

Talking Points: Empower the West

These are some talking points to help you explain to your MP why the Empower the West campaign is important for NSW, to you and the people and communities in the Far West.

Challenges facing communities in the Far West

- The population in the region has been declining for more than 20 years. In 1997, the region had a population of 58,000, today it's 48,000¹
- Migration out of the region linked to a lack of educational, social and employment opportunities
- The population is also spread over vast distances
- There is an ageing population with a relatively young and growing Aboriginal population
- As a result of population decline, local economies have been weakening
- There are relatively low income levels in almost all local government areas of the Far West
- Communities are constantly under stress
- Communities under stress – Evidenced by a deep sense of disconnect and discontent associated with social and economic change, a lack of trust and an absence of meaningful collaboration between community groups, including tensions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.
- Continuing high levels of social disadvantage
- Concern that the existing service delivery system lacks local input, ignores localised priorities, is poorly designed, and not focussed on achieving meaningful and visible local outcomes
- A lack of trust and collaboration characterised by:
- Unhealthy community competition for resources and services
- Tensions within and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities
- Perceptions that “they don’t really care” due to the absence of a visible presence of NSW and Australian government agencies
- Lack of effective leadership at all levels of government
- Absence of a unified system of governance - with government agencies and councils currently operating in silos with minimal levels of collaboration, collective action or strategic focus
- A system of Aboriginal governance and service delivery that is not effectively integrated with the system of local, State and Commonwealth government

We’re focusing on the Far West because:

Our members, with whom we consulted in developing the 2016 PBS, told us the Far West is in need of significant and urgent investment in a range of social policy areas, namely:

- Transport

¹ Office of Local Government (2016), Background Paper, *The Far West Initiative Improving outcomes for the People of Far Western NSW*

- Justice
- Family and community support
- Health

NCOSS's Pre-budget Submission called on the government to make further investments in support services for vulnerable children and families, health, community transport, and alternative options to custodial sentencing. In more specific terms, this included:

Recommendations:

Invest an additional \$40 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.

The State's west has a much higher proportion of children at risk of significant harm, but 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.²

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.

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 IPTAAS provides invaluable assistance to people to access medical treatment.

The fact that IPTAAS provides money for public transport on 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 average³ 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 \$2million to provide five year funding for the Driving Change Program in four sites across Western NSW and the Far West.

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

² 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.

³ FaCS District data and profiles 2013-14.

license in NSW compared to 70% of non-Aboriginal people.⁴

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.

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 has the cap. Specific attention 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.

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.

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.

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

Aboriginal people make up almost a quarter of our State's prison population.

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.

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.

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.

⁴ 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.

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. 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.