

## Working Together for a Fairer Far West and Orana

The NCOSS policy platform sets out the opportunities to work together for a fairer Far West and Orana region<sup>1</sup> and the investments that will deliver benefits for the future.

The next NSW Parliament can act decisively to provide immediate cost of living relief, build resilience for vulnerable population groups, and improve conditions and opportunities for the female dominated social service sector.

This fact sheet highlights the issues that need addressing, the economic impacts of not addressing them, and provides links to the policy solutions that can drive the changes we need to see in our local communities.

We look forward to working with policymakers and elected officials to pursue opportunities which prioritise those most in need, deliver benefits for the future and set us on the path for a fairer Far West and Orana.

### Quick Statistics for the Far West and Orana

- 1.4% of the total NSW population or 115,566 people.
- 19,593 First Nations people or 17% of the total regional population.
- Higher rates of one parent families – 19.6% of families compared with 15.8% in NSW.
- Lower median household incomes per week \$1,377 compared with \$1,829 for NSW.
- Lower rates of renting, 28.6% of households, than for NSW at 32.6%.
- Lower numbers of households that speak a language other than English at home – 6.7% compared with 29.5% for NSW.<sup>2</sup>
- It contains the marginal electorate of Dubbo.

### Key issues in Far West and Orana

- Energy and housing are two of the biggest cost items in low income households after food.<sup>3</sup>
- 11% of low income respondents to the [NCOSS Cost of Living Survey](#) were aware of the Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) scheme but only 1.7% had accessed it.
- Across the state 21% of respondents were aware of the Low Income Household Rebate but only 4.7% had used it.
- Respondents living in the combined region of Far West – Orana and Murray reported the highest rates of being unable to pay for household expenditure items over the last 12 months at 79%, compared with the state average of 58%. This included skipping meals, going without medication, health care, or dental.<sup>4</sup>
- Overall, across NSW, 1 in 5 people delayed going to the dentist because of cost concerns.

- One in two low-income households in the combined region (53%) were unable to pay a utility bill on time – the highest in the state (24%).
- Respondents in the combined regions of Far West - Orana and Murray (47%) were most likely to report at least one negative change to their housing arrangement in the last 12 months compared to the rest of the NSW (33%).<sup>5</sup>
- A quarter of households who are renting were in housing stress (35.5% in NSW).<sup>6</sup>
- The annual economic loss in the region due to flow-on impacts of housing stress on productivity and participation, is estimated at upwards of \$4.5m.<sup>7</sup>
- The increase in Domestic and Family Violence in the region is one of the lowest in the state at just 4% over the course of the pandemic. However rates of violence in the region are the highest in the state.<sup>8</sup>
- Regional economic impacts of Domestic and Family Violence are estimated at over \$1.2bn, over the period 2020 – 2025, including direct health and productivity costs, and indirect costs due to pain, suffering and premature mortality.
- Across NSW, 2,402 women return to live with a violent partner because of a lack of affordable housing, and a further 2,410 become homeless because they cannot find secure and permanent housing after leaving violence.<sup>9</sup>
- Homelessness overall, across NSW, has risen by 10% since the start of the pandemic.
- The NSW Government per capita spending on Domestic and Family Violence is \$32.4 – one third of that spent by the Victorian government.
- NSW has experienced a 13.4 per cent increase in the number of children from low socio-economic areas who are developmentally vulnerable at the start of school (over 2020 to 2021).
- Over 2 in 5 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, compared to 1 in 5 non-Indigenous children, started their schooling journey developmentally vulnerable (2021).
- \$887m estimated lost lifetime earnings in the region due to children missing face to face schooling over the pandemic.
- On average a 12.3% increase in the number of children at risk of significant harm in the Western and Far West NSW Districts compared to the state average of 13.5%.<sup>10</sup>
- The economic impact of this increase is estimated at \$109m.
- In the first half of 2022, NSW punters lost almost \$4bn playing the pokies.<sup>11</sup>
- It is estimated that across the region up to \$104m could be lost in productivity over the period 2021-25 due to increases in poor mental health, including anxiety and depression, amongst the employed population.
- On average, NSW spends 33 per cent, or around \$53 less, on community mental health services per resident than other states and territories.

## Our solutions

Our policy platform has been developed through close engagement with members and informed by a rigorous research agenda. For a summary of recommendations, click [here](#). To find a more detailed description of NCOSS's Policy Platform for a Fairer NSW click [here](#).

## Contact Details

If you would like further information on the policy platform email [advocacy@ncoss.org.au](mailto:advocacy@ncoss.org.au)

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<sup>1</sup> The Far West and Orana region is a large region covering 15 Far West and North-West Local Government Areas from Dubbo to Walgett and Broken Hill to the North-West corner of the state (including the unincorporated area of NSW).

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022 *Far West and Orana 2021 Census Quickstats* viewed 17 November 2022 <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/105>

<sup>3</sup> Institute of Public Policy and Governance 2022 *Tough Times, Hard Choices Struggling households and the rising cost-of-living in NSW* Sydney. Following statistics come from the Cost of Living report apart from where indicated.

<sup>4</sup> This included one or more of - going without prescribed medication/healthcare, meals, or essential hygiene items, being unable to afford mobile data or internet at home, to travel for essential reasons, minimum credit card payments, being unable to pay their utility bills or rent/mortgage on time.

<sup>5</sup> Negative changes to housing included a rent increase, moving in with family or friends due to cost, rent leave being terminated, moving house due to cost, damage to home due to a natural disaster and experiencing a period of homelessness.

<sup>6</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022 *Far West and Orana 2021 Census Quickstats* viewed 17 November 2022 <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/105>

<sup>7</sup> Impact Economics and Policy 2022 *Aftershock: Addressing the Economic and Social Costs of the Pandemic and Natural Disasters Report Three – Housing Security* Sydney. Following statistics come from the [Aftershock Report series](#) apart from where indicated.

<sup>8</sup> Based on DV Assaults in 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Equity Economics 2021, *Rebuilding Women's Economic Security – Investing in Social Housing in New South Wales*, Sydney

<sup>10</sup> Department of Communities and Justice districts. Figures compare the period 2020-2021 to 2018-2019.

<sup>11</sup> Koziol, M (2022), Average NSW pokies loss way above that of other states. Sydney Morning Herald. 5 September 2022 <https://www.smh.com.au/national/average-nsw-pokies-loss-way-above-that-of-other-states-20220901-p5benb.html>

