

Working Together for a Fairer Hunter Valley

The NCOSS policy platform sets out the opportunities to work together for a fairer Hunter Valley region¹ 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 Hunter Valley.

Quick Statistics for the Hunter Valley

- 3.6% of the total NSW population or 291,946 people.
- 23,309 First Nations people.
- Higher rates of one parent families – 17.7% of families compared with 15.8% in NSW.
- Lower median household incomes per week \$1,557 compared with \$1,829 for NSW.
- Lower rates of renting, 26.8% of households, than for NSW at 32.6%.
- Lower numbers of households that speak a language other than English at home – 5.7% compared with 29.5% for NSW.²
- It contains the marginal electorates of Port Stephens and Upper Hunter.

Key issues in Hunter Valley

- Energy and housing are two of the biggest cost items in low income households after food.³
- 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.
- Indicators of financial hardship were particularly high in the Hunter Valley, with 70% of households reporting taking at least one action when short of money – compared to 62% in NSW.⁴
- Overall 1 in 5 people delayed going to the dentist because of cost concerns.
- Hunter Valley currently has the highest public dental treatment waitlist in the state – 8,817.⁵
- 13% of respondents in the Hunter Valley reported overcrowding.

- 36.8% of renters are in housing stress (35.5% across NSW).⁶
- A 19% increase in Domestic and Family Violence in the Hunter Valley over the course of the pandemic.⁷
- \$1.1 bn estimated costs in the region associated with this increase in violence over the period 2020-25 - including direct health and productivity costs as well as 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.⁸
- Homelessness overall, across NSW, has risen by 10% since the start of the pandemic.⁹
- 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).
- Over \$1.5bn estimated lost lifetime earnings in the Hunter Valley due to children missing face to face schooling over the pandemic.
- A 19.2% increase in the number of children at risk of significant harm in the Hunter New England District¹⁰ compared to the state average of 13.5%.¹¹
- In the first half of 2022, NSW punters lost almost \$4bn playing the pokies.¹²
- The Hunter New England Local Health District had a 33% increase in the number of presentations for self-harm or suicidal thoughts in young people (12 – 17 years) over the course of the pandemic.¹³
- In total, over the period of 2021-2025, the additional costs associated with the increased rates of anxiety and depression amongst the working population in NSW could reach \$7.4 billion.¹⁴
- On average, NSW spends 33 per cent, or around \$53, less per resident on community mental health services 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

¹ The Hunter Valley excluding Newcastle region is a large ABS SA4 region incorporating the following LGA's: Cessnock, Dungog, Maitland, Muswellbrook, Port Stephens, Singleton (most of - excludes an area of Wollemi National Park), Upper Hunter.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022 *Hunter Valley exc Newcastle 2021 Census Quickstats* viewed 17 November 2022 <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/106>

³ 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.

⁴ Indicators of financial hardship include seeking assistance from family or friends, using Buy Now, Pay Later to pay for essential items, pawning or selling something for cash, seeking assistance from a welfare or community organisation, taking out a payday or short-term loan or accessing a no interest loan.

⁵ This includes Newcastle. Combined Pensioners & Superannuants Association (2022), The biggest dental deserts. https://cpsa.org.au/article/the-biggest-dental-deserts/?mc_cid=15a36e24e1&mc_eid=8401d56289

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022 *Hunter Valley exc Newcastle 2021 Census Quickstats* viewed 17 November 2022 <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/106>

⁷ Based on AVO breaches from April 2020 to March 2022. Impact Economics and Policy 2022 *Aftershock: Addressing the Economic and Social Costs of the Pandemic and Natural Disasters Report Two – Domestic and Family Violence* Sydney. Following statistics come from the [Aftershock Report series](#) apart from where indicated.

⁸ Equity Economics 2021, *Rebuilding Women's Economic Security – Investing in Social Housing in New South Wales, Sydney*

⁹ Since the start of the pandemic, there has been no update to the publicly available data on the number of people experiencing homelessness. Impact Economics and Policy utilised the number of people seeking Specialist Homelessness Services and currently experiencing homelessness to conservatively estimate the growth in the number of people experiencing homelessness.

¹⁰ DCJ District extending to QLD border.

¹¹ Figures compare the period 2020-2021 to 2018-2019. Local Health District extends to QLD border.

¹² Koziol, M (2022), *Average NSW pokes 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>

¹³ Increases are from 2018 to 2021.

¹⁴ For the Hunter Valley NCOSS estimates, on a proportional population basis, indicate that costs in the region could reach over \$260 million.

