

MEDIA RELEASE

20/06/2017

Surplus represents disappointment for disadvantaged - NSW Budget 2017/18

The Illawarra Forum today called the NSW State Budget 'unexciting and disappointing'.

Considering the large surplus, the peak body for community services in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven calls for more investment in family and community services, affordable housing, and public transport in this region.

"Once again, the NSW Government has prioritised a budgetary surplus over the welfare of vulnerable people, including the homeless and families on low incomes" said Nicky Sloan, CEO of the Illawarra Forum

Particularly lacking is investment in social and affordable housing. "Access to safe, accessible and affordable housing is the number one issue affecting families on low incomes and vulnerable people" Ms Sloan said "and while we welcome the extension of measures such as the Social and Affordable Housing Fund, we believe there should be greater investment in social housing options. For example, it's nice to see the \$5m investment into transitional accommodation for rough sleepers, but this does little to address underlying issues or support long-term sustainable rentals".

Also lacking are early intervention measures. "The NSW Government is increasing case workers and support workers in the child protection area, but this reflects growing demand. Investing in early intervention programs including capacity building and community development programs could prevent families slipping into crisis, and reduce the number of children and young people in the child protection and Out of Home Care system." said Ms Sloan

The Illawarra Forum also welcomed the investment into supporting people escaping violence, including the \$25m Start Safely Program, a further \$10m for a Domestic Violence Innovation Fund, and \$13m to extend the Safer Pathways program across a further 15 sites.

While the Illawarra Forum welcomes the commitment to road infrastructure in the region in the 2017/18 budget, we once again highlight the need for greater investment in an effective and efficient public transport system for the Illawarra and Shoalhaven. Affordable and accessible transport is, without doubt, one of the main barriers to employment and training in the region.

"It appears the NSW Government is trying to prove its fiscal efficiency by returning a large surplus" said Ms. Sloan "However, investing in its citizens, particularly those who are marginalized and vulnerable would return far better dividends in the future".

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About the Illawarra Forum

The Illawarra Forum is the peak body working for community services and 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 Illawarra Forum is an independent organisation governed by a committee of management elected annually by the membership.

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.