

Media Release

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NCOSS STEPS UP COMMUNITY TRANSPORT CAMPAIGN ACROSS NSW

In the lead up to the State Election, NSW's peak social services body, NCOSS is shining a light on significant concerns surrounding the future of community transport services across the state.

NCOSS CEO, Joanna Quilty, said that access to transport is a major issue for people who are experiencing poverty or disadvantage, and particularly for people in regional and rural areas.

“In NSW, your postcode should not determine your ability to get around – we need to ensure all communities have access to affordable transport solutions,” Ms Quilty said.

“Currently, community transport providers, particularly in regional and rural areas, are facing growing demand that they are unable to meet due to funding constraints and uncertainty.

“As well as this, overly prescriptive contracts prevent providers from running their businesses as they see fit.”

These concerns from community transport providers have also been compounded by issues with the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

“The NDIS has added to concerns about viability as it means funding to meet the transport needs of people with disability no longer flows to community transport providers,” Ms Quilty said.

“NDIS participants can supposedly purchase transport services through their individualised funding packages. But as we know, NDIS plans have so far failed to adequately account for participants' transport costs.

“In addition, many people with disability don't qualify for the NDIS and no longer have funded transport supports, which means they are turning to community transport for assistance.”

Ms Quilty said community transport is an economic and social enabler that allows people to stay connected and must be better supported by State political leaders.

“Compared to public transport in metropolitan areas, transport in the regions is in short supply,” Ms Quilty said.

“For many people, community transport is a vital service which enables them to access medical treatment, undertake daily tasks and participate in local activities.

“Reducing transport disadvantage across NSW must be a priority of the next NSW Government,” Ms Quilty said.

BACKGROUND

This financial year, the NSW Government committed \$9.5 million in recurrent funding and a one-off injection of \$3 million to the community transport program targeted at 'transport disadvantaged' people across all of NSW (this does not include funding given to local councils), compared with \$8.38 billion for metro Sydney-based public transport.

The lion's share of funding for community transport comes from the Federal Government via Transport NSW, but this is targeted predominantly at older people, rather than 'transport disadvantaged' communities.

NCOSS is calling for the next NSW Government to prioritise reducing transport disadvantage through greater recognition of and support for the vital role of community transport all over NSW. In particular NCOSS, in conjunction with the Community Transport Organisation, is advocating for:

- Long-term funding for the NSW Community Transport Program, including an increase in funds for service providers by 20 per cent each year for five years.
- Streamlining and clarification of contractual requirements, including asset ownership and the ability for community transport providers to manage their fleets in response to local need.
- Establishing place-based arrangements so that all transport funding and resources in a particular location can be more flexibly deployed to meet local needs.

Other transport priorities that NCOSS is advocating for include:

- Improve the Isolated Patients Transport and Accommodation Scheme to increase flexibility in and awareness of approved services.
- Increased funding directed towards evidence-based programs, such as Driving Change, that support young people in regional areas to get their licence.
- A move to an even flatter fare structure for regional bus services, to further reduce the disparity between metropolitan public transport fares and those applied in rural and regional areas.
- Ms Quilty said these practical measures would greatly benefit regional communities across the state.

For more information on NCOSS, go to www.platform.ncoss.org.au

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