



Investing in Communities: NCOSS 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.

Published October 2016.

© NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS)

This publication is copyright. Non-profit groups have permission to reproduce part of this book as long as the original meaning is retained and proper credit is given to the NSW Council of Social Service. All other persons and organisations wanting to reproduce material from this book should obtain permission from the publishers.

NCOSS can be found at:

3/52 William St, WOOLLOOMOOLOO NSW
2011

phone: (02) 9211 2599

email: info@ncoss.org.au

website: www.ncoss.org.au

facebook: on.fb.me/ncoss

twitter: [@_ncoss_](https://twitter.com/_ncoss_)



Message from the CEO



Our communities are one of this state's most important assets. They are strong, resilient and innovative when given the environment to thrive.

Last year, ahead of our Pre Budget Submission NCSS visited communities around the state to hear from them about the key challenges they face and the solutions that would allow them to overcome those challenges.

This year we did it again, except we spoke to more people in more communities.

We also reached out to people on the ground experiencing and at risk of poverty about what would make a difference in their lives, and the lives of their family. We asked them what are their top three issues in NSW politics today and a majority chose ensuring we have a quality health system, and more than a third identified the cost of living.

We know that in NSW our communities face some incredible challenges. Inequality is increasing, too many people experience poverty and vulnerable people continue to fall through the cracks.

But what we've also discovered is that the solutions lie within communities.

They are asset rich, they understand what the problems are, what solutions will work for them and where there are gaps. Those communities just need to be enabled and to be listened to.

Communities are already doing incredible work across this state. We need to recognise that work, we need to ensure it is allowed to continue and that communities can learn from each other. When we invest in our communities that investment can go further than we imagine.

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. We have much to learn from strong and connected Aboriginal communities, from regional and remote communities and from the myriad of diverse communities that make up this state.

We have learnt a lot this year. And we have pulled together these learning into a set of recommendations for the upcoming Budget that we know will make a real difference to communities and to people's lives.

When you read the recommendations I am sure they will not be a surprise to you. They certainly weren't to me. And these weren't the only issues that were raised with us of course. Rest assured all of the perspectives and data we gathered will be put to good use – it all fits into our advocacy somewhere! But these are the things that people told us will make a difference. And this is where communities have said our focus should be.

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.

Tracy Howe
CEO

Introduction

The NCOSS Pre-Budget Submission (PBS) ensures the needs and aspirations of people experiencing poverty are part of the NSW Government's agenda and that they get reflected in the allocation of funds in the State Budget.

Over the years the PBS has been the culmination of research, analysis, consultation, discussion and debate. This year we have consulted more widely, and more deeply than ever before.

For the first time this year we engaged directly with people experiencing or at risk of poverty and disadvantage, via a survey of 417 households receiving income support. We wanted to hear directly from people experiencing or at risk of poverty what their priorities were for the upcoming Budget.

We also continued our member and stakeholder engagement approach from last year, travelling widely across NSW and holding 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 to see, the barriers they experienced in providing this, and the possible solutions that could make a real difference in the lives of people experiencing or at risk of poverty and disadvantage.

Our process identified the cost of living pressures faced by people experiencing poverty and disadvantage, mental health, dental health, social and



affordable housing, early childhood education, nurse home visits for vulnerable families, and services for the Far West and Western NSW as the key areas where we need to see investment right now.

We know that different people, with different cultural experiences, from across NSW 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, or other backgrounds and experiences.

Anchored in extensive 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.



This year, we recommend the NSW Government:

- Deliver a cost of living package for people experiencing and at risk of poverty
- Boost community living supports for young people experiencing mental ill-health
- Invest in early childhood education
- Roll out a nurse-led home visiting service for vulnerable families statewide
- Fix the gap in oral health
- Deliver Phase 2 of the Social and Affordable Housing Fund
- Empower the West

Recommendations Summary

Deliver a cost of living package for people experiencing and at risk of poverty

Invest \$368 million to make transport, electricity, housing, and legal services more affordable for people on low incomes.

Boost community living supports for young people experiencing mental ill-health

Invest \$14 million over four years to deliver Youth Community Living Support Services (YCLSS) in six new locations across NSW.

Invest in early childhood education

Establish a \$250 million Early Childhood Education Investment Fund to improve the effectiveness of recurrent funding growth.

Roll out a nurse-led home visiting service for vulnerable families statewide

Invest an additional \$25 million per annum in the state-wide rollout of nurse-led home visiting programs for vulnerable families with children age 0-2.

Fix the gap in oral health

Invest an additional \$25 million into oral health services in NSW to improve access to timely dental services and reduce oral health inequities.

Deliver Phase 2 of the Social and Affordable Housing Fund

Deliver at least 5000 additional units of social and affordable housing for the state's most disadvantaged people, particularly regional, rural and remote areas, Aboriginal communities, older women and women, children and young people experiencing domestic and family violence, by rolling out Phase 2 of the Social and Affordable Housing Fund (the SAHF).

Empower the West

By investing just \$13 million per year communities in Western NSW and the Far West could be empowered to make positive change in their region.

Invest an additional \$30 million over four years into supports for vulnerable children and families in Western NSW and the Far West as part of the Targeted Earlier Intervention Reform process.

Invest \$4 million over four years to extend the Isolated Patient Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS) to include payments to Community Transport providers in the Far West and Western NSW.

Invest \$2 million to provide five year funding for the Driving Change Program in four sites across Western NSW and the Far West.

Invest \$2.8 million over four years in Regional Transport responses in the Far West and Western NSW including annual brokerage funding of \$100,000 in each district and a \$500,000 pool of recurrent funding per district for projects that demonstrate success in meeting local unmet need.

Invest \$1.1 million to facilitate the permanent appointment of two Mental Health Court Liaison Officers in the Far West from 2017-2021.

Invest \$4 million over four years in Court Diversion and Bail Support Programs for Aboriginal people in the Far West and Western NSW.

Invest an additional \$10 million over four years to increase access to dialysis in Western NSW and the Far West through additional dialysis chairs and related staff; and access to home dialysis through increased support for training and nurses. Additional funding should be guided by a regional dialysis needs assessment to ensure investment addresses clear shortfalls.



Methodology

This PBS is grounded in the perspectives of people experiencing poverty and disadvantage, and the organisations in the community sector that work with them. We used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to gather these perspectives, undertook a thematic analysis to sharpen our focus, and developed seven costed recommendations that will make a real difference in the lives of people experiencing or at risk of poverty and disadvantage and their families.

We began with a survey of 417 households that aimed to understand the perspectives of people who are receiving income support payments (as a proxy for experience or risk of poverty and disadvantage) about a range of budget priorities and measures. Participants were drawn from the online research panel of Online Research Unit, and the survey was conducted by Online Research and Essential Research.

Both Essential Research and Online Research Unit are ISO 20252 accredited. Online Research Unit is also ISO 26362 (Global Panel Standard) accredited. Essential Research and Online Research Unit are members of the Australian Market & Social Research Organisation (AMSRO). All research team members belong to the Australian Market and Social Research Society (AMSRS). All Essential Research staff ascribe to the AMSRS Code of Professional Behaviour, as well as to a company-specific privacy policy.

Our data collection also included a survey of our members, and a series of 26 qualitative workshops held across NSW. 288 people attended the consultations, representing 216 organisations.



Consultations held in:

Albury	Maitland	
Armidale	Newcastle	
Bateman's Bay	Nowra	
Broken Hill	Orange	
Campbelltown	Parkes	
Coffs Harbour	Parramatta	Tamworth
Dubbo	Port Macquarie	Tweed
Gosford	Queanbeyan	Wagga
Kempsey	Springwood	Wilcannia
Lismore	Sydney	Wollongong

The consultations were built around a series of community conversations that sought to develop public knowledge based on experience and observation. Conversations are held within a community, about that community. Through these conversations we aimed 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 public knowledge gleaned from the survey and 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.

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.

Deliver a cost of living package for people experiencing and at risk of poverty

Recommendation

Invest \$368 million to make transport, electricity, housing, and legal services more affordable for people on low incomes.

What's the issue?

The rising cost of living continues to be a major issue. This is hardly surprising, with public transport fares, car registration costs, electricity bills, housing-related expenses, and the cost of legal services all on the increase.

These concerns were reflected strongly in what people experiencing or at risk of poverty told us through our research. When respondents were asked to tell us their most important state government issue, the cost of living generally, and the cost of running a car, were both in the top three responses. Housing costs – including both the cost of accommodation and housing-related expenses more generally – also emerged as a major issue of concern.

The cost of running a car is likely to increase further, with the NSW Government predicting that under current arrangements, Green Slip prices could increase by up to 20% or \$100 next year. Adding in registration fees and taxes, this would see even small car owners paying more than \$1,000 to keep their car on the road. This is before including other insurance costs, like comprehensive car insurance. With many drivers lacking this form of insurance, a small mistake on the road can end up costing people thousands of dollars, which for people on low incomes is often taken on as additional debt.

When it comes to the cost of living more generally, we know that electricity prices continue to hit low-income households hard. Between 2012 and 2015, 78,000 homes had their electricity disconnected

because they could not afford to pay their bills. Yet funding for the Low Income Household energy rebate has remained static since 2014-2015, with rebates fixed at \$235.

Similarly, ongoing housing costs, such as local government rates, continue to increase. Pensioner concession rebates for local government rates and levies have not increased since 1993. This is despite the fact that rates have increased steadily since that time.

We also know from our consultations that public transport costs remain an ongoing problem for people experiencing or at risk of poverty. Access to transport enables independence, access to services and healthcare and full social and economic participation in the community. This is especially the case for job-seekers, trainees, apprentices, and other people on income support payments. Lowering the cost of fares for these groups in Sydney and the regions would assist job-seekers to find employment, help people receiving income to gain greater independence, and support trainees and apprentices to acquire new skills and opportunities.

Seventy-two per cent of people responding to our survey also told us that more funding for affordable legal services would make a real difference to their lives. Yet in our consultations we were told that Community Legal Centres are facing further Commonwealth Government cuts of \$3 million from July 2017, with funding already \$3 million less than Productivity Commission recommendations.

Action needed

We recommend the NSW Government invest \$368 million in additional funding and take the following action to help reduce cost of living pressures:

- Invest \$29 million to extend the \$100 motor vehicle registration rebate currently available to apprentices to all job-seekers, young people, and parents receiving income support.
- Invest \$130 million to reduce the rate of duty currently payable on comprehensive car insurance to 2.5%.
- Invest \$173 million to extend the \$2.50 Gold Card to all concession card holders.
- Increase the Low Income Household energy rebate to \$250, with \$8 million in funding redirected from the poorly targeted and low take-up Family Energy Rebate, and a further \$5 million in additional funding.
- Invest \$25 million to increase the local government rates concession cap for pensioners from \$250 to \$330.
- In future years, tie the cap on pensioner rates concessions to the amount that councils are able to increase their rates under the rate-peg, as determined each year by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART).
- Provide NSW Community Legal Centres with a total of \$6 million in extra funding.

Boost community living supports for young people experiencing mental ill-health

Recommendation

Invest \$14 million over four years to deliver Youth Community Living Support Services (YCLSS) in six new locations across NSW.

What's the issue?

Long term mental health conditions commonly begin between the ages of 14 and 24. Getting the right support at the right time can be instrumental to recovery.

While mental health services for young people exist in NSW, there are times when a lack of capacity to provide outreach and/or very limited access to the internet and mobile telephone reception can impede young people's access to those services in regional areas.

More comprehensive coverage of face-to-face mental health services across NSW can offer young people better access to support when needed.

Youth Community Living Support Services provide young people aged 16 to 24 (inclusive) help to support their recovery and avoid developing a significant psychosocial disability. YCLSS works with young people who are being case-managed by a mental health service by offering non-clinical support. Because the program is tailored to the goals of the young person involved, the kinds of support provided are diverse and can include assistance with socialisation, support to find housing or building confidence through learning skills. The young people in the program work with a support worker who may also be a peer.

Funding for the first YCLSS service in South-West Sydney was announced in 2015 with four more locations funded in the Hunter, Nepean Blue Mountains, Northern NSW and Western Sydney.

Action needed

More young people across NSW should have the opportunity to access Youth Community Living Support Services. To make this happen, we recommend an investment of \$14 million over four years so that six new locations are introduced in the following areas:

- Mid-North Coast
- Illawarra/Shoalhaven
- Western NSW
- Far West
- Murrumbidgee
- Central Coast

Given the lack of transport in rural and regional areas has a strong impact on young people's access to mental health services, funding should facilitate outreach from regional hubs to smaller towns in the district. Funding allocations should also take in to account that many rural and regional hubs have low levels of mobile phone and internet access and as such young people in these areas cannot access technology based mental health supports that are increasingly being offered.

Premier's Priority

- Improving service levels in hospitals

Invest in early childhood education

Recommendation

Establish a \$250 million Early Childhood Education Investment Fund to ensure vulnerable children and young people access the full benefits of quality early education and improve the effectiveness of recurrent funding growth.

What's the issue?

The importance of quality early childhood education is well documented. With 90% of a child's brain development occurring in the first five years¹ this is a critical window of opportunity to maximise children's potential and improve their life outcomes. Early education is particularly important for children from low-income and disadvantaged backgrounds. It has the potential to reduce poverty, increase intergenerational social mobility and bring about improved social and economic development for our community as a whole.²

The NSW Government's recent announcement of a \$115 funding boost for early education is a welcome step forwards towards better quality, universally accessible, early education. However, following years of inadequate investment in early education we have significant ground to make up if we are to lift our performance from being one of the worst performing Australian jurisdictions. Currently in NSW we have:

- The highest fees for early education of all the States and Territories.
- Low enrolment rates, with only 77 per cent of children in the year before school enrolled for at least 600 hours.
- The worst performance on the proportion of disadvantaged children enrolled in early childhood education (72%).³

In addition to a sustained increase in recurrent funding for the provision of early education we need an injection of funding targeting children from low-income and vulnerable families, ensuring they receive the support they



need in order to receive the full benefit of recurrent funding growth.

Action needed

Invest \$250 million over ten years in an Early Childhood Education Investment Fund to complement existing funding measures and ensure vulnerable children are able to access the full benefits of quality early education. The fund would:

- Acknowledge that the work needed to ensure children in vulnerable families successfully transition to preschool, and maintain their enrolment, begins at birth. To enable this the fund would facilitate the development of pathways to preschool for vulnerable children.
- Incubate cross-sectoral partnerships – such as between any combination of early childhood services, children and family services, Aboriginal services, employment services, educational institutions, housing providers, government, the private sector and employers – that will draw on diverse expertise and encourage collaboration to deliver new services, improve access to early education and achieve outcomes for vulnerable families across a range of domains.
- Build on innovative approaches to service delivery that have grown out of communities and that support children and their broader families.

- Provide financial support for strategies to improve Aboriginal access to early education, including growing the number of Aboriginal community-controlled services, resourcing an Aboriginal representative body, and developing a systematic and sustained approach to improving the cultural accessibility of mainstream services.

- Ensure early childhood services are equipped to support children who experience domestic violence including by strengthening linkages between domestic violence services and early childhood services and ensuring priority childcare places are available to women experiencing domestic violence.

- Create an opportunity to build the evidence base in relation to access to early education by testing innovative strategies that could be replicated more broadly.

In addition, the extra funding allocated to community preschools and long day care should continue beyond July 2018 with further increases in recurrent funding in order to provide quality, affordable and accessible services.

Premier's Priority

- Improving education results

¹ Education Service Australia, *Engaging Families in the Early Childhood Development Story*, 2010.

² OECD, *Starting Strong III*, 2012.

³ NSW currently has the worst performance on the proportion of disadvantaged children enrolled in early childhood education. NSW Auditor-General (2016) Report to Parliament: Early Childhood Education

Roll out a nurse-led home visiting service for vulnerable families statewide

Recommendation

Invest an additional \$25 million per annum in the state-wide rollout of nurse-led home visiting programs for vulnerable families with children age 0-2.

What's the issue?

The birth of a new child is often a time of great joy, but it can also be a time of difficult adjustment. For vulnerable families, who may be experiencing multiple stressors, it can be a particularly challenging period. But too often these families have the least support.

Nurse-led home visiting programs have a strong evidence base and bring about substantial benefits for vulnerable children and their families. They can lead to better pregnancy outcomes, support mothers to breastfeed for longer and improve women's experience of motherhood. Ultimately, nurse home visits can help cultivate a safe and nurturing home environment and improve a child's health and developmental outcomes. A recent FACS-commissioned review of prevention and early intervention research identified nurse-led home visiting programs as one of the most promising strategies for improving child development outcomes, with multiple studies demonstrating a return on investment of between 1.26 and 5.7.⁴

The largest nurse-led home visiting program in NSW, Sustaining NSW Families, currently operates in eight sites across the state. But many locations – including those experiencing significant levels of disadvantage – are missing out.

KPMG's recent evaluation of Sustaining NSW Families found a strong case for state-wide rollout given the positive outcomes being achieved for children and parents, and with the program achieving an estimated net benefit per child of \$9,769.⁵

Investing in the state-wide rollout of Sustaining NSW Families would also be in line with the Third Action Plan under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, which includes a focus on 'Early intervention with a focus on the early years, particularly the first 1000 days for a child.'

Action needed

Invest an additional \$25 million in the State-wide roll-out of the Sustaining NSW Families program. In addition, we recommend the Ministry of Health:

- Ensure the program is appropriately tailored to local contexts, with additional support provided in order to address the needs of disadvantaged high risk groups including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Develop strategies to ensure an appropriately skilled, culturally diverse workforce that is able to meet the needs of the community.

- Explore opportunities to embed interventions to reduce family and behavioural risk factors for childhood obesity within the program.
- Establish multiple entry pathways in addition to the routine screening of mothers during pregnancy, including mechanisms to target support to parents with current or previous experience in out-of-home care.
- Ensure strong linkages with support services for families experiencing more complex issues, including where domestic and family violence is suspected or disclosed.
- Establish a study investigating the longitudinal impacts of Sustaining NSW Families on the life trajectories of the children involved in order to develop a strong source of data to inform future service delivery and work in this area.

Premier's Priority

- Tackling Childhood obesity

Fix the gap in oral health

Recommendation

Invest an additional \$25 million into oral health services in NSW to improve access to timely dental services and reduce oral health inequities.

What's the issue?

Oral health is fundamental to physical, mental and social well-being, with poor oral health impinging on many aspects of people's everyday lives, influencing eating, sleep, work and social roles.⁶

Poor oral health can cause pain and discomfort, affect general health, and is strongly associated with major chronic diseases. It can impinge on mental health – leading to feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem in both children and adults – and is linked with depression. It can also impact a child's development and ability to learn, and diminishes individual's employment prospects and ability to engage in social situations.

Although the majority of oral disease and tooth loss is preventable, many people are not able to access to preventative or timely dental services. People on low-incomes, Aboriginal people, people living in rural and regional areas, and refugees all have significantly worse oral health outcomes than the rest of the NSW population. The physical, mental, social and financial costs of poor oral health can further cement existing social inequities.

While people on low-incomes are eligible for public dental services in NSW, they often have to wait months, or in some cases, years, for treatment. Following a period of improvement, the waiting list for public dental treatment in NSW is once again growing, and as at March 2016 there were 8,501 children and 105,469 adults waiting for general dental care.⁷

Many patients start on public dental waiting lists seeking preventive or restorative treatment but become emergency cases by the time they receive treatment. A delay in assessing and treating a person's oral health needs is not only detrimental at an individual level, but also has a flow on effect to the health system as a whole, with oral conditions the



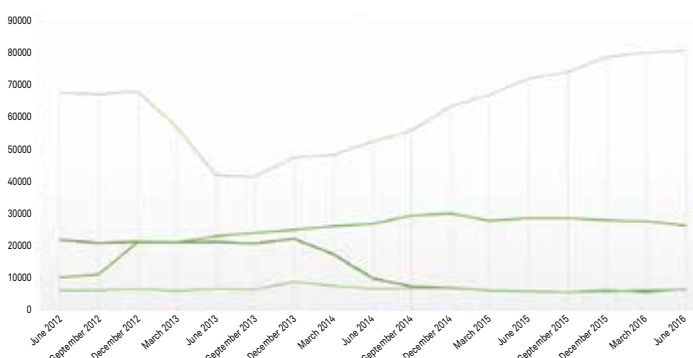
third highest reason for acute preventable hospital admissions in Australia.⁸

In our survey of people experiencing or at risk of poverty, respondents nominated timely, affordable dental care as the number one policy that would make a difference in their life and the life of their families. It is time to fix this gap in oral health.

Action needed

Invest an additional \$25 million per annum into oral health services in NSW. As part of the investment, the NSW Government should:

- Increase the number of dental practitioners employed in the public sector.
- Increase service levels in regional, rural and remote areas, including building on the success of existing outreach services.
- Expand oral health promotion and treatment services in corrective services settings.
- Provide additional funds to address inequalities in oral health within the NSW population, and develop and resource clear access pathways for priority populations – including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and refugees.
- Fund a state-wide Aged Care Dentistry program – linking the goals and objectives of the Commonwealth Better Oral Health in Residential Care Program with a NSW service initiative to provide oral health assessments and appropriate dental care pathways for public sector eligible residents in aged care facilities in NSW.
- Integrate oral health care into the broader health care system, including emphasising the common risk factor approach to health promotion, and integrating oral health and medical records across all local health districts and networks.
- Work with the Commonwealth Government to negotiate a new National Partnership Agreement and advocate for the continuation of the Child Dental Benefit Scheme.



Number of NSW residents waiting for dental assessment and treatment, 30 June 2012 to 31 March 2016. Source: NSW Health.

⁶Healthy Mouths, Healthy Lives: Australia's National Oral Health Plan 2004–13 (2004). Prepared by the National Advisory Committee on Oral Health.
⁷NSW Health. Available at <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/oralhealth/Pages/public-dental-care-waiting.aspx>
⁸Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2014) Australian hospital statistics 2012–13. Health services series no. 54. Cat. no. HSE 145. Canberra: AIHW.

Deliver Phase 2 of the Social and Affordable Housing Fund

Recommendation

Deliver at least 5000 additional units of social and affordable housing for the state's most disadvantaged people, particularly regional, rural and remote areas, Aboriginal communities, older women and women, children and young people experiencing domestic and family violence, by rolling out Phase 2 of the Social and Affordable Housing Fund (the SAHF).

What's the issue?

A home makes everything else possible. Education, training, employment, health, and safety all rest on the stability of having a place to call home. Yet thousands of people in NSW are homeless; 60,000 families are on the social housing waiting list; and the latest Rental Affordability Index rates both Sydney and regional NSW as the least affordable metro and regional areas in Australia.⁹ In NSW, 43.3% of low-income households are in rental stress (where rent accounts for 30% or more of a low-income household's expenses).¹⁰ The situation is even worse in Sydney where 54.4% of low-income households are in rental stress, and 50.4% of households receiving CRA continue to experience rental stress despite this assistance.

It is no surprise then that housing and homelessness consistently ranked as the number one priority in our PBS consultations, both in Sydney and regional areas. We know that Aboriginal people, young people, people with disability, older women, women and children escaping DV, people from CALD backgrounds, and people in the western regions of NSW face additional barriers to securing affordable housing and as such are at an increased risk of experiencing homelessness. And

without safe and affordable housing, service providers struggle to support their clients to access health, education and employment – it all comes down to housing.

NCOSS welcomes the NSW Government's flexible approach in Future Directions for Social Housing in NSW in introducing multiple levers for increasing the supply of social and affordable housing. NCOSS also commends the NSW Government's decision to partner with NCOSS and IPA to create the Social and Affordable Housing Fund (SAHF) with a \$1.1 billion capital investment. These steps will ensure more people have a place to call home.

But the housing affordability crisis across NSW will get much, much worse unless we take concrete steps to address it now.

Action needed

The NSW Government should invest in this budget to:

- Create at least 5000 new units of social and affordable housing and deliver on its commitment to rolling out future phases of the SAHF.
- Ensure the fund targets the needs of regional, rural and remote communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, older women and women, children and young people escaping domestic and family violence.
- Ringfence the proceeds from the future sale of any state-owned public housing by adding such profits to the SAHF to be used solely for the creation of more homes for the state's most disadvantaged residents.

- Invest \$45 million to pilot a shared homeownership scheme in partnership with existing financial institutions and community housing providers to support low- and moderate-income households to achieve the security of home ownership, including in the western parts of NSW.

Premier's Priority

- Reducing Youth Homelessness



Empower the West

The solutions to the challenges the Far West and Western NSW face, lie within communities. With an Aboriginal population at four times the state average, it is crucial that Aboriginal people are listened to and are allowed to take ownership of, and involve their community in, the provision of supports and services for their community.

By investing just \$13 million per year communities in Western NSW and the Far West could be empowered to make positive change in their region.

Recommendations

- Invest an additional \$30 million over four years into supports for vulnerable children and families in the Far West and Western NSW as part of the Targeted Earlier Intervention Reform process.
- Invest \$4 million over four years to extend the Isolated Patient Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS) to include payments to Community Transport providers in the Far West and Western NSW Districts.
- Invest \$2million to provide five year funding for the Driving Change Program in four sites across Western NSW and the Far West.
- Invest \$2.8 million over four years in Regional Transport responses in the Far West and Western NSW including annual brokerage funding of \$100,000 in each district and a \$500,000 pool of recurrent funding per district for projects that demonstrate success in meeting local unmet need.
- Invest \$1.1 million to facilitate the permanent appointment of two Mental Health Court Liaison Officers in the Far West from 2017-2021.
- Invest \$4 million over four years in Court Diversion and Bail Support Programs for Aboriginal people in the Far West and Western NSW.
- Invest an additional \$10 million over four years to increase access to dialysis in Western NSW and the Far West through additional dialysis chairs



and related staff; and access to home dialysis through increased support for training and nurses. Additional funding should be guided by a regional dialysis needs assessment to ensure investment addresses clear shortfalls.

Why a focus on the West?

In this PBS, NCOSS has focused on the Far West and Western NSW. We do this because our members told us that right now, more than ever, we need to solve problems in the west.

Access to opportunities and services in these areas is often hampered by levels of investment that do not fully account for the impact of distance, sparse population density and levels of need. Too often, this translates to substandard services and people who are already financially disadvantaged facing out-of-pocket costs that they cannot realistically meet. Not only does disadvantage become further entrenched in this scenario, but opportunities to make changes through employment, education and quality health outcomes become further out of reach.

This needs to change and so NCOSS members have developed these recommendations to set this in train.

Additionally, the community and NCOSS agree that secure and affordable housing is a key enabler that provides people with a solid foundation. Emphasis should therefore be given to ensuring that the 5000 new units of social and affordable housing; and the shared home ownership

scheme pilot we have recommended in this submission includes the delivery of housing stock for rent and co-ownership in the State's western regions.

Supporting children and families through prevention

Invest an additional \$30 million over four years into supports for vulnerable children and families in the Far West and Western NSW as part of the Targeted Earlier Intervention Reform process.

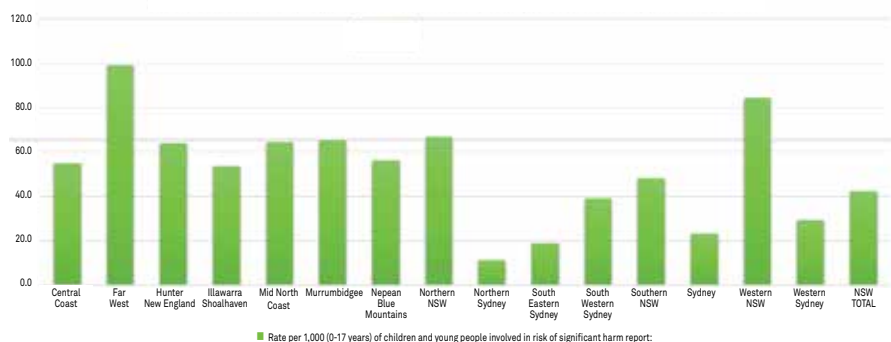
While the State's west has a much higher proportion of children at risk of significant harm, these districts have not received their fair share of funding. Of particular concern is the well-being of Aboriginal families, who experience disadvantage on multiple fronts. This is reflected in the massive over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the out-of-home care (OOHC) system.¹¹

Families should be able to receive the help they need before a problem escalates, but we know there is a significant gap in preventative services and those that offer supports early on. Families with more complex problems should have access to the supports they need to prevent crises occurring.

At the same time all children and young people should have opportunities to connect to their communities – to gain access to valuable networks that build

¹¹ Aboriginal children in NSW more than 10 times more likely than their non-Aboriginal peers to be in OOHC. Productivity Commission (2016) Report on Government Services, Child Protection Services.

Rate per 1,000 (0-17 years) of children and young people involved in risk of significant harm reports



resilience, to build positive relationships with each other and with adults, and to ensure problems can be identified early.

We recommend that as part of the current Targeted Earlier Intervention (TEI) Reform process, an additional \$30 million be injected into the TEI service system in the western areas of NSW. Additional funding should be targeted to areas of unmet need, with a particular focus on the delivery of Aboriginal services for Aboriginal families.

Transport equals access

Transport is a real facilitator of access to services in Western NSW. Thin public transport markets, distance and sparse populations create real challenges that require multipronged responses.

- Invest \$4 million over four years to extend the **Isolated Patient Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme** (IPTAAS) to include payments to Community Transport providers in the Far West and Western NSW Districts.

The Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme provides invaluable assistance to people to access medical treatment. One of the key positives of the NSW scheme is the ability to group travel over the week to meet distance eligibility criteria. This gives people requiring regular treatment, such as dialysis, greater access to transport support than is available in other states. However, the fact that IPTAAS provides money for public transport or a per km reimbursement is a barrier for people who live in areas underserved by public transport, who have no car and who are unable to pay what can be sizeable upfront costs. With people in western NSW earning average incomes of between 15% and 22% below the NSW average¹² there is a need to augment the scheme to ensure that those who also need to travel long distances to access health services are not disadvantaged. Providing payment for Community Transport trips through IPTAAS would overcome these barriers.

- Invest \$2 million to provide five year funding for the Driving Change Program in four sites across Western NSW and the Far West.

Responsive transport is also important as a connector of people and services. **The Driving Change Program** provides Aboriginal people with support to apply and sit for their license, resolve issues related to fines and connect with vehicles and driving lessons. The NSW Auditor General has estimated that only 50% of eligible Aboriginal people hold a driver's license in NSW compared to 70% of non-Aboriginal people.¹³ While the Program is running currently in some sites, recurrent funding is urgently needed to maintain the service and provide coordination and practice support through an appropriate Aboriginal community controlled organisation.

- Invest \$2.8 million over four years in **Regional Transport** responses in the Far West and Western NSW including annual brokerage funding of \$100,000 in each district and a \$500,000 pool of recurrent funding per district for projects that demonstrate success in meeting local unmet need.

A total investment of \$2.8 million for regional transport would provide four-year funding of \$200,000 per year for Western and Central West NSW to be distributed as brokerage funding by Transport for NSW Regional Managers. A further allocation of four-year funding from 2018-2019 onward would create a \$2 million pool for projects that respond to underserved population groups and have shown merit through the evaluation of shorter term brokerage funding.

The current system of providing only short term brokerage funding for projects means that problems are never solved. Small non-recurrent projects cannot overcome the challenges that thin public transport markets pose and those who are disadvantaged are paying the price.

Providing longer-term funding based on evaluated trials could disrupt the ongoing disadvantage generated by a lack of transport options. Specific attention



¹² FaCS District data and profiles 2013-14.

¹³ Auditor General NSW. New South Wales Auditor-General's Report to Parliament: improving legal and safe driving among Aboriginal People. Sydney: Audit Office of New South Wales; 2013.

should be paid to projects that respond to unmet need for instance, transport for young people and regular accessible transport that will not only link people with services but also education and employment opportunities.

Mental health support must be in place

- Invest \$1.1 million to facilitate the permanent appointment of two Mental Health Court Liaison Officers in the Far West from 2017-2021.

People living with mental ill health are over-represented in the criminal justice system. NSW Court Liaison Officers provide mental health assessments, linkages to treatment and advice to the Court regarding diversion. These officers operate in 20 local NSW courts including Dubbo in Western NSW. Currently the Broken Hill Local Court, which operates daily, does not have a Court Liaison Officer. Appointing two officers would enable coverage of the Broken Hill Court and Circuit areas that take in Wilcannia and Wentworth Local Courts. This would provide options for people with mental health issues to connect with appropriate treatments and avoid custody.

Bail support and diversion can help keep Aboriginal people out of custody

- Invest \$4 million over four years in Court Diversion and Bail Support Programs for Aboriginal people in the Far West and Western NSW.

NCOSS members want alternative options to custodial sentences for Aboriginal people who make up almost a quarter of our State's prison population. Programs that divert Aboriginal people from prison and toward support are especially needed in areas with high Aboriginal populations such as the western areas of NSW.

The Aboriginal Court Diversion and Bail Support Program assists Aboriginal people living in Campbelltown and Macquarie Fields to connect with support and services through a 16-week program. Engagement with the program can be mandated as a condition of bail. This



has the dual benefit of enabling people to access drug, alcohol and mental health treatment; and other culturally appropriate services which can reduce the risk of reoffending. Run by Aboriginal staff within Justice Health, the program uses a whole-of-family approach connecting partners and children to support where needed—often from Aboriginal services within the local community.

An investment of \$4 million dollars would enable the Program to be offered in the Far West and Western NSW regions for four years at a cost of \$500,000 per site per year. Besides the obvious avoided cost of custody, the program would provide multiple social benefits to Aboriginal People in these areas through connection with support to recover from mental health and drug and alcohol issues, greater access to local and culturally-appropriate services for the whole family, the ability to stay on country and reduced rates of negative outcomes that come with a criminal conviction.

Create more local options for dialysis

Invest an additional \$10 million over four years to increase access to dialysis in Western NSW and the Far West through additional dialysis chairs and related staff; and access to home dialysis through increased support for training and nurses. Additional funding should be guided by a regional dialysis needs assessment to ensure investment addresses clear shortfalls

Access to dialysis is patchy in Western NSW and the Far West. It is not uncommon for people to travel well over 100 km each way to access their nearest unit. Broken Hill is a location where dialysis is operating at capacity and further analysis is needed to identify the best way to respond to unmet demand.

The solutions to this problem will be different in each location. In some places, a new dialysis unit is required. In others, access to training for home dialysis or additional nursing staff is needed. What is clear is that the Far West and Western NSW LHDs should undertake a comprehensive dialysis needs assessment for their district to determine the most efficient and effective ways to channel increased funding to increase capacity.

It is also vitally important that steps taken to increase capacity must not shift costs from the health system to vulnerable consumers. We also recommend that any decision to increase home dialysis training and support, corresponds with steps to ensure that levels of assistance provided by the NSW Life Support Rebate and any water concessions align with the utility costs generated.

Premier's Priority

- Protecting our kids
- Improving service levels in hospitals

Summary of Consultation

What did people experiencing or at risk of poverty say?

One of the central elements of our policy development for the PBS was engaging with people experiencing and at risk of poverty about what they want to see in this budget. We surveyed a representative sample of 417 households receiving income support as a proxy for experience or risk of poverty, and asked for their perspectives on what would make a difference in their lives, and the lives of their family. We used this information to determine the priorities for this pre-budget submission, and to help shape our work more generally. These perspectives are summarised below:

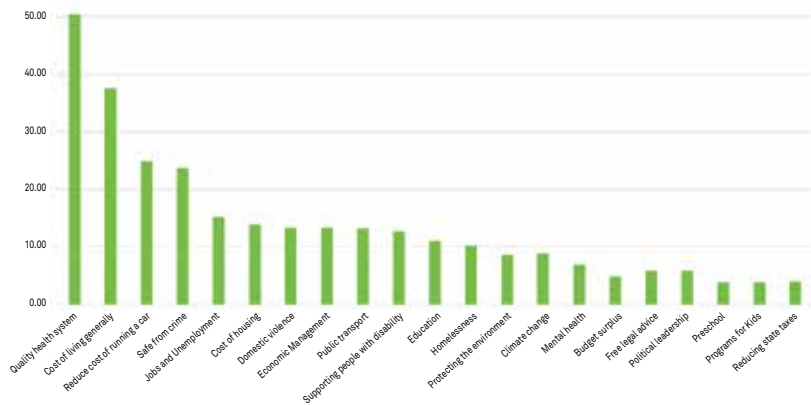
The top issues in NSW politics today are health and the cost of living

When we asked survey respondents to identify their top three issues in NSW politics today, a majority chose ensuring we have a quality health system, and more than a third identified the cost of living. Substantial proportions also indicated the cost of running a car was a key issue, and keeping us safe from crime.

Health should be the number one priority for investment

When we asked survey respondents to identify the budget measures that would make a difference to them and their family, three out of the top four issues were health related. The most popular proposal was a guarantee that no one in NSW would wait more than the clinically recommended time to see a specialist or have the surgery their specialist recommended, with more than 90% saying this would make a difference, including 60% who said it would make a big difference. The most deeply felt issue was a state wide dental health scheme so that all people with health care cards could access timely, affordable dental care, with 89% saying it would make a difference, including 67% who said it would make a big difference. Reducing emergency room wait times (88%) and improving mental health services (69%) were also identified as making a difference.

Top three issues in NSW politics today



Meeting the cost of living is a key challenge and concern for people on low incomes

The cost of living generally, and the cost of running a car were two out of the three top issues in NSW politics identified by survey respondents. More than 88% of survey respondents also said that giving all people with a healthcare card a 15% reduction on their utility bill (rather than the current flat rate rebate) would make a difference, and 78% said the same for extending exemptions on licence fees, motor vehicle registration and public transport concessions to all health care card holders.

There are things that governments can do to help people experiencing or at risk of poverty be healthy

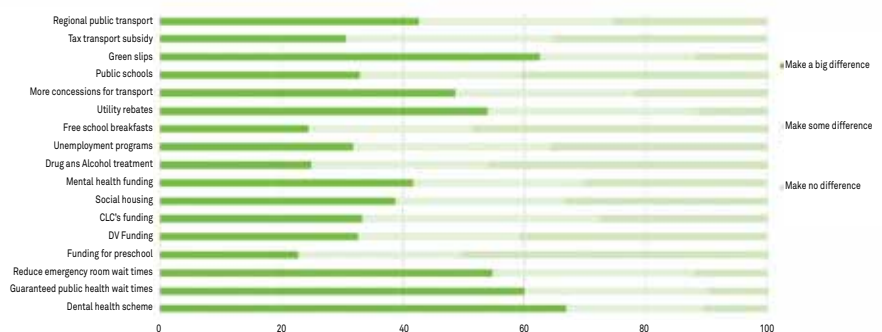
We asked survey respondents to identify the “one thing” that the NSW government could do to help them improve their health. The most popular answer (14% or one in seven respondents) was improved

access to dental health services. Survey respondents also said that increasing income support payments (12%), improving government provided health services (11%), strengthening Medicare (8%), and measures to reduce the cost of living (7%) would help them improve their health.

There is support for tax reform, as long as it is fair

There was strong support for requiring registered clubs to pay the same poker machine tax as hotels (65% support) and increasing taxes on tobacco (65% support), alcohol (56% support) and sugary drinks (53% support). Survey respondents expressed more mixed support for increasing the base of payroll tax (40% support, 28% opposed and 30% not sure) or a stamp duty land tax switch (32% support, 28% opposed 38% not sure). There was little support for increases to motor vehicle registration (8% support), increasing the GST (17% support) or putting the GST on food (12% support).

Which of the following budget measures would make a difference in the life of you and your family?



What did the health and community services sector say?



Community service organisations in New South Wales want to see 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 fair and cohesive communities that celebrate and embrace diversity. They recognise and accept people irrespective of their 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 takes violence against women and children seriously and where there are zero deaths from domestic and family violence.

The 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 and 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 supported by champions 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, there is support for key transitions (eg from primary to high school, retirement etc) if required.

There are real connections between individuals, one to one, group to group, culture to culture based on acceptance and respect, laying 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 decided by agencies outside the area.

The Regional Picture

Whilst often the issues and challenges that impact on communities across the state may be similar the ways these issues manifest and the solutions needed are specific to communities and must be shaped by those communities.

We know that regional, rural and remote communities across our state often experience concentrated disadvantage and face issues of isolation, distance and are at danger of being left behind. We heard about six key priority issues across the state; but the picture of these issues looks different community to community.



This is the regional picture in:

- Central Coast
- Far West
- Hunter and New England
- Illawarra and Shoalhaven
- Mid North Coast
- Murrumbidgee
- Nepean and Blue Mountains
- Northern NSW
- South Western Sydney
- Southern NSW
- Sydney
- Western NSW
- Western Sydney



On the Central Coast health, housing and young people were the key priority issues. In health the community wants to see community based health services, particularly for women and people experiencing mental ill health. Unaffordable dental health is a key issue for people on the Central Coast and there is a six week wait list for dental care that is not acute.

More social and affordable housing and supported accommodation is needed in this region. There is only a 3% availability of accommodation on the Coast. Rents are very high and people moving from Sydney have pushed up the cost of housing.

Finally the Central Coast needs a strategy focussed on young people, with more investment in early intervention. There is significant need in this region, particularly for 0-13 year olds, but no growth in funding in this area.

Cost of living

- In the year to July 2015 an average yearly electricity bill cost \$2,100
- Latest figures show the average annual personal income in the region was \$45,005, more than \$5,000 less than the state average

- Latest median weekly rental figures for 2 bedroom dwellings (March Qtr2016) range from \$325 in Wyong, to \$360 in Gosford
- Latest figures show Local Government rate assessments in Gosford were \$767.90 and \$784.19 in Wyong, compared to the State median of \$672

Children and young people

- Latest figures show 55 in every 1000 children are involved in risk of significant harm reports and 15.1 were in out-of-home care
- 9,662 children in the region are living below the poverty line, with a child poverty rate of 15.98%, compared with a state average rate of 13.8%
- Last year 128 young people aged 15-24 were hospitalised due to intentional self-harm

“ If you want to stop the flow, you have to break the poverty cycle for children... over 33% of homeless are young people and we have higher youth unemployment than the state average. ”

Dental wait list

- 1239 children and 8161 adults are on the NSW public dental waiting list
- Only 55.1% of children age 5-6 years are free of dental cavities
- On average, children age 5-6 years have 1.57 decayed, missing or filled teeth

“ Poor teeth impact on other areas of your life - employment, social life and internal health issues. ”

Social Housing wait list

- Latest figures show there were 4,978 social housing units, with 3,141 people still on the waiting list
- In the 12 months to 30 June 2015, 284 people were successfully housed, but expected waiting times for those still on the list exceed 10 years

“ A house is essential to everything, you can't have good health without a home. ”

In the Far West, with an Aboriginal population at 9.8% of the total – 4 times the state average, it is crucial that Aboriginal people can take ownership of determining solutions for their communities. Self-determination for local Aboriginal peoples and communities should be central to how problems are solved – putting control over developing and implementing solutions in their hands.

All forms of transport – planes, trains, buses, taxis and cars – are unaffordable and insufficient in this region. They make accessing employment and education hard, but also travel to healthcare services.

The health needs of children and young people are also a priority, along with mental health. Work should be done to tap into preschools and primary schools to have those children accessing healthcare and in particular targeting health outcomes for 2-3 year olds. Employment and education are critical issues, with a need for economic growth and investment in the region, but also programs to connect young people to skills and work. Maintenance of social housing in this region is also a significant issue, with people living in terrible conditions.

Cost of living

- Latest figures show the average annual personal income in the region was \$41,490, which was nearly \$10,000 less than the state average
- In the year to July 2015 an average yearly electricity bill cost \$2,600, which is over \$500 more than the equivalent in Sydney and Newcastle

“ Access to health care is a basic human right. ”

- Latest median weekly rental figures for 2 bedroom dwellings in the Broken Hill and Far west region are \$200
- Latest figures show Local Government rate assessments in the region ranged from \$208 in Balranald, \$214 in Central Darling, \$533 in Wellington, \$647 in Broken Hill, against a rural average of \$531



Children and young people

- Nearly 27% of children in Central Darling are developmentally vulnerable according to the Australian Early Development Census. This is the second highest proportion of children in any LGA in NSW

“ The Justice system is not fair on our youth. Too many of our young people are getting caught in the system and locked up for menial charges. This locks them out of work and housing. ”

- Latest figures show 104 in every 1000 children were involved in risk of significant harm reports and nearly 16 in 1000 were in out-of-home care
- Despite having some of the highest rates of vulnerable children, there are no Sustaining NSW Families nurse home-visiting sites in the Far West
- 861 children in the region live below the poverty line, with a child poverty rate of 22.45%. The child poverty rate in the region is nearly double the state average of 13.8%
- 16% of hospitalisations due to intentional self-harm were young people aged between 15 and 24

Dental wait list

- 19 children and 413 adults are on the NSW public dental waiting list

Social Housing wait list

- Latest figures show there were 235 social housing properties, with 141 applicants still on the waiting list for housing
- In the 12 months to 30 June 2015 39 applicants were housed, with the expected waiting times for those still on the waiting list in Broken Hill between 2-5 years, and up to 10 years in other areas of the region

“ We need models of shared home ownership in Aboriginal communities. This could be overseen by the Land Council. It needs to be run out of communities for communities. ”

Hunter and New England

For the Hunter and New England region housing and homelessness, mental health and youth and families were key priorities. Affordable, decent and appropriate accommodation is needed across the region. Currently there is so much competition for rental accommodation, people on low incomes or income support just cannot afford housing in the region. Local people are being pushed out and forced to move away from their support structures, by workers coming in to work for the mines.

“ Income supports just aren't enough to cover the basics. ”

This community wants to see better services and integration of these services with a focus on prevention and early intervention. Currently services are only able to triage the crisis cases. There needs to be investment in early intervention for young people and families and funding for the Mental Health Commission's strategic plan. Early childhood education was also identified as a vital intervention mechanism to break the current cycle, and this is in dire need of more investment.

Cost of living

- In the year to July 2015 an average yearly electricity bill cost between \$2,100 and \$2,600
- Latest figures show the average annual personal income in the region was \$46,314, which was nearly \$5,000 less than the state average
- Latest median weekly rental figures for 2 bedroom dwellings range from \$188 in Moree/Narrabri, \$200 in the Upper Hunter, \$240 in Armidale, \$250 in Tamworth and the Lower Hunter, \$260 in Cessnock and the Great Lakes area, \$285 in Maitland, \$290 in Port Stephens, \$325 in Lake Macquarie, to \$370 in Newcastle

“ Housing affordability is the number one issue. There needs to be investment in social and affordable housing. ”



- Latest figures show Local Government rate assessments in the region ranged from \$560 in the Upper Hunter, \$598 in Gunnedah, \$667 in Inverell, \$714 in Tamworth, \$747 in Narrabri, \$777 in the Moree Plains, \$781 in Maitland, \$831 in Armidale, \$874 in Newcastle, to \$880 in Lake Macquarie and Cessnock, against a rural average of \$531

Children and young people

- Latest figures show 65 in every 1000 children were involved in risk of significant harm reports and 18 1000 were in out-of-home care
- The Sustaining NSW Families nurse home-visiting program is currently available in Cessnock, Kurri Kurri, Singleton, Maitland and Newcastle. But there are children in need throughout the district
- 15,996 children live below the poverty line in the Hunter and 6,993 children living below the poverty line in New England. These represented child poverty rates of 13.7% and 19.5% respectively. Gwydir, with 27.4%, and Tenterfield with 28% had some of the highest rates of child poverty in the state

- In 2014-15, 489 young people aged 15-24 were hospitalised due to intentional self-harm

Dental wait list

- 922 children and 8041 adults are on the NSW public dental waiting list
- Only 62.9% of children age 5-6 years are free of dental caries
- On average, children age 5-6 years have 1.2 decayed, missing or filled teeth

Social Housing wait list

- Latest figures show there were 17,782 social housing units in the Hunter New England, with 6,551 people still on the list waiting to be housed
- In the 12 months to 30 June 201, 1,559 people were housed, with expected waiting times for those still on the list exceeding 2-5 years in much of the region, 5-10 years in areas like Maitland and Kurri Kurri, and exceeding 10 years in much of the region, including Foster, Lake Macquarie, Port Stephens, and Cessnock



In the Illawarra and Shoalhaven housing, young people and the cost of living were identified as key issues people faced. People in this region are having to make difficult choices as they cannot afford the increasing cost of living. They cannot afford to put food on the table and in particular older people are having to choose between paying a utility bill and buying food. This community want to see more investment in concessions and rebates for people on low incomes, particularly people on NewStart allowance.

There is a lack of affordable housing in this region. There needs to be more local affordable housing so that people can stay in their own area and better use of existing stock, for example holiday homes. But there also needs to be more ongoing support, it cannot just be providing a roof over someone's head but giving them the support to sustain this. Early intervention for young people was also identified as a key need, particularly for pre-adolescents.

“ We have a large number of people paying more than 50% of their income in rent, with transport costs on top of that – that doesn't leave much to put food on the table. ”

Cost of living

- Latest figures show the average annual personal income in the region was \$47,196, which was nearly \$4,000 less than the state average
- In the year to July 2015 an average yearly electricity bill cost \$2,100
- Latest median weekly rental figures for 2 bedroom dwellings range from \$285 in the Shoalhaven, \$340 in Shellharbour, \$360 in Wollongong, to \$380 in Kiama
- Latest figures show Local Government rate assessments in the region were \$760 in Shoalhaven, \$921 in Shellharbour, \$1,012 in Wollongong and \$1,175 in Kiama, against a NSW median of \$672

Children and young people

- Latest figures show over 50 in every 1000 children were involved in risk of significant harm reports and nearly 16 in 1000 children were in out-of-home care
- 10,363 children in the region living below the poverty line, with a rate of child poverty rate higher than the state average, at 15.1%
- In 2014-15, 158 young people aged 15-24 were hospitalised due to intentional self-harm

Dental wait list

- 460 children and 4779 adults are on the NSW public dental waiting list
- Only 71.3% of children age 5-6 years are free of dental caries
- On average, children age 5-6 years have 0.79 decayed, missing or filled teeth

Social Housing wait list

- Latest figures show there were 11,101 social housing units in the Illawarra Shoalhaven, with 3,683 people still waiting to be housed
- In the 12 months to 30 June 2015, 593 were housed, with expected waiting times between 5-10 years across much of the region, and exceeding 10 years in Ulladulla and Shellharbour

“ A house, a home underpins everything – you can't have good health if you don't have a roof over your head. ”



On the Mid-North Coast housing and homelessness, with their link with drugs and alcohol, opportunities for young people and mental health were the key priorities. In this area even housing at the bottom end of the market is not affordable for many people. Services for people at risk of homelessness are overwhelmed and cannot meet the demand.

This community wants to see ongoing support for families prioritised to ensure children and young people are supported and not at risk. We also need to see children and young people empowered, and their voices amplified in policy discussions about them.

“ Many clients are trying to access super because their income is just not enough to cover the cost of living. ”

Mental health was identified as impacting on all service systems, as were the current service gaps and lack of clear pathways to services where the gaps occur.

Cost of living

- Latest figures show the average annual personal income in the region was \$38,830, which is \$12,000 less than the state average

- In the year to July 2015 an average yearly electricity bill cost \$2,600, which is more than \$500 more than the equivalent in Sydney and Newcastle
- Latest median weekly rental figures for 2 bedroom dwellings range from \$250 in Kempsey/Nambucca, \$300 in Coffs Harbour, to \$310 in Port Macquarie
- Latest figures show Local Government rate assessments in the region ranged from \$648 in Kempsey, \$717 in Nambucca, \$785 in Coffs Harbour, to \$880 in Port Macquarie, against a rural average of \$531

Children and young people

- Latest figures show 69 in every 1000 children were involved in risk of significant harm reports and over 14 in 1000 were in out-of-home care
- Despite having high rates of vulnerable children there are no Sustaining NSW Families nurse home-visiting sites in the Mid North Coast

“ Young people are ending up at the pointy end of support services because they can't get the early support to stop them ending up there, and then it's too late. ”

- 9,899 children in the region living below the poverty line, at a rate nearly double the state average at 21.8%.

Nambucca's child poverty rate of 26.7% is one of the highest in the state

- In 2014-15, 111 young people aged 15-24 were hospitalised due to intentional self-harm

Dental wait list

- 509 children and 5612 adults are on the NSW public dental waiting list
- Only 42.2% of children age 5-6 years are free of dental caries
- On average, children age 5-6 years have 3.07 decayed, missing or filled teeth

Social Housing wait list

- Latest figures show there were 3,580 social housing units in the Mid North Coast, with a further 2,057 people still waiting to be housed

“ There is not enough social housing. There needs to be a business model around sustainable affordable housing, to maintain a sustainable industry. ”

- In the 12 months to 30 June 2015, 201 people were housed, with expected waiting times ranging from 2-5 years in Wauchope, 5-10 years in places like Bellingen and Macksville, to over 10 years in places like Coffs Harbour, Woolgoolga and Port Macquarie

Murrumbidgee and Riverina

Young people, mental health, transport and housing were key issues that arose in Murrumbidgee and Riverina. For young people, homelessness is a key problem, but early intervention and programs to ensure connectedness need to be part of the solution. This needs to start early yet the cost and availability of childcare in the region mean that it is inaccessible for many. And there is nothing available after hours for shift workers to access.

In Murrumbidgee distance and isolation can be a significant barrier to accessing employment, services or health care. Here you need a car, but the cost of maintaining a car can be prohibitive with the cost of registration and insurance, particularly for people doing it tough who may need this access the most.

This region needs more social and affordable housing and better maintenance for the social housing that exists. There should be more mixed housing with a percentage of real affordable housing in new developments.

Stronger inpatient and community based mental health services that can meet the demand that is in the community were also identified as vital.

Cost of living

- Latest figures show the average annual personal income in the region was \$40,077, which was over \$10,000 less than the state average
- In the year to July 2015 an average yearly electricity bill cost \$2,600 which is over \$500 more than the equivalent in Sydney and Newcastle
- Latest median weekly rental figures for 2 bedroom dwellings range from \$185 in Tumut/Tumbarumba, \$190 in the Upper Murray, \$200 in Griffith/Murrumbidgee, \$220 in Albury, to \$235 in Wagga Wagga
- Latest figures show Local Government rate assessments in the region ranged from \$173 in the Murrumbidgee, \$458 in Tumbarumba, \$568 in Cootamundra, \$570 in Tumut, \$783 in Griffith, \$818 in Wagga Wagga, to \$997 in Albury, against a rural average of \$531



Children and young people

- One in four children in Murrumbidgee LGA are developmentally vulnerable according to the Australian Early Development Census
- Latest figures show 65 in every 1000 children were involved in risk of significant harm reports and nearly 15 in 1000 were in out-of-home care

“ There needs to be investment in young people’s mental health and early intervention. ”

- Despite having some of the highest rates of vulnerable children, there are no Sustaining NSW Families nurse home-visiting sites in Murrumbidgee
- 8,679 children in the region living below the poverty line, with a child poverty rate of over 16% that is above the average of the state. The Urana LGA, with 27.2%, has one of the highest rates of child poverty in the state
- In 2014-15, 157 young people aged 15-24 were hospitalised due to intentional self-harm

Dental wait list

- 245 children and 1787 adults are on the NSW public dental waiting list
- Only 49.2% of children age 5-6 years are free of dental caries

“ Bad teeth and bad nutrition are big issues in this community. ”

- On average, children age 5-6 years have 2.32 decayed, missing or filled teeth

Social Housing wait list

- Latest figures show there were a total of 4,484 social housing units in the region, with 1,380 people still waiting for housing
- In the 12 months to 30 June 2015 716 people were housed, with expected waiting times for those still on the list ranging from 2 years in Wagga Wagga and Tumut, up to 5 years in Albury and Griffith and much of the region, and as much as 10 years in Cootamundra

“ Youth homelessness is a big concern here, particularly finding appropriate housing for young people. ”

Nepean and the Blue Mountains identified homelessness and housing affordability, mental health and suicide, and the need for early intervention as the key issues that would make a difference to reducing inequality. All of these issues are linked, and that means the solutions need to be linked too. This community need ongoing mental health support services, particularly for children and young people, that are accessible to the whole region not just a small part of it.

There is not enough recognition of the significant and growing proportion of working poor in this community, who are spending 50% or more of their income on rent and transport costs. These community members cannot afford day to day expenses and need support to meet the rising cost of living.

“ Children presenting to services with issues related to suicide are getting younger. ”

Cost of living

- Latest figures show the average annual personal income in the region was \$48,578, which was nearly \$3,000 less than the state average
- In the year to July 2015 an average yearly electricity bill cost \$2,100
- Latest median weekly rental figures for 2 bedroom dwellings range from \$240 in Lithgow, \$325 in Penrith, \$350 in the Hawksbury, to \$360 in the Blue Mountains
- Latest figures show Local Government rate assessments in the region ranged from \$574 in Lithgow, \$902 in Penrith, \$936 in Hawksbury, to \$1,091 in the Blue Mountains, against a state median of \$672

Children and young people

- Latest figures show over 60 in every 1000 children were involved in risk of significant harm reports and 22 in 1000 were in out-of-home care
- 9,834 children in the region living below the poverty line at an average rate of 14%
- In 2014-15, 154 young people aged 15-24 were hospitalised due to intentional self-harm

Dental wait list

- 1144 children and 9725 adults are on the NSW public dental waiting list
- Only 69.6% of children age 5-6 years are free of dental caries
- On average, children age 5-6 years have 1.04 decayed, missing or filled teeth

Social Housing wait list

- Latest figures show there were 5,584 social housing units in the Nepean Blue Mountains, with 3,358 people still on the waiting list to be housed
- In the 12 Months to 30 June 2015, 460 people were housed, with expected waiting times for those remaining on the list ranging from 2-5 years in Lithgow, to 5-10 years or more in Penrith, Blue Mountains, and Richmond

In the Northern Rivers and Far North key priorities were housing and children and young people, particularly children in out of home care. This community needs more social housing with an enforced minimum percentage of social and affordable housing in all new developments. But also protections for people in the private rental market, including legal protections for people living in caravan parks.

There are too many children in out of home care in this region and there needs to be more opportunities to engage with families early. The biggest focus should be early interventions across the board. Services need to be getting involved early enough to ensure the cycle does not continue. One pathway is early childhood education, and there are some great examples of that working in communities in this region.

Cost of living pressures are hard to keep pace with for many people in the region who are living on the brink of crisis and are vulnerable, living week to week.

“ The cost of public transport makes getting to education and training impossible, resulting in kids hitching to and from school or TAFE. ”

Cost of living

- Latest figures show the average annual personal income in the region was \$38,292, which was over \$12,000 dollars less than the state average
- In the year to July 2015 an average yearly electricity bill cost \$2,600 which is as much as \$500 more than the equivalent in Sydney and Newcastle
- Latest median weekly rental figures for 2 bedroom dwellings range from \$240 in the Richmond Valley hinterland, \$253 in the Clarence Valley, \$335 in the Tweed Valley, to \$345 in the Coastal areas of the Richmond Valley
- Latest figures show Local Government rate assessments the region were; \$588 in Richmond Valley, \$626 in Kyogle, \$669 in Ballina, \$1022 in Tweed, \$950 in Lismore, and \$898 in Byron, against a NSW rural average of \$531



Children and young people

- Latest figures show 65 in every 1000 children were involved in risk of significant harm reports and nearly 14 in 1000 were in out-of-home care
- The Sustaining NSW Families nurse home-visiting program is currently available in Lismore, Kyogle, Richmond Valley and Ballina. But there are children in need throughout the district. In Clarence Valley 8.3% of children are developmentally vulnerable according to the Australian Early Development Census

“ Preschool and early development needs better funding. Children being ready for school is a big gap, with access and affordability of Early Childhood a big problem. ”

- 11,072 children in the region living below the poverty line, with a child poverty rate nearly double the state average at 21.6%. The Kyogle LGA has one of the worst rates of child poverty in the state at 28.2%
- In 2014-15, 180 young people aged 15-24 were hospitalised due to intentional self-harm

Dental wait list

- 510 children and 8222 adults are on the NSW public dental waiting list
- Only 42.7% of children age 5-6 years are free of dental caries
- On average, children age 5-6 years have 2.8 decayed, missing or filled teeth

Social Housing wait list

- Latest figure show there were 3,890 social housing units in the region, with 2,964 people still on the list waiting to be housed
- In the 12 months to 30 June 2015, 293 people were housed, with expected waiting times across the region for those still on the list generally between 5-10 years, with some areas such as Tweed Heads, Byron Bay, Mullumbimby, and Murwillumbah exceeding 10 years

With the significant growth in South West Sydney's population, key emerging issues are social and affordable housing, outreach and planning. We need to ensure there is enough housing at the social and affordable end of the market. Our planning system should cater for that, and also the services and infrastructure needed by a rapidly growing population. With this growing population, we also need investment in services and outreach to ensure community needs are met.

The cost of living

- Latest figures show the average annual personal income in the region was \$45,646, which was over \$5,000 less than the state average
- In the year to July 2015 an average yearly electricity bill cost \$2,100
- Latest median weekly rental figures for 2 bedroom dwellings range from \$333 in Fairfield, \$350 in Campbelltown and the Southern Highlands, to \$380 in Liverpool
- Latest figures show Local Government rate assessments in the region ranged from \$671 in Fairfield, \$792 in Campbelltown, \$866 in Blacktown, \$900 in Liverpool, to \$1,010 in Wollondilly, against a state median of \$672

Children and young people

- In 2014-15, over 38 in every 1000 children were involved in risk of significant harm reports and 9 in 1000 were in out-of-home care
- The Sustaining NSW Families nurse home-visiting program is currently available in Fairfield and Liverpool and is being implemented in Campbelltown. But there are children in need throughout the district. In Bankstown almost 1 in 10 children are developmentally vulnerable according to the Australian Early Development Census
- 14,587 children in the region living below the poverty line, with a child poverty rate averaging over 15%. The Campbelltown LGA has a child poverty rate of 20.21% that is nearly double the state average
- In 2014-15, 366 young people aged 15-24 were hospitalised due to intentional self-harm

“ Access to acute mental health services is key – there needs to be a greater focus on services for younger age groups. ”

Dental wait list

- 1333 children and 20548 adults are on the NSW public dental waiting list
- Only 61.1% of children age 5-6 years are free of dental caries
- On average, children age 5-6 years have 1.47 decayed, missing or filled teeth

Social Housing wait list

- Latest figures show there were 20,690 social housing units in South Western Sydney, with a further 12,764 people still waiting to be housed
- In the 12 months to 30 June 2015, 1,307 people were housed, with expected waiting times for those still on the list averaging between 5-10 years in most places, and exceeding 10 years in Liverpool, Bankstown, and Fairfield



In Southern NSW young people, housing, mental health and health were the major issues. This community wants to see trauma informed services and supports for young people, along with outreach services in mental health. We need services that support people before they reach crisis point and need acute care. We need to target children from zero up, to help them connect to their community, building into schools and existing programmes, and working with children before the crisis cycle begins.

Southern NSW also need more housing, with a significant wait list for accessible housing in all areas in this region. People have to travel out of town to find affordable housing and this has flow on impacts of cost of transport and access to employment.

Cost of living

- Latest figures show the average annual personal income in the region was \$54,383
- In the year to July 2015 an average yearly electricity bill cost \$2,600, which is more than \$500 more than the equivalent in Sydney and Newcastle

- Latest median weekly rental figures for 2 bedroom dwellings range from \$180 in the Lachlan Valley, \$200 in the Snowy Mountains, \$240 in Goulburn/Yass, \$250 in the South Coast, to \$295 in Queanbeyan

“ People are having to travel out of town to find affordable housing, the cost of transport takes away from the basics, like prescriptions, utilities and food. ”

- Latest figures show Local Government rate assessments in the region ranged from \$477 in Bombala, \$608 in the Snowy River and Yass Valley, \$680 in Cooma-Monaro, \$688 in Eurobodalla, \$767 in Goulburn-Mulwaree, \$789 in the Bega Valley, to \$935 in Queanbeyan, against a state median of \$672

Children and young people

- Latest figures show 51 in every 1000 children were involved in risk of significant harm reports and 10 in 1000 were in out-of-home care
- 6,925 children in the region living below the poverty line, with a child poverty rate of 14% that is higher than the state average. Eurobodalla has one of the highest child poverty rates in the state, at 23.2%.

- In 2014-15, 112 young people aged 15-24 were hospitalised due to intentional self-harm

Dental wait list

- 311 children and 1761 adults are on the NSW public dental waiting list
- Only 55.5% of children age 5-6 years are free of dental caries
- On average, children age 5-6 years have 1.98 decayed, missing or filled teeth

Social Housing wait list

- The latest figures show there were 2,878 social housing units in Southern NSW, with 1,276 people still on the list waiting to be housed
- In the 12 months to 30 June 2015 275 people were housed, with expected waiting times for those still on the list exceeding 2-5 years in Bega, 5-10 years across much of the region, and exceeding 10 years in places like Queanbeyan

“ Young people with emerging mental health issues can't get to see a practitioner until it becomes acute – there is a major gap around accessing support. ”



In Sydney the key priorities are social and affordable housing, children and young people and health. We need to see more social and affordable housing but also a strong focus on tenant's rights. Affordable housing is fundamental to stabilising ever other issue. We need to build on the Social and Affordable Housing Fund and take it to the next level. There is a significant shortfall in Sydney that still needs to be addressed.

We need to see more investment in education, health and other services and supports focussed on children and young people. This community want to see all young people engaged and have opportunities regardless of background or finance.

Cost of living

- Latest figure show the average annual personal income across the Sydney, Southeast and Northeast Sydney region was \$60,175 which, although higher than the state average, has not kept pace with the significant increases in the basic costs of living
- In the year to July 2015 an average yearly electricity bill cost \$2,100
- Latest median weekly rental figures for 2 bedroom dwellings range from \$390 in Canterbury, \$473 in Ashfield, \$500 in Strathfield, \$530 in Burwood, \$550 in Marrickville, to \$630 in Canada Bay

- Latest figures show Local Government rate assessments across Sydney and Southeast and Northern Sydney in 2010/11 from \$583 in Botany Bay, to \$1,243 in Pittwater, against a state median of \$672

“Poverty impacts on so many health conditions, and the impact of chronic health issues is long-term.”

Children and young people

- Latest figures show 22 in every 1000 children in Sydney were involved in risk of significant harm reports and 3 in 1000 in Sydney were in out-of-home care
- The Sustaining NSW Families nurse home-visiting program is currently available in Arncliffe, St George and Sutherland, and being implemented in Canterbury. But there are children in need throughout other areas of Sydney
- 48,335 children across Sydney, Southeast and Northern Sydney, living below the poverty line. LGAs like Canterbury, with 25.6%, and Rockdale, with 22.4%, have child poverty rates nearly double the state average
- In 2014-15, 767 young people aged 15-24 across Sydney, Southeast Sydney and Northern Sydney, were hospitalised due to intentional self-harm

Dental wait list

- 2,450 children and 23,955 adults across north, southeast and central Sydney are on the NSW public dental waiting list
- Only 65.2% of children in Sydney age 5-6 years are free of dental caries
- On average, children age 5-6 years in Sydney have 1.16 decayed, missing or filled teeth

Social Housing wait list

- The latest figures show there are 37,100 social housing units across Sydney, South-eastern and Northern Sydney, with 12,541 people still on the list waiting to be housed
- In the 12 Months to 30 June, 1,935 people were housed, with expected waiting times for those still on the list exceeding 10 years in Marrickville, Canterbury, the Inner West, St George, Sutherland, Sydney, the Eastern Suburbs and Riverwood, and 5-10 years or more in the Northern Beaches and Suburbs

In Western NSW, with an Aboriginal population of 9.2% - four times the state average, it is crucial that Aboriginal people can take ownership, and involve their community in the provision of supports and services for their community. The key issues in Western NSW were health, mental health, housing and young people.

Access and equity in health care is key in this region. Health funding and the health workforce – ensuring we develop the existing workforce, but also build it so that services can meet the needs of the region. Mental health units need to be expanded, but we also need to see other services in the community, and a plan to tackle the stigma around mental health. Mental health is a concern for young people and we need to see more social spaces and supports available so young people have somewhere to go.



“Transport impacts on people being able to work. People might have a car but cannot afford the registration and the upkeep costs to run the car legally.”

We also need to see more accessible transport and to remove the barriers to joining resources together that are already out there. Finally, we need affordable housing not just social housing. There are not enough affordable housing units in this region. We need to invest in affordable housing and have more people transition along the housing continuum.

Cost of living

- Latest figure show the average annual personal income in the region was \$42,911, which was nearly \$8,000 less than the state average
- In the year to July 2015 an average yearly electricity bill cost \$2,600, which is \$500 more than the equivalent in Sydney and Newcastle
- Latest median weekly rental figures for 2 bedroom dwellings range from \$200 in Bourke/Cobar, \$240 in Dubbo, to \$250 in Orange and Bathurst

- Latest figures show Local Government rate assessments in the region ranged from \$227 in Bourke, to \$731 in Mid-Western, \$783 in Bathurst, \$866 in Dubbo and \$1,057 in Orange, against a regional average of \$531

Children and young people

- More than half of the children in Brewarrina are developmentally vulnerable according to the Australian Early Development Census. This is the highest proportion of children in any LGA in NSW

“Early childhood education is just not affordable. We need our children to get the best start in life and currently that is flat out of reach for a lot of families.”

- Recent figures show 86 in every 1000 children were involved in risk of significant harm reports and 22 in 1000 were in out-of-home care
- Despite having some of the highest rates of vulnerable children, there are no Sustaining NSW Families nurse home-visiting sites in the Western NSW
- 10,141 children in the region living below the poverty line, with an average child poverty rate of over 17%. Further, Coonamble (26.2%), Warrumbungle (26.9%), Gilgandra (27.8%), Walgett (27.93%) and Brewarrina (31.15%) are among the regions with the 10 highest rates of child poverty in the state

- In 2014-15, 101 young people aged 15-24 were hospitalised due to intentional self-harm

Dental wait list

- 1578 children and 2971 adults are on the NSW public dental waiting list
- Only 47.7% of children age 5-6 years are free of dental caries
- On average, children age 5-6 years have 2.4 decayed, missing or filled teeth

Social Housing wait list

- The latest figures show there are 5,313 social housing units across the region, with 1,773 applicants still waiting for housing

“Affordable housing is a big concern, even in the private market. Dubbo has a 6 year waiting list for a general client.”

- In the 12 months to 30 June 2015 730 people were housed, with expected waiting times ranging from 2 years or more in Bourke, Orange, Parkes and Forbes, to over 5 years in Bathurst and many other areas of the region

“We are on the cusp of a crisis with the number of people on dialysis, and there is not the local health care to treat people or the transport options to get them there.”

In Western Sydney the key priorities were underpinned by an even larger one – poverty, which affects everything. The key issues were housing, mental health and education. We need to see inclusionary zoning and shared equity schemes plus other measures to boost housing. Community housing models allow for better management, with a commitment to a specific community and can take account of a community’s culture, gender, age, and geographical needs.

This community wants to see early intervention with children and families to address mental health issues and more funding for education. Intensive family support is needed where there are mental health problems. There needs to be treatment and prevention measures in place because currently there can be a cycle across generations.

Cost of living

- Latest figure show the average annual personal income in the region was \$49,396, which is below the state average
- In the year to July 2015 an average yearly electricity bill cost \$2,100
- The latest median weekly rental figures for 2 bedroom dwellings range from \$235 in Blacktown, \$270 in Holroyd, \$330 in Parramatta, \$350 in the Hills, to \$420 in Auburn
- Latest figures show Local Government rate assessments in the region ranged from \$52 in Auburn, \$637 in Holroyd, \$697 in Parramatta, \$777 in Blacktown, to \$918 in the Hills, against a state median of \$672

Children and young people

- Latest figures show 27 in every 1000 children were involved in risk of significant harm reports and 4 in 1000 were in out-of-home care

“ We need early mental health intervention for 0-8 year olds, and a commitment for ongoing programs. ”

- The Sustaining NSW Families nurse home-visiting program is currently being implemented in Auburn and Parramatta. But there are children in need throughout the district. In Blacktown almost 1 in 10 children are developmentally vulnerable according to the Australian Early Development Census
- 27,999 children in the region living below the poverty line, with a child poverty rate averaging 20%. Auburn has one of the highest child poverty rates in the state at 26.1%
- Last year 261 young people aged 15-24 were hospitalised due to intentional self-harm

Dental wait list

- 2551 children and 10,016 adults are on the NSW public dental waiting list
- Only 54.5% of children age 5-6 years are free of dental caries
- On average, children age 5-6 years have 2.05 decayed, missing or filled teeth

Social Housing wait list

- The latest figures show there are 20,690 social housing units in Western Sydney, with 12,764 people still on the list waiting to be housed
- In the 12 months to 30 June 2015, 1,231 people were housed, with expected waiting times for those still on the list being 10 years or more, across the region

“ Housing is a fundamental need, inclusionary zoning needs to happen. Currently there is none in the Parramatta area and it is a lost opportunity. ”

