



ncoss
NSW Council of Social Service

7 December 2017

Rebecca Main
Committee Director
Portfolio Committee No. 2 – Health and Community Services
NSW Parliament Legislative Council
6 Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Via email: portfoliocommittee2@parliament.nsw.gov.au

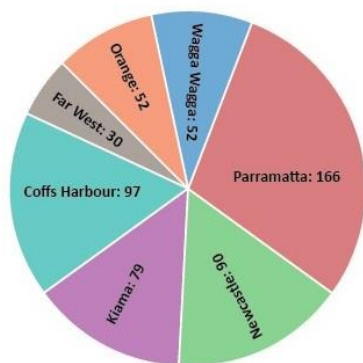
Dear Ms Main,

Re: Inquiry into the provision of drug rehabilitation services in regional, rural and remote New South Wales

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to the *Inquiry into the provision of drug rehabilitation services in regional, rural and remote New South Wales*.

The NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS) works with and for people experiencing poverty and disadvantage to see positive change in our communities. As the peak body for health and community services in NSW, we support the sector to deliver innovative services that grow and develop as needs and circumstances evolve.

NCOSS believes there is immense value in hearing directly from diverse, strong and connected communities on the key challenges they face, and opportunities for positive change. That is why NCOSS held consultations in July and August this year comprising six regional conferences, 38 workshops and 570 people across the state, to speak with people living below the poverty line, leaders and services grounded in communities.



During these consultations we heard that access to drug rehabilitation services is a critical issue for communities in across NSW. Communities told us that people experiencing poverty and disadvantage find it hard to access and maintain the treatment and support they need, and that the lack of funding in the alcohol and other drug (AOD) service sector has led to a major shortage of places in AOD treatment.

We heard that the AOD service sector is not supported and resourced to meet the specific and complex needs of vulnerable groups. For example, we know that people in AOD treatment often experience intersecting issues such as poor mental and/or oral health. These can have a significant flow on impact on general health, employment and social integration. However, AOD services are often not equipped or resourced to provide for these intersecting needs.

Moreover, there is limited continuity of support for people transitioning back into the community following AOD treatment. This means that without adequate support, some people are at higher risk of experiencing homelessness, compounding health issues or coming into contact with the justice system, which further entrenches the cycle of disadvantage.

In this context, and in response to the Inquiry's specific Terms of Reference, NCOSS endorses the key issues and recommendations raised in submissions from our organisational members the Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies (NADA) and Mission Australia.

NCOSS reinforces that:

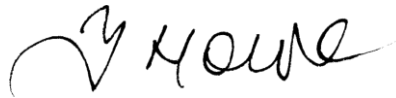
- The AOD service sector needs more support and resources to meet demand for treatment and bed shortages, particularly in rural and remote NSW where services are limited. Services in these areas need more funding and investment not only to meet demand, but also reduce the need for clients to travel long distances to metropolitan or larger regional centres to access treatment.
- Funding allocations must be informed by robust and evidence-based assessment of population and community need, for example, through the under-utilised *Drug and Alcohol Service Planning (DASP)* model.
- Rehabilitation services need to be affordable, holistic and provide adequate aftercare supports. Wrap-around supports should include links to mental health supports, education and employment, housing and other community services.
- There is a need to better understand how people with lived experience as peer workers identify in the AOD workforce, so that adequate support can be provided to this cohort into the future. NCOSS's 2018/19 Pre-Budget Submission¹ calls for more investment in the mental health peer workforce and we believe peer workers need to be supported and valued for the crucial role they play across the human services sector.
- More broadly, an AOD workforce development strategy should be established and resourced to support ongoing education, training and capacity building in the sector. It should also focus on recruiting and retaining suitably qualified staff in rural and remote areas.
- Targeted and culturally appropriate supports and services should be provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional, rural and remote areas. Where possible, these services should be delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations.

¹ <https://www.ncoss.org.au/ncoss-pre-budget-submission-2018/19>

This Inquiry presents a crucial opportunity to respond to the needs of communities in regional, remote and rural NSW, and NCOSS looks forward to the Committee's findings in this regard.

If you would like to discuss any of the issues we raise in this submission in more detail, or require any further information or input, please do not hesitate to contact Elyse Cain, NCOSS Policy Lead, on 02 8960 7912 or elyse@ncoss.org.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tracy McLeod Howe'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'T'.

Tracy McLeod Howe
Chief Executive Officer
NSW Council of Social Service

