

# People Places Partnerships – Mid North Coast Summary Report

## Taree Regional Forum November 2023

This Summary Report outlines the key issues and insights shared by participants at the Taree Regional Forum hosted by NCOSS and local hosts Manning Valley Indigenous Community Support Services and Forster Neighbourhood Centre. We encourage everyone with an interest in service delivery and social issues in the Mid North Coast to read the full report [found here](#).

### Key findings

#### Funding for Place-Based Solutions

- Services are increasingly being concentrated in larger population centres, losing touch with the communities they are meant to be working with and providing services for.
- Services are struggling to address community needs due to the negative impacts of short-term grant programs and restrictive guidelines.

*‘Kempsey is called Kempsey Airport by local services – because there are so many pilots here’*

- The nature of competitive tendering and grants means services can’t collaborate as much as they would like – funding bodies want the sector to collaborate at the same time as making them compete with each other.
- Services need appropriate long-term funding to:
  - Cover the real cost of high-quality service provision.
  - Build trust through the provision of successful long-term programs developed in collaboration with communities.
  - Respond to emergencies, and innovations in the sector.
  - Recruit and retain staff.
  - Pay staff properly – the “culture of care” leads to exploitation of staff through unpaid overtime.
- People and families access many services to get the help they need – reporting doesn’t reflect the complex ways people achieve good outcomes for themselves and their families, over long timeframes.

*‘The sector knows strengths-based approaches work best but community development has become a dirty word for funding bodies – it’s all about efficiencies and churning out spurious individual “outcomes” instead of working in step with communities.’*

- Aboriginal ways of doing things – sitting with people in their pain, listening, yarning and spending time with people is not acknowledged and funded. Likewise, Neighbourhood Centres are not recognised for much of the work they do and do not receive core funding. They are often the first place people turn to.

*‘Local place-based services are responsive and flexible – we know what our communities need.’*

## Access to Local Services

- Engaging people in effective programs can be difficult – services need to be able to build a local profile and demonstrate non-judgemental approaches. Trust and confidentiality is key for wary clients. Clients need to be reassured they will be safe and not be judged – but service KPIs measure “occasions of service” not time spent with clients.

*‘Our services are swamped with people suffering the mental health impacts of stress and trauma caused by poverty.’*

- Non-Indigenous services are not always culturally safe or they have one or two Aboriginal workers who shoulder a huge load for those services.
- In many areas services just don’t exist or they have huge waiting lists:
  - Mental health services for young people.
  - Limited or no mental health services across the board.
  - Allied health services.
  - Limited services for men, especially men with children and men over 25.
  - Addiction and literacy supports for young people.
  - Personal advocates for young people.
  - Services for people caught in the criminal “justice” system, particularly young people.
- Data collected by government agencies are released too slowly to inform immediate need - the census data is too slow, and is inaccurate for First Nations communities, who often don’t engage due to fears of what happens with their data, or how it is used against them in mandatory reporting.
- Some services have been centralised to larger population centres but there is no reliable public transport and no community transport - the harder things are for people the less likely they are to engage. Some services are not accessible to people with disability.
- More coordination and communication between federal, local and state governments and between and within agencies is needed. Collaboration and sharing of resources is vital so that all cohorts are serviced adequately. Local service provision needs to be focused on the needs of communities and aligned with local, regional and national strategies.

## Networks and Sector Support

- Client focused regular meetings are really important to ensure that people with complex needs can access all parts of the service system. Services rely a lot on meetings such as Safety or Youth Action meetings.
- Interagencies focused on particular service types or cohorts are important to share information and keep up to date with reforms in the sector, innovation and research, and to build relationships for future collaboration.
- Various groups are supported across the sector and by government – state, federal and local. Local government has a big role to play in co-ordinating and supporting interagencies – they are not competing in the same space as social services so are unlikely to have the same conflicts of interest as when larger sector organisations are tasked as unofficial regional “peak” bodies.
- Where local organisations set up their own networks they are mostly run on top of existing workloads and with little or no resourcing – ‘support is patchy’. All organisations should receive adequate funding to enable them to both participate in and resource local networks.

## For more information

For more information about this summary report please contact:

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