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Budget of positives and negatives

This year's budget announcement once again contains a mixed bag for the region's community services organisations and for its many vulnerable residents, according to the peak body for community services, the Illawarra Forum.

The Illawarra Forum welcomes Budget initiatives to assist young people to move into paid employment, and to tackle violence against women and their children but warns it still fails to address significant disadvantage faced by families on low incomes, and young people on welfare payments.

"We welcome some of the measures announced in the 2016/17 Budget plan" said Nicky Sloan, CEO of the Illawarra Forum "These include the significant investments over the next three years in programs to break the cycle of violence. While we are not yet aware of what these programs will be, we do know they will be informed by the final report of the COAG Advisory Panel on Reducing Violence."

Some other welcome measures include a \$10m investment over 3 years in support for recently arrived humanitarian migrants to increase their social and economic participation, and the \$96m investment into new approaches to groups who are at risk of long term welfare dependency.

"We also note the new investment into Youth Jobs initiatives, including internship programs and subsidies to encourage employers to take on young workers" said Ms Sloan "we will be delighted if these initiatives result to real job outcomes for the region's large number of unemployed young people. However, the budget contains no increase in support payments for young unemployed people, and the reality is that keeping people living under the poverty line is not conducive to employment outcomes. It is difficult to look for work while you are concentrating on day to day survival."

While the budget includes an investment in Aged Care Contact Centres to inform people about their options in terms of community care and residential options, there are concerns about the impact of the Medicare rebate freeze and the likely impact on bulk billing, as well as cuts to dental health which will put additional strain on the already stretched public dental service.

"Overall, the budget addresses the issue of the deficit through cuts to spending rather than increasing revenue" said Ms Sloan "It does nothing to address the continuing lack of investment in affordable housing; and the \$20m per year cuts to the Department of Human Services over the next 4 years will increase the pressure on already strained Centrelink staffing levels, and therefore on the service they can deliver to people in need."

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About the Illawarra Forum

The Illawarra Forum is the peak body working for community services organisations in the Illawarra and the Shoalhaven. It supports community organisations, promotes expertise and innovation in community development, fosters industry development and provides advocacy for social justice.

The Forum represents the non-government community services industry in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven, which consists of approximately 300 organisations. The Illawarra Forum works closely with numerous organisations which provide support to vulnerable people across the region including:

- Social housing providers;
- Homelessness services;
- Home and community care services;
- People with disability;
- Individuals and families with multiple layers of social and financial disadvantage;
- Victims of domestic violence and sexual assault ;
- Youth work programs;
- Community health services, including mental health and drug/alcohol services;
- Community legal centre services; and
- Community development and community capacity building.