

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## NSW Budget 2016/17

The Illawarra Forum today welcomed some of the measures in the NSW State Budget but, considering the large surplus, calls for more investment in family and community services, affordable housing, and public transport in this region.

Access to safe, accessible and affordable housing is the number one issue affecting families on low incomes and vulnerable people, so the Illawarra Forum is pleased to note the measures to support people to transition from social housing to private rental. "We are pleased to see initiatives to expand private rent assistance such as 'Rent Choice' " said Nicky Sloan, CEO of the Illawarra Forum "This medium term rent assistance program will give vulnerable families and individuals relief for up to three years, giving them opportunity to seek support services and explore education or employment opportunities." Of course a major obstacle to accessing programs like this is the lack of affordable rental properties in the region.

"We once again commend the government on extending supports for children in the Out of Home Care program" stated Ms. Sloan "But we note that the new funding is to meet increasing demand. We continue to urge the government to invest more in family and community services to really tackle some of the key issues affecting people experiencing poverty and disadvantage, and thus reduce the stress on the out of home care system."

Further investment in early childhood education would certainly be a step in the right direction "It is pleasing to note the commitment to continued funding for Aboriginal Child and Family Centres, and we hope that is good news for the wonderful Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre in Nowra" said Ms Sloan.

The Illawarra Forum also welcomes the commitment of funds for the implementation of the NSW Ageing Strategy, including \$600,000 for an Elder Abuse Helpline and Resource Unit. Elder Abuse is emerging as an urgent issue, and this measure will assist to assess the scope and to address the issue.

While the Illawarra Forum welcomes the commitment to road infrastructure in the region in the 2016/17 budget, we still 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.

"While the Illawarra Forum is heartened by many of the budget measures, we continue to call for increased and sustained investment in real strategies to address unemployment, transport issues, poverty, homelessness and domestic violence in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven" said Ms. Sloan

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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.