

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **2020/21 Budget – The Good, The Bad and The Ugly**

This year's federal budget announcement contains a mix of the good, the bad, and the downright ugly for the region's many vulnerable residents and for the region's hard working community services organisations, according to the Community Industry Group, the peak body for community services in southern NSW.

### **The Good**

"Of course we welcome the tax cuts for people on low and middle incomes, and that will include many of the hard working people in the community services industry," said Community Industry Group CEO, Nicky Sloan. "But unemployment is high across the Illawarra and NSW South Coast, and we must remember that tax cuts do nothing for those who don't have jobs."

"We were hoping for a significant investment in social housing," said Ms Sloan "While that did not eventuate, we were very pleased to see a small investment in the important community housing sector. But a higher investment in the social housing sector would have provided a real economic stimulus for the region."

The doubling of free mental health therapy sessions from 10 to 20 is welcomed, particularly at a time when people are experiencing increased stress and social isolation.

Two payments of \$250 have been announced for people on pensions and family tax subsidies, these will undoubtedly enable people on these income supports to make important one-off purchases. However, people on JobSeeker payments will miss out on these important financial windfalls.

"The 23,000 increase in Home Care Packages for older people is highly welcomed," said Nicky Sloan. "But we must remember that there are currently over 100,000 people on the waiting list. So, 77% of the people waiting for these important services will once again miss out."

### **The Bad**

There was a lack of investment for jobs in the care sector. At a time of increased unemployment, this was a lost opportunity to support new jobs in a growth sector.

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Similarly, there was a lack of additional funding for domestic and family violence services. “The COVID-19 pandemic has seen an escalation in relationship tensions and relationship violence,” said Ms Sloan “This would have been an ideal time to invest in prevention, intervention and support strategies.”

Most disappointing is the lack of increase of investment in residential aged care, instead the government is waiting for the findings of the Royal Commission in February 2021. “We know that more than 670 people have died in residential aged care as a result of COVID-19, and thousands more suffer isolation from family and friends,” Nicky Sloan said. “This would have been an ideal time to invest in aged care and support the Aged Care providers who are working so hard to provide the best care for our valuable older Australians.”

### **The Ugly**

The most glaring gap in the 2020/21 Budget has been the failure to deliver a permanent adequate rate for the JobSeeker payment. “With the unemployment rate rising, and more people finding themselves out of work as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were disappointed that there was no announcement of a permanent increase to the JobSeeker payment,” said Ms Sloan. “We cannot go back to a payment of \$40 per day. While the coronavirus supplement has been invaluable, supplements can be reduced or removed at any time. We urgently need a permanent increase to the base JobSeeker payment.”

Finally, although it had been expected, it was disappointing to see the 113% increase to Humanities subjects. “While we were pleased to see that Social Work was excluded from this increase, we must acknowledge that many people – myself included – bring different skills to the social services sector through humanities degrees in important subjects such as human geography, sociology or politics.”

### **About the Community Industry Group**

Community Industry (formerly known as Illawarra Forum) is the peak body working for community services and organisations in Southern NSW. It supports community organisations, promotes expertise and innovation in community development, fosters industry development and provides advocacy for social justice. Community Industry Group is an independent organisation governed by a committee of management elected annually by the membership.

Community Industry Group represents the non-government community services industry in the South East of NSW, which consists of approximately 300 organisations, and works closely with numerous organisations which provide support to vulnerable people across the region.