – no matter where they live or who they are.

Recommendation: Improve access to public transport services by investing an extra \$42.7 million to expand investment in new infrastructure and services; make existing infrastructure and stock more accessible for people with disability; lower fares for people on low incomes and who are unemployed; and support Community Transport services.

Methodology

The 2015-2016 PBS process began with 21 consultations held across NSW, conducted over a six week period. 280 people attended the consultations, representing 197 organisations.



Consultations held in:

- Sydney
- Wilcannia
- Port Macquarie
- Kempsey
- Orange
- Broken Hill
- Dubbo
- Wagga Wagga
- Coffs Harbour
- Queanbeyan
- Lismore
- Newcastle
- Gosford
- Springwood
- Campbelltown
- Parramatta
- Albury
- Shellharbour

The consultations followed the “Harwood” framework. This framework is built around a series of community conversations and seeks to develop public knowledge based on experience and observation. Conversations are held within a community, about that community.

The Harwood framework seeks to understand the shared aspirations of a given community (in this case NCOSS members and other community organisations), what their challenges or issues are, and the changes or solutions that may assist in achieving the stated aspirations.

The information from these conversations was collated and analysed to arrive at the seven key priorities that appear in this PBS. These areas were identified as the most common issues facing communities across the State.

The public knowledge gleaned from the consultations was then brought together with the expert knowledge of NCOSS staff, relevant advisory panels and other experts in the field to develop the specific recommendations that appear here. These recommendations align with both the public and expert understandings of the issues facing communities state-wide. Significantly, they were also informed by the guiding principles outlined in our two major campaigns currently underway, 1 in 7 and A Fair Deal for Our Community Services.

The final recommendations were presented to our members for endorsement and as such provide a strong statement about the targeted measures that are needed to address poverty and disadvantage in NSW.

1. A place to call home is central to everything for people experiencing poverty, disadvantage and homelessness.



Premiers Priorities:

- Building Infrastructure
- Reducing Domestic Violence
- Reducing Youth Homelessness
- Faster Building Approvals

Recommendation:

Invest an extra \$711 million and make smart policy choices to deliver a significant increase in the social and affordable housing stock in NSW, reduce homelessness, and properly maintain existing social housing stock.

The end result:

People experiencing poverty and disadvantage live in secure, affordable, appropriate housing that meets their needs, and provides them with the ability to participate fully in the cultural, social and economic life of the state.

What's the issue?

Everyone needs a place to call home. But for families, households and people on low incomes, housing is unaffordable in many places in our state – particularly Sydney. Despite our wealth, the high cost of housing is creating poverty and disadvantage, and as a result, Sydney has a higher rate of poverty than any capital city in Australia at 15% and thousands of people experience homelessness every night. More than half of low to middle income families are experiencing housing stress, and this is a major driver of child poverty here in NSW. Many social housing tenants are also living in properties that urgently need maintenance. And there are different housing challenges faced by Aboriginal communities and peoples, and in regional areas.

Housing is also not an isolated problem. Service providers at every workshop across the state spoke of the criticality of housing to achieving employment, health, education and other goals. Homelessness and lack of affordable housing makes the rest of the service system unworkable.

We also know that the lack of affordable housing for people on low incomes is constraining growth, employment, participation and productivity in NSW. Business, developers, the community sector and people across the state agree that further smart policy and budget choices are needed to solve this wicked problem.

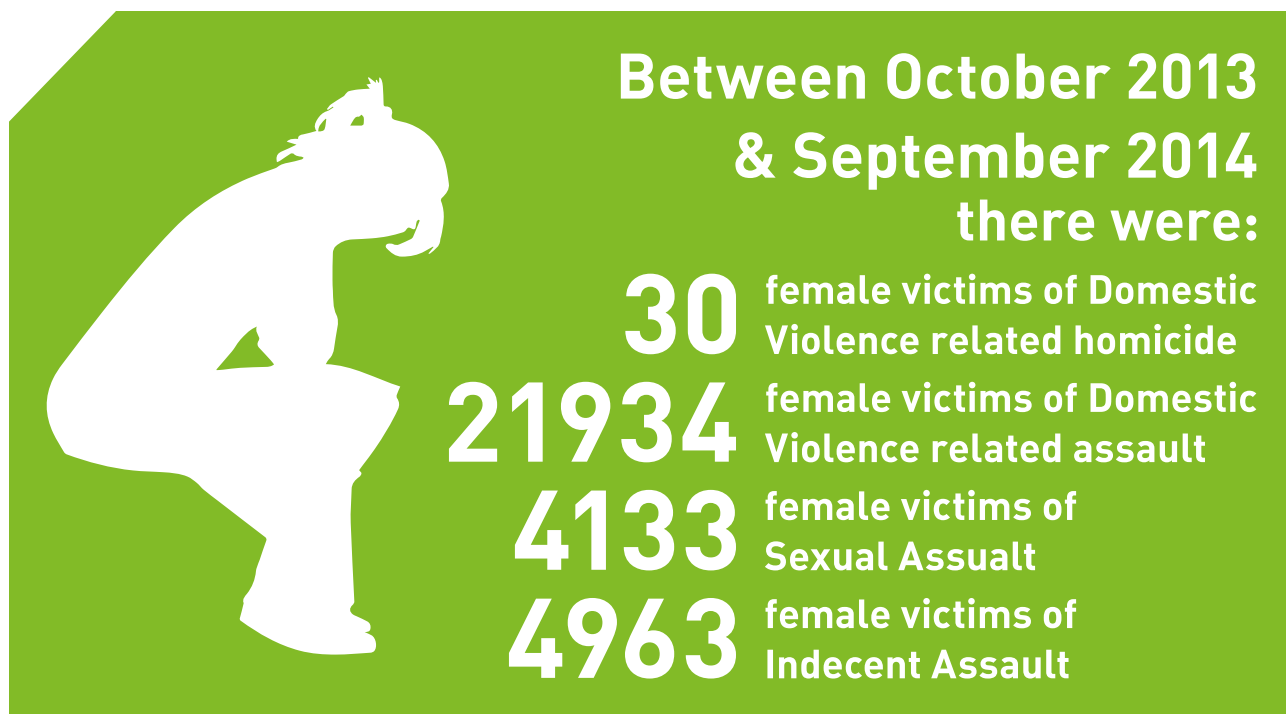
The action needed:

NCOSS applauds the NSW Government's decision to partner with NCSS and Infrastructure Partnerships Australia in the creation of the Social and Affordable Housing Fund, as a critical kick start to the investment that is needed. But there are other smart policy and budget choices we can make to ensure people experiencing poverty can access secure affordable housing that meets their needs, including:

- Continue the delivery of the NSW Government's \$1 billion Social and Affordable Housing Fund.
- Work with service providers, business and the community to find new and innovative ways to fund and deliver new social and affordable housing stock, beyond the Fund.
- Invest \$317 million to address the maintenance backlog in the public housing system.
- Invest an additional \$5.2 million per annum in tenancy advice and assistance.
- Support young people experiencing homelessness by committing long-term funding for the full six-year homelessness service reform period, guaranteeing at least \$389 million in funding beyond the four-year forward estimates.
- Implement policies that increase housing supply, particularly at the affordable end of the market.
- Implement Inclusionary Zoning to ensure that developers and builders set aside a share of affordable housing in any new construction project



2. We need to prioritise ending sexual assault and domestic and family violence



Premier's Priorities:

- Reducing domestic violence
- Protecting our Kids

Recommendations:

Invest \$106 million over the next three years in specialist, trauma-informed and trauma specialist responses to sexual assault and domestic and family violence including specialist community legal assistance.

The end result:

NSW is safe for women, and is free of sexual assault and domestic and family violence. Everyone in the community understands the underlying cause of SA/DFV (gender inequality) and opposes sexual assault and DFV in NSW. Until that is achieved, people who experience domestic and family violence and/or sexual assault have access to client-focused services that meet their needs regardless of location, culture, sexuality, gender, age and disability status.

What's the issue?

NSW crime statistics report close to 30,000 assaults, an average of 35 murders that are domestic violence related and almost to 900 sexual assaults per year. Women make up the vast majority of victims and research shows that approximately half of domestic violence assaults go unreported. Troublingly, women are less likely to report when they are pregnant or have experienced 5 incidences of abuse.

Everyone agrees that sexual assault and DFV are a crisis in NSW. We need to act now to ensure NSW is safe for women, children and those affected by sexual assault and DFV.

The action needed:

The NSW Government has demonstrated a commitment to responding to the DFV crisis by appointing a Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, and making a reduction in DFV reoffending one of the Premier's priorities. That said, a comprehensive, resourced strategy, based on A Safer State: a blueprint to end sexual assault and domestic and family violence in NSW to guide and prioritise its actions from 2016-2019 is needed to make serious inroads in this crisis.

- \$100 million over three years to meet the health, housing, justice and legal needs of people experiencing DFV and/or sexual assault across NSW. Funding must be allocated in consultation with leaders in this area, in ways that position services to respond to high-risk groups including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women; older women and younger women; women with disabilities; women from CALD communities; women in rural and regional communities; LGBTIQ people and women in prison and those exiting prison. Targeted funding must facilitate access and choice of specialist legal services such as community legal centres, Legal Aid, Aboriginal legal services, and family violence legal services.
- \$3 million over three years directed at men's behaviour change programs.
- \$1.5 million over three years directed at NGOs with sexual assault and domestic and family violence (DFV), gender equity and training experience to deliver prevention and respectful relationship programs in a range of settings including schools, sporting and community organisations.
- \$1.5 million over three years to resource training for workers outside of the sexual assault and DFV areas to develop trauma-informed skills, identify people at risk and support them to seek help.

Any investment should be flexible enough to ensure that regional responses can be implemented, gaps can be filled and barriers overcome. This might include funding transport options where distance between services exists and/or retrofitting to overcome accessibility limitations.



3. People with disability must be included in the cultural, social and economic life of our state



Premier's Priorities:

- Creating Jobs
- Improving Government Services
- Improving Education Results
- Improving Service Levels in Hospitals

Recommendation:

Invest \$15 million over three years in a Disability Inclusion Fund to ensure the representatives of people with disability can work with the NSW Government to make all NSW Government services (like health, education and transport) work for people with disability, deliver on the government's inclusion and participation agenda, and amplify the voice of people with disability in the cultural and economic life of our state.

The end result:

People with disability can access all NSW Government services, and are included in and can participate in the cultural and economic life of our state.

What's the issue?

There are 1.3 million people with disability in NSW, many of whom will not be eligible for support under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). While the NDIS is currently being implemented in NSW there will be limitations on what it can deliver, and people with disability will continue to use a range of NSW Government services that we all rely on like hospitals, schools and transport.

At the same time, the NSW Government has introduced the Disability Inclusion Act that includes obligations for each NSW Government agency to develop disability inclusion action plans.

Currently, NSW invests in a range of organisations to facilitate inclusion and ensure people with disability participate fully in the cultural and economic life of our state, whether or not they are eligible for disability services. This \$10 million annual investment is only guaranteed until 30 June 2016. By comparison, Victoria plans to invest \$10 million in an Inclusive Schools Fund, and other states have comprehensive plans to ensure that they can deliver on their inclusion agenda post NDIS implementation.

The action needed:

NSW must invest \$15 million over three years to create a Disability Inclusion Fund.

The creation of this Fund will ensure the Government can invest in inclusion activities like support programs for people with intellectual disability who come in contact with the NSW Criminal Justice System, advocacy for an inclusive health, education and transport system, making NSW Government services broadly accessible as a matter of course rather than creating special pathways for people with disability, and other programs that facilitate inclusion and participation.

Critically, this investment will assist the NSW Government deliver their inclusion and participation agenda, and ensure people with disability participate fully in the cultural and economic life of our state.



4. Poverty in childhood shouldn't affect your life chances



Premier's Priorities

- Tackling childhood obesity
- Improving education results
- Protecting our kids
- Reducing youth homelessness

Recommendation:

Invest \$543.2 million in key initiatives to ensure the life outcomes of NSW children aren't determined by their socio-economic status and the poverty they experience in childhood.

The end result:

Poverty no longer determines the future life chances of children in NSW.

What's the issue?

In New South Wales, 13.8% of children under the age of 15 are experiencing poverty – a rate higher than any other mainland state. Almost 1 in 7 children are living in households below the poverty line.

And we know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are overrepresented amongst children experiencing poverty and are particularly disadvantaged across a range of indicators.

Children and young people who experience poverty and disadvantage are more likely to have health and behavioural problems, experience housing and food insecurity, and not achieve their full potential at school. These childhood experiences have an impact across the entire life course, shaping their employment prospects, their health outcomes and sense of wellbeing.

And despite this, NSW spends less per child on early childhood education and care than any other state. This means that increasing our investment to the same level as South Australia would take an additional \$500 million per annum – even more if we brought it up to the levels of investment by the WA or NT Governments.

But living in poverty shouldn't determine a child's life chances or educational outcomes.

More support is needed to make sure no children are falling through the cracks, and to break the cycle of disadvantage.

The action needed:

Invest \$543.2 million in key initiatives to ensure children and young people experiencing poverty and disadvantage are given the best start in life including:

- An additional \$25 million to resource the state-wide roll-out of nurse-led home visiting programs for vulnerable families during the first two years of a child's life.
- Increase our investment in early childhood education by 166% or \$500 million per annum, to ensure all children can access quality early education from the age of three, to provide free services to children experiencing poverty and disadvantage, and to bring NSW to the middle of the pack in terms of investment in early childhood education.
- \$3.2 million for a Healthy Eating: Healthy Living Fund to establish and resource healthy eating initiatives such as breakfast programs in low socioeconomic primary and secondary schools.
- \$15 million in activities and programs that ensure children and young people are connected to their families and communities.



5. We need to use everyone's talents to build our shared opportunity and prosperity



Premier's Priorities:

- Creating Jobs
- Reducing Youth Homelessness
- Protecting our Kids

Recommendation:

Invest \$83 million each year for three years in a comprehensive Local Jobs Partnerships program, that resources local councils and community organisations to work with the most disadvantaged jobseekers to get them into work.

The end result:

Increasing employment among the most disadvantaged jobseekers has significant economic benefits to the state. When the most disadvantaged in our community are successful, we are all successful. The total effects for the decade subsequent to a project like this completing could be an additional \$8.9 billion in Gross State Product (GSP) and Gross Domestic Product (GDP); an additional \$2.46 billion in consumption; and an additional \$1.64 billion in state tax receipts.

What's the issue?

Unemployment causes poverty, affects physical and mental health, and reduces life satisfaction. While NSW has an unemployment rate of 6%, which is below the national average and lower than all other states, unemployment remains a persistent and serious issue in certain demographics, with the unemployment rate much higher among young jobseekers (12%), Aboriginal jobseekers (22%), and regional jobseekers (more than 20% in some regions). Also of particular concern are jobless families (14% of all families) as lack of paid employment is the most important cause of child poverty.

The Premier has committed his government to creating 150,000 jobs over the next four years. Achieving this will ensure more people can share in the prosperity created by Australia's wealthiest state. But if the most disadvantaged in our community cannot access the dignity, inclusion and opportunity that comes from being a worker, we will have failed them, and failed to take advantage of their talents to build our shared wealth.

The action needed:

We need to invest \$83 million each year for three years in a comprehensive Local Jobs Partnerships program, that resources local councils and community organisations to work with the most disadvantaged jobseekers to get them into work.

Local Job Partnerships is a three part program that will help address unemployment experienced by the most disadvantaged jobseekers. This partnership will bring together the community, business and government sectors to address unemployment in a localised way with a strong regional and community focus. It has three key elements:

- Set for Work helps disadvantaged jobseekers transition to employment and/or education and training. It specifically targets jobless families, regional, youth, and Aboriginal jobseekers, and funds organisations to deliver nationally recognised training up to Certificate III level; career advice; job preparation skills including resume writing, interview preparation, and workplace skills; and mentoring and post participation support.
- Empower helps disadvantaged youth exiting correctional facilities or subject to community-based orders gain the skills necessary to transition to employment and/or further education and training.
- Head Start provides time limited wage subsidies to local councils and private sector employers who employ disadvantaged jobseekers in a 12-month traineeship who have previously participated in either Set for Work or Empower.



6. People experiencing mental ill health want support in their own communities



© 2014 State of New South Wales

Acknowledgement: NSW Mental Health Commission (2014). Living Well: Putting people at the centre of mental health reform in NSW. Journey 1 infographic 1. Sydney, NSW Mental Health Commission.

Premier's Priorities:

- Improving Service Levels in Hospitals
- Improving Government Services

Recommendation:

Invest an additional \$469 million over four years into community based mental health services that offer a range of sub-acute, clinical and non-clinical services across NSW.

The end result:

Everyone in NSW can access community mental health services that meet their needs and respond to their cultural identity, background and experience; and are empowered to manage their mental health in their own communities as they arise and before acute responses are required.

What's the issue?

Mental illness is the third most common health condition in terms of burden of disease, and is closely associated with other health problems and socioeconomic disadvantage, including homelessness, unemployment and poverty. We also know that people experience their mental ill health in a range of different ways, and recovery is rarely a linear process. Difficulty accessing the right service when symptoms occur can mean people experience an escalation of their condition and require higher level responses in acute settings than would have been necessary if they had access to supports earlier on.

NSW invests less than other states in community mental health responses, and significantly less than the average of other states. In addition, a significant proportion of the investment in mental health services is targeted at acute responses, despite the fact that community based services are more cost effective, offer people early support that reduces the need for acute responses, and are preferred by people experiencing mental health concerns. Community based responses also allow people to stay in their community, maintain their connection with family, friends and workplaces and access other natural support networks.

Living Well, the 10-year strategic plan for mental health in NSW released in 2014, emphasises local solutions, respecting the expertise of Aboriginal people and the need for services to be delivered in culturally appropriate ways. This is consistent with what NCOSS heard during these consultations.

The action needed:

NSW should invest any new growth funding for mental health services, and at least \$469 million over four years, into community mental health responses, until our investment matches the average of the other states. This investment should be focused on:

- Community delivered programs that are managed locally to meet local needs, by organisations that know their community and can design outreach that works effectively in the local context.
- Sub-acute, short to medium stay facilities are funded to provide residential treatment and support in community settings that people can self-refer to when people experience an onset of symptoms.
- A mix of responses that include clinical and non-clinical services in the community.
- Access to trained peer mental health workers who can use their own lived experience to support others.
- Targeted funding for Aboriginal communities and service providers to design and deliver programs that enhance people's social and emotional well-being.
- Targeted funding to build and enhance collaboration between mainstream mental health services and specialist services that have the capacity to respond to the diversity in the local community.
- Transport to enhance availability of services to smaller rural, regional and remote.



7. Transport services should be available, accessible & affordable for everyone – no matter where they live or who they are



Premier's Priorities:

- Building Infrastructure
- Improving Government Services

Recommendation:

Improve access to public transport services by investing an extra \$42.7 million to:

- Expand investment in new infrastructure and services;
- Make existing infrastructure and stock more accessible for people with disability;
- Lower fares for people on low incomes and who are unemployed; and
- Support Community Transport services.

The end result:

People in NSW can access affordable, accessible public transport.

What's the issue?

Public transport is essential for people to live their day-to-day lives. Every day, public transport services are relied upon to go to work and access services like hospitals, child-care and schools.

Yet many people cannot access to the services they need.

In many parts of NSW services are either infrequent or non-existent, particularly in the regions. Otherwise, certain groups – such as people with disability, those on low incomes and people who are unemployed – are excluded due to problems with accessibility or affordability.

Often, service gaps are filled by Community Transport (CT) services operated by the non-government sector. However, with recent changes to service regulation and other government-led reforms to the sector, many CT services are struggling to survive.

The action needed:

New investment in regional infrastructure and services:

- Invest \$24.7 million to provide an extra 50 town-to-town bus and coach services in targeted regional centres in need of more services;
- Provide an additional two daily train services between Orange and Dubbo by including additional stops in existing limited stops services.
- Make transport more accessible for people with disability:
- Provide a clear and complete schedule for completing train station accessibility upgrades across the NSW and Sydney trains network; and
- Require contracted private bus services to meet standards under the Transport for NSW Disability Action Plan.
- Lower fares for people on low incomes and people who are unemployed:
- Reduce the daily cap for Concession Opal Card users from \$7.50 to \$2.50, in line with the Opal Gold Card.
- Provide \$1.5 million supplementary funding to the Community Transport sector to deliver the additional services required by transport disadvantaged clients no longer able to access the ADHC funding for disability-related transport, who are not eligible for an NDIS package.



Appendix: Summary of Consultation Outcomes

Community Aspirations

Community service organisations in New South Wales envisage a state where people live in communities that are vibrant and inclusive, where they have a sense of belonging and feel connected and supported.

They are caring, compassionate and cohesive communities that celebrate and embrace diversity. They recognise and accept people regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, ability, sexuality, health or socio-economic status. They do not stigmatise. These communities are built on positive relationships, where people are respected, valued, have dignity, and are happy.

These are communities that allow children to grow up in a safe environment, that take violence against women and children seriously, and where there are zero deaths from domestic and family violence.

These communities function on principles of justice and fairness, where access to basic human rights (food, healthcare, safety, justice, education, housing) are a given. Employment opportunities are available and accessible, they are not restricted by personal economic circumstances. There are also opportunities to develop and grow through access to services, technology and education.

Ideally all have the financial capacity to sustain a good standard of living. Where this cannot be achieved, the cost of living does not stop them from participating in their community. There is equal access to services regardless of where people live or their capacity to pay.

They are grounded communities where people get involved and everyone chips in. People have ownership and the contributions of individuals are valued. They have shared goals and a common purpose. There is strong leadership where people have choices and feel part of the decision making that affects their local community. Individuals have a voice and they have hope.

These are sustainable communities that will remain sustainable into the future. They invest in their people, particularly their youth. They understand that investing in the young early on will deliver outcomes and savings in the long term. Transitions in life are as smooth as possible and there is support for people who need it at these pivotal times.

There are real connections between individuals, one to one, group to group, culture to culture, based on acceptance and respect. These connections lay the foundations for healthy and resilient communities.

The services themselves will be strong, collaborative, responsive and accessible, reaching those most in need. There will be localised provision of assistance, where services will have the control and responsibility to address what is happening locally and not as decided by agencies outside the area.

Additional Issues

There were various other topics discussed in the PBS consultations however, although they are important, they were either not necessarily perceived to be state-wide issues or they were not identified as having the same degree of priority as the issues that formed the 7 key PBS recommendations. The additional issues are as follows:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, peoples and organisations

Aboriginal community leaders identified several key issues they would like addressed. They highlighted the need to improve school attendance for Aboriginal children. They also noted the unacceptably high incidence of incarceration for driving offences. The need for improved access to legal aid for family law matters was raised as crime is frequently related to family law matters. Concern was also expressed over the poor take up rates of meals-on-wheels programs for older Aboriginal people.

Older people

Reform of the aged care sector was raised as an urgent need. Aged care day centres were recognised as being an important service for older people and their carers, yet it was noted they are financially struggling with low rates of \$11.70 per hour. The need for better recognition of high care and low care needs in aged care funding models instead of the current one size fits all approach was highlighted. It was suggested that the inequity between NDIS and aged care needs to be addressed as one model is free while the other requires income part payment. Further, income tested fees for community aged services were noted as creating barriers, and impacting meals-on-wheels and community transport. Support was raised for improved respite access as a crucial service for older people and their carers.

Connectivity

Access to technology was raised as a serious issue in many areas. Internet access and affordability issues are of particular concern. Exacerbating this is poor technological literacy which further impacts physical isolation concerns. Multiple towns in rural and regional NSW are subject to black spots with no coverage outside town centres. Due to these connectivity and coverage issues, remote communities face difficulties accessing beneficial services like Telehealth.

There is also concern about government approaches to the issue of connectivity, for example the NBN satellite has been set up facing away from Broken Hill which will not address the connectivity issues of people in the Broken Hill area. Additionally, Telstra is frequently the only provider in some areas resulting in limited options and lack of affordable or competitive rates.

Disadvantage and inequality in our society

Concerns were raised that in focussing too heavily on the economy, the notion of 'community' or 'society' is lost, and the concept of a 'fair go' is forgotten. There is a strong sense that poverty and disadvantage is worsening across NSW.

It was stressed that when discussing poverty and disadvantage, language matters. Couching the issue in 'soft words' like 'financial stress' instead of 'poverty' masks the harshness of the situation, when in fact poverty is what it is and it's hard. While the term 'financial stress' may be better articulated, it was

suggested that using this term under-emphasises the seriousness of poverty as it infers transience and can fail to acknowledge the reality of long-term poverty.

It was noted that there is increasing food insecurity and a rise in associated health problems. People who never expected to be in need are now presenting at services for assistance, including professionals (due to jobs re-locating overseas) and single older women. Benefits are often too low for people to meet their basic needs. Debt levels are high and utility costs are causing substantial financial stress. There needs to be a better concession system with broader access and improved promotion of what is available. Financial literacy is key, and needs to be part of any solution.

Being able to support one's self is vital for personal wellbeing and for the health of communities yet it was highlighted that there are insufficient employment opportunities in many areas. This results in long commutes and often means 12-hour work days for people living in isolated areas, which severely impacts families and wellbeing. Concerns were raised that there hasn't been any long-term planning to ensure there are meaningful jobs available in the future. Structural changes have had a significant impact on individuals and the resources boom didn't benefit everyone, resulting in the feeling that little is being done to secure employment options in the future. Training also remains an issue, in particular the high costs associated with retaining registration for Registered Training Organisations (RTO).

Cost of Living – Energy

There was concern over the high cost of electricity in many areas and consequently support was expressed for caps and safety nets on energy bills for low income people. It was noted that environmentally sustainable practices, such as solar, are out of reach for many people meaning they have no alternative but to pay high energy rates. Concerns were raised about people being encouraged to change energy providers on the promise of lower energy costs when in fact the rates end up being much higher but this isn't discovered until the first bill is received three months later and they are unable to pay it.

Research

Support was raised for improving the way poverty and disadvantage, and how the sector is responding, are measured. Longitudinal studies and geo-spatial data collection and reporting were noted as potentially useful methodologies.

Early Intervention

Concerns were raised around the need for better early intervention approaches across a variety of areas. For children and young people, trauma (as a result of child abuse and neglect, family breakdown, and homelessness) is the key issue and more services are needed to address this.

It was noted that there are fewer resources available to respond to early intervention issues with the prevailing logic being 'do more, do better, but with no extra money'. There was a sense that outcomes are being compromised by a focus on expenditure, in the absence of a focus on value for money. Similarly, there was concern that tokenistic approaches are being created rather than meaningful interventions. It was noted that refining the system won't necessarily address these systemic issues.

Neighbourhood Centres

The precariousness of funding for neighbourhood centres was raised as a serious concern. The focus of neighbourhood centres is primarily on community development and therefore early intervention is a key

component underlying the rationale of their services. It was consequently noted that there needs to be a prioritising of early intervention funding and policy approaches, alongside a recognition by government that funding early intervention services now may potentially reduce the cost of crisis funding in the future.

Neighbourhood centres facilitate a 'no wrong door' approach to service provision, enabling the coordination of wrap around services in a 'hub' model. It was noted that better resourcing and deployment of such co-located models of service provision needs to be achieved so that people with complex needs gain timely access to crucial services. Similarly, it was commented that such hubs need to be properly publicised so clients are aware of their existence and the services they provide.

In a 'no wrong door' model, service providers need to be able to connect into a centralised network so as to facilitate referrals. However, agencies also need the option of being able to work with a family across all of their issues rather than being required to refer them on. It was noted that there needs to be recognition of the benefits of the 'no wrong door' hub model and, given the increasing volume of clients being serviced, improved allocation of appropriate resources.

Gambling

Gambling was raised as a particularly concerning issue in many communities. It was noted that gambling venues are frequently located in low income areas and as such are preying on especially vulnerable people. It was suggested that a cap be imposed on gambling and that children's gambling games be banned. Additionally, it was recommended that children receive formal education on the dangers of gambling as part of the school curriculum.

Access to Justice

Concern was expressed that aggressive policing and crime prevention policies are pushing more people into the criminal justice system and this needs to be addressed. Support was expressed for improved funding for juvenile justice support programs and a reduction in remand times for children and young people. Similarly, the need for enhanced discharge plans for adult post-release prisoners was highlighted. Concerns were raised over equity of access to justice and the overrepresentation of youth, Aboriginal people, and people with mental illness in the justice system. Additionally, the need for better community legal education was noted. Funding for Community Legal Centres is considered central to people experiencing poverty achieving access to justice, and the recent and proposed cuts to this service were considered highly problematic.

Safety

Various concerns were raised about safety in both public places and at home. Safety on public transport was of concern, as was the need for better infrastructure such as lighting on footpaths and in parks. It was noted that while experiences and perceptions of crime are not always aligned, better design of public areas would improve perceptions of safety and promote wellbeing in the community. The need to properly resource local governments in order to achieve safe public spaces was highlighted. It was recognised that appropriately focused policing is critical for protection from crime.

Volunteering

Various issues around volunteering were raised. It was noted that there had been a dip in volunteering and the suggestion of government tax breaks for volunteers was canvassed. Concerns around obtaining insurance to cover volunteers was highlighted given that the capacity to insure is prohibitive after a certain age which restricts the pool of available volunteers. Additionally, it was suggested that funding rules be changed to allow allocation of funds for project workers to manage volunteers as this task, while resource intensive and necessary, is frequently excluded by funding bodies.

Women experiencing poverty, disadvantage and homelessness

Concerns were raised around disadvantages experienced by women in terms of homelessness; unemployment, underemployment and low wages; domestic and family violence (and the need for free legal advice for women in these situations); and structural inequality.

