



WESTERN SYDNEY PILLARS OF RESILIENCE

COVID-19 SURVIVAL AND RECOVERY



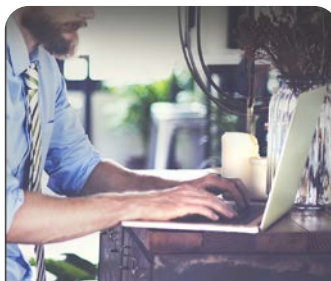
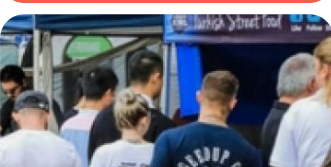
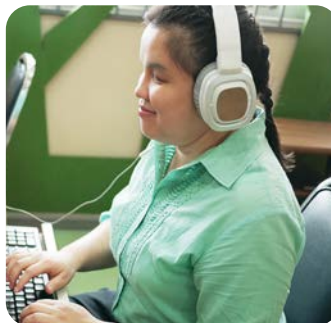
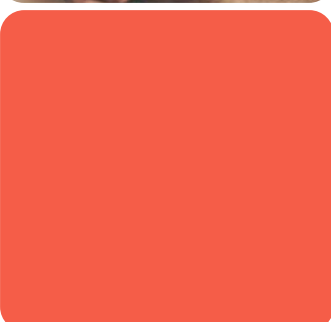
FAMILY
& COMMUNITY



HEALTH
& SAFETY



LIVELIHOOD
& INCOME



AUGUST 2021

Our Respect

We acknowledge First Nations peoples as the sovereign Traditional Owners and Custodians of the unceded lands and waters on which we work and live. **We pay respect to Elders past and present.** We respectfully recognise all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their cultures and their heritage. We acknowledge past and present injustices and **commit to standing in solidarity with First Nations people.**

Our Place

Dharug | Gundungurra | Dharawal

Blacktown | Blue Mountains | Camden
Campbelltown | Canterbury Bankstown
Cumberland | Fairfield | Hawkesbury | Liverpool
Parramatta | Penrith | The Hills | Wollondilly

2.4 m people | Aboriginal | Multicultural | Young
Ageing | Fastest growing | 3rd Largest economy
5.8 thousand sq kilometres | Historical | Urban
Rural Bushland | Waterways

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the many local community members, leaders, groups and organisations who graciously shared their lived experience with us. This knowledge and wisdom in the midst of a public health crisis due to COVID-19, is fundamental to better understanding what we need to do as a community.

Thank you to the project team at Western Sydney Community Forum and Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre whose commitment, skill and tenacity brought this information to fruition – Dr. Archana Preeti Voola, Nadiana Albistur, Anna-Marie Kanaan, Blake Morris, Tom Nance, Rachel Haywood, Kamalle Dabboussy and Billie Sankovic. This would not have been accomplished if not for the deep trust and extensive networks that both organisations have garnered with local communities and across community leaders, groups and organisations.



About us

Western Sydney Community Forum is the regional peak social development council working for inclusive, sustainable and thriving communities in greater Western Sydney, now and for future generations. It prioritises generating conversation, thought leadership, practice development and regional collaboration based on the principles of equity, integrity and ambition. Western Sydney Community Forum has 3,000 members, subscribers and service users from across the region with average participation of 110,000 and a reach of 450,000 per year.

Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre is a community-based non-profit organisation established to actively and directly relieve the situation of people and communities from diverse backgrounds whose social condition finds them disadvantaged. We aim to promote the principles of access and equity for diverse communities and identify and promote particular disadvantaged groups' needs to ensure that no one is left behind. Underpinning our principles are the core values for Human Rights. We all have our thoughts and ideas, should all be treated in the same way, and given the same opportunities, living in freedom and safety.



Greater Western Sydney is home to about half of Sydney's population and about 40 percent of the population of NSW. It is full of essential workers and small businesses contributing billions to the national economy. It is rich with a diversity that shapes the eclectic and vibrant social fabric and culture of NSW and the nation.

The spotlight has been on greater Western Sydney, nationally and indeed globally. COVID-19 public messaging that has emphasised compliance and polarisation, with the consequent negative stereotyping, is counterproductive at best and destructive at worst. To achieve national health and wellbeing on all levels, the narrative must focus on public health, care, hope and community.

In times of disaster or crisis, the people and communities that are hardest hit are those already experiencing some level of vulnerability, or socio-economic barriers, or service gaps. This has been brought to the fore throughout the pandemic. However, the equity gap continues to increase. This must be addressed to survive and recover from this pandemic and safeguard our future.

This paper provides clear directions on where to start - by correcting entrenched inequities and by investing in local trusted place based community structures that are pivotal in building and sustaining recovery, cohesion and wellbeing.

Billie Sankovic

Chief Executive Officer
Western Sydney Community Forum



Western Sydney is a radiant and vibrant community, home to one of the largest populations and economies in Australia. It is home to thousands of small businesses, tradesmen and tradeswomen who build our homes, keep our services going and have proven to be the lifeblood of the society that we rely upon. The people of Western Sydney are inherently resilient, diverse and harmonious.

However, Western Sydney, in particular South West Sydney, has attracted negative attention locally and nationally. Images of contrasts between Western Sydney and the east fill structured and social media, voices of anger are amplified. For residents in the area, this has been suffocating. This othering of community, real or perceived, will leave a sting.

In times of crisis, history has shown that the most disadvantaged are the most affected - vulnerable due to isolation, postcode or income levels. And we need to ensure all benefit from services and interventions equitably. That not only is the immediate need addressed, but that all share in the recovery equally. This paper puts forward understanding and insights that will help guide future steps and build on the communities' strengths.

I encourage policymakers to engage with and listen to the community for solutions, for the answers are already in Western Sydney, they just need to be discovered!

Kamalle Dabboussy

Chief Executive Officer
Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre



About this Paper

Western Sydney Community Forum and Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre have collaboratively captured substantial and crucial information from diverse communities across greater Western Sydney. This data provides information relating to the lived experiences of people during COVID-19 lockdowns and vaccination efforts in July and August 2021 and insights relating to what needs to happen now to address survival and into the future to secure recovery.

Information was captured through extensive and diverse data collection sources directly from people affected on the ground and from the community groups and organisations supporting them. Almost 160 local community members shared their lived experiences in the current lockdown. Over 235 community groups and organisations who support close to 550,000 people, contributed their knowledge and experiences from the frontline. Collectively this provided a rich source of wisdom and information from across greater Western Sydney.

This paper captures the essence of these experiences to provide a guide for decision makers. It provides a framework to pave a way forward that is based on and embeds the three essential pillars of resilience. These pillars emerged as being at the forefront for the people of greater Western Sydney at this time:

- family and community,
- health and safety, and
- livelihood and income.

Recommendations are provided for immediate actions to address survival now and for longer term actions to secure recovery into the future across the three essential pillars.

A key theme that has emerged to secure recovery across all pillars of resilience is the significance of local community, cultural and economic development led by local trusted place based community leaders, groups and organisations. The community sector is traditionally rooted in and a reflection of community aspirations and needs. Historically this has been valued and recognised through public investment. However, for some time, public investment in the community sector has shifted to focus on and extend government service delivery and crisis support, at the expense of local community, cultural and economic development.

This is no more evident than in times of crises, when the community sector and community-based structures are vital to reach and respond locally and to better engage, inform and support local people. To secure recovery and social, cultural and economic wellbeing into the future, public investment needs to return to these local structures, beyond the focus on 'bricks and mortar' and crisis service delivery.

This paper provides insights to address this fundamental function and highlights the strength and loss that has been part of the Australian landscape for generations. It also emphasises the importance of involving greater Western Sydney and its people, in COVID-19 strategies, decisions and actions, to ensure recovery.

¹ Full details can be obtained by contacting Western Sydney Community Forum or Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre

Pillars of Resilience





FAMILY AND COMMUNITY



01

What we know

Families are interdependent

This lockdown has shown that families and communities, by blood or choice, are the bedrock of strength and resilience as they provide a sense of meaning and belonging as well as offering support, protection and guidance.

Connectedness is at the core of First Nations people and communities with the pandemic disrupting cultural, relational and collective practices; and initiatives must be culturally safe, trauma-informed and Aboriginal-led.²

Conflicting norms of family and household groups exist in the values held by many communities with large multigenerational extended families, and the policy prescriptions of limiting interactions to only those living within a physical house, causing significant impacts.

Local trusted place based community leaders, groups and organisations are key

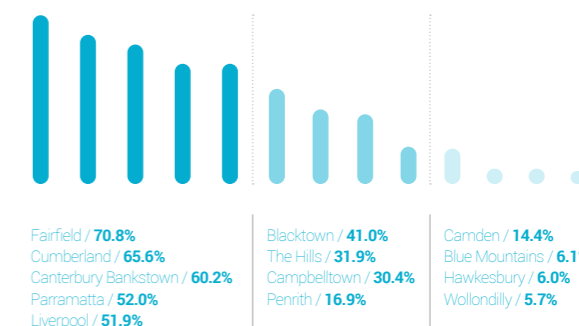
During this lockdown it is clear that local people turn to local trusted place based community groups and organisations for assistance and support.

Family and community leaders have been pivotal in supporting the residents of greater Western Sydney to survive this outbreak and local place based trusted community groups and organisations have been a safe haven for information, support, sustenance and services.

Equitable access is imperative

Adequate access and care, as well as the impact on people who are vulnerable including children, young people, older people and people with disability, must be at the forefront.

Access for culturally and linguistically diverse communities requires accessible interventions across the life cycle from pre-school and school to economic programs and intergenerational efforts.



Proportion of people who speak a language other than English at home³

The digital divide has intensified and can only be solved by holistically addressing three fundamentals: device and network affordability, connectivity access, and digital literacy ability.⁴

Access to housing is continually precarious with increasing presentations of homelessness and decreasing levels of housing affordability.

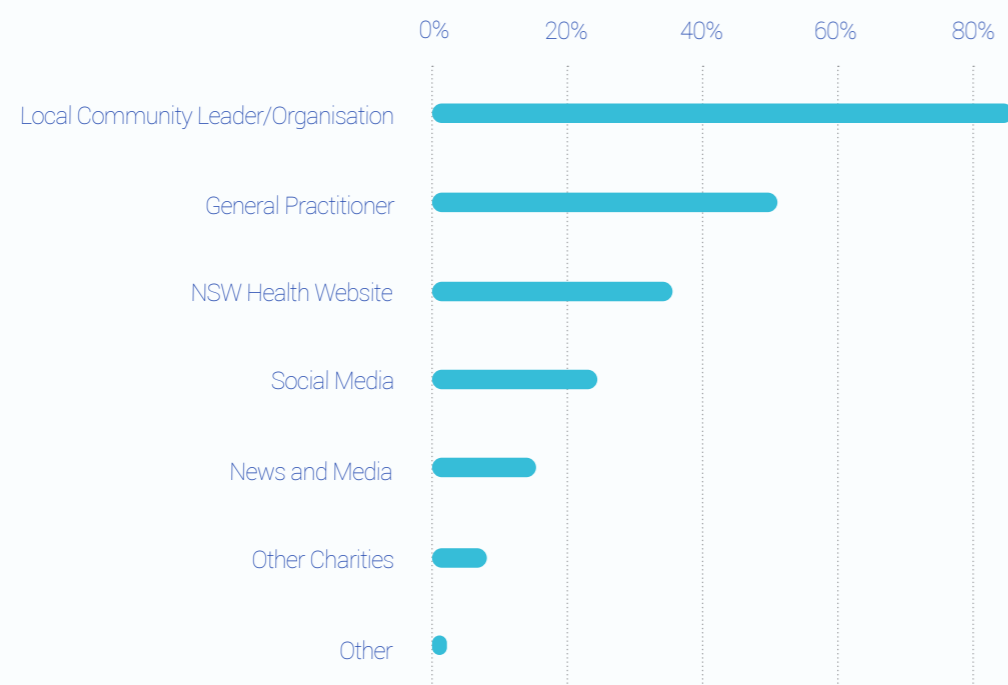
Social cohesion is fragile

Trust and social cohesion in a crisis are fragile, with social cohesion and community cultural development being fundamental to survival and recovery.

Increasing social capital can lead to an 18 percent decline in the cumulative number of infections and deaths⁵ and conversely mistrust can adversely impact on managing COVID-19 survival and recovery.

The public narrative has been perceived by local communities as an emphasis on compliance and punishment rather than on public health, resulting in increased social polarisation.

Preferable sources of health communications¹





ACTIONS FOR IMMEDIATE SURVIVAL

- Invest in specialised First Nations and bilingual staff dedicated to COVID-19 messaging and support for families and communities located within trusted community based and led organisations, including access to interpreters and translations
- Recognise and invest in local community leaders for their time, expertise, and community connections in engaging with individuals, government and business
- Invest in greater Western Sydney specific mainstream and bilingual media infrastructure to enable tailored and trusted messaging to individuals and communities
- Invest in digital infrastructure for online access, programs and services through community based organisations and appoint local digital inclusion specialists

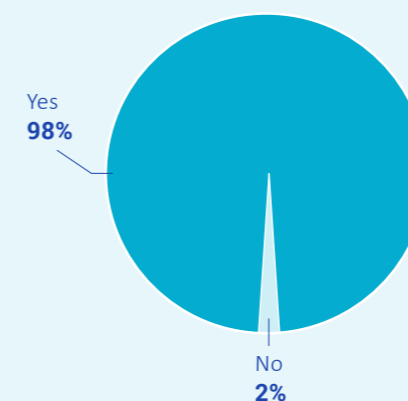
“Multigenerational living is common for cultural and/or economic reasons ... even when extended family members do not live in the same house; they are still considered family with specific responsibilities for care... balancing **cultural values of interdependence with mainstream values of independence** ...”⁶



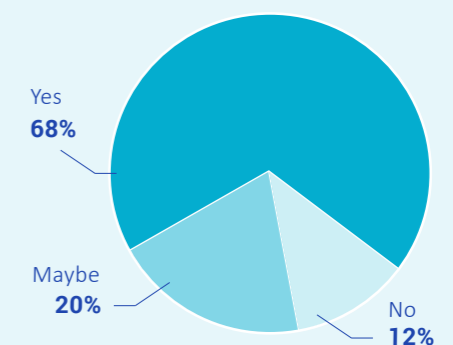
ACTIONS TO SECURE RECOVERY

- Build digital infrastructure, capability and literacy of communities living the digital divide through a Digital Community Plan and investment in the state and federal budget
- Nurture social cohesion post lockdown through inter-agency partnerships at the local level to reduce stigmatisation and support the needs of vulnerable families
- Establish a fund for community-led local arts and cultural programs and institutions including community cultural development initiatives that reclaim and revitalise public spaces and places
- Invest in holistic redressal of intergenerational barriers faced by First Nations, refugee and migrant communities through life cycle focused interventions
- Develop and equitably invest in sustainable universal place based community organisations, programs and services in greater Western Sydney to ensure access for all local communities and to drive social inclusion
- Address the increasing equity gap across all areas prioritising housing, employment, income, health, education, and transport

Willingness to comply with public health orders⁷



Willingness to work with health tracers⁷





HEALTH AND SAFETY

What we know

Entrenched inequities result in disproportionate impacts

People already experiencing vulnerabilities are disproportionately impacted, and reflect deeply-entrenched, long standing health inequalities and the increasing income and wealth gap¹⁰.

First Nations people have vaccine coverage below the national average, and this gap reflects existing experiences of inequity including access to health care, housing, education and employment.

A 20-minute walk built into a person's daily routine reduces the risk of early death by 22 percent and increases a person's mental health by 33 percent¹¹, but Western Sydney has disproportionately less access to open space.¹²

With limited health infrastructure in the region, inadequate culturally and linguistically appropriate telehealth and a gaping digital divide, people had no choice but to travel outside of their home for health reasons.

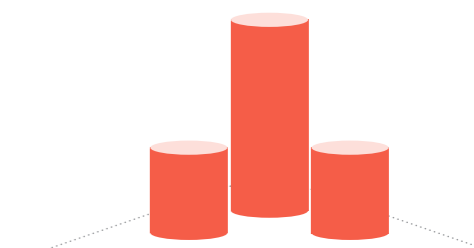
Tailored and accessible health communications is most effective

Vaccination is primarily driven by access, messaging and digital literacy as opposed to hesitancy and the primary barriers include access, multilingual messaging, age group appropriate messaging, and digital literacy¹³.

Clarity on medical facts conveyed through trusted sources and in languages that were familiar to the communities is needed immediately to increase uptake.

Clear, consistent, inclusive, and personable one-on-one information has the furthest reach and is most effective for survival and recovery.

One-On-One



Preferred method for health communications¹⁴

Local vaccination clinics need to be scaled up as they are working due to partnerships with local trusted organisations and their geographic proximity to community.

There is a correlation between systemic trust and confidence with vaccine uptake and public health orders.

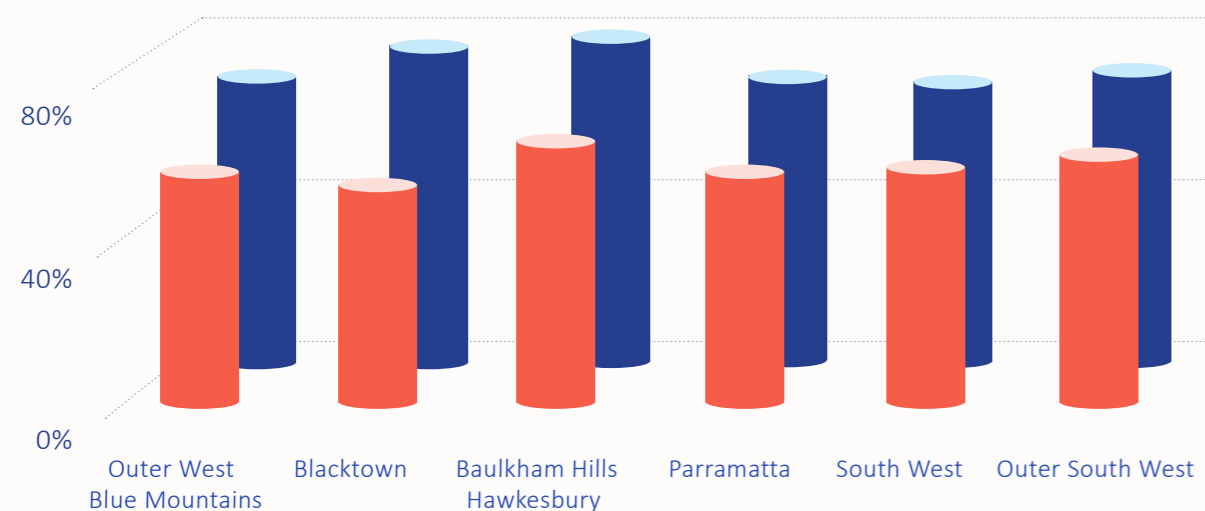
People must be culturally, mentally and physically safe

Cultural safety is at risk when particular groups are stereotyped, targeted and hyper-policed.¹⁵

Social isolation, a sudden shift to online learning and having all family members in the home all the time exacerbated mental health and risks to safety in the home for families, particularly where there is lower levels of literacy and digital exclusion.

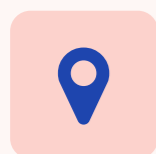
Australia is likely to see an increase in mental health emergency presentations, self-harm and suicide and this cost to lives impacts the economy by an estimated \$220 billion annually¹⁶.

15+ First dose vaccination rate⁹



Entire Population 29 Aug 2021

First Nations 30 Aug 2021



ACTIONS FOR IMMEDIATE SURVIVAL

- Provide additional support to local Aboriginal led services to continue engaging locally to increase access to information, vaccinations and support
- Provide emergency access to resources for mental health and domestic violence services to ensure rapid responses and support
- Equip local leaders to establish mobile and outreach vaccine clinics in the local community and in-home, especially for people with disability, the elderly, in work sites, in local housing estates and in community hubs
- Invest in digital vaccine messaging at the local level in partnership with local community leaders, segmented by language and by age to improve effectiveness
- Provide trauma informed and culturally competent telehealth and rapid clinical and non-clinical culturally informed wellbeing programs
- Publish timely data on vaccine availability, supply and rollout, including priority of access and disaggregated vaccination rate data across geographical areas and key high risk population groups to encourage health-seeking behaviours and support community led strategies
- Accelerate roll out and ensure widespread access to rapid antigen testing capabilities to fast track independent identification for decision making and self-management
- Ensure people who are vulnerable have access to vaccinations immediately including people with disability, older people, the caring sectors and essential workers

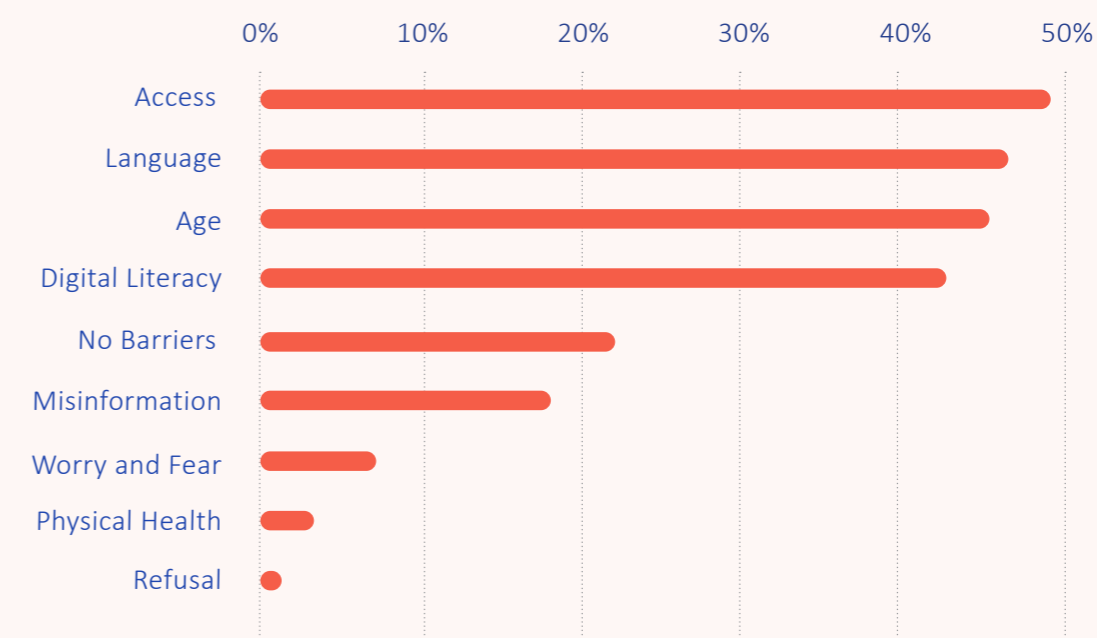
"We have heard of increasing incidents of **racism** and racist remarks directed at members of the ... communities in Western Sydney, which is a cause of serious concern because of the already heightened **anxiety** present ... racist remarks are a kind of blame shifting, trying to put the responsibility for the spread of the virus onto others ... other issues of increasing concern in Western Sydney include an increase in referrals to **mental health** service providers ... feeling the impacts from a shortage of affordable **housing**, the rising incidence of **domestic violence**, a lack of appropriate services for **Indigenous communities**, **drug, alcohol**, and **suicide counselling** and short-term funding problems for programs that are proving effective.¹⁷"



ACTIONS TO SECURE RECOVERY

- Embed mechanisms across policy and service delivery for genuine and active representation and involvement in decision making to ensure cultural safety, particularly for First Nations communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, young people, people with a disability
- Improve access and affordability of specialist mental health services for vulnerable communities, particularly where there are complex needs and considerations
- Develop and scale peer-led and community non-clinical mental health services delivered via place-based community organisations
- Balance urban growth with safe, smart and healthy urban living environments to increase physical and mental health, walkability, liveability and transport options

Barriers to vaccination¹⁸





LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME



03

What we know

The safety net must be accessible

Staying at home versus having a home is a false choice that communities have to make while not being adequately compensated for loss of income and employment to sufficiently meet obligations.

Demand for food and emergency relief has increased with local place based community organisations unable to meet the level of demand within existing resources.

Rules for the COVID-19 health orders and associated income support payments are rapidly changing and hard to comprehend, both for people who speak a language other than English at home and the broader community.

There is a need for the provision of in-language support to access government assistance such as disaster payments to maintain cost of living, test and isolate payments and pandemic leave.

The impacts of a slow economy in a rapidly evolving crisis are far reaching

Entry level work is near impossible to secure during the pandemic, and job seeker is below the poverty line and not enough to survive.

Essential workers who must travel beyond their local government areas, as well as insecure employment and the need to meet financial obligations, drives decision making on movement for people in greater Western Sydney.

A COVID-19 based recession in NSW is predicted to cause over 9,000 people to be homeless, a 24 percent increase in housing stress, an increase in domestic violence, and 27,000 more children at risk of harm, in addition to households and businesses enduring enormous drops in income.

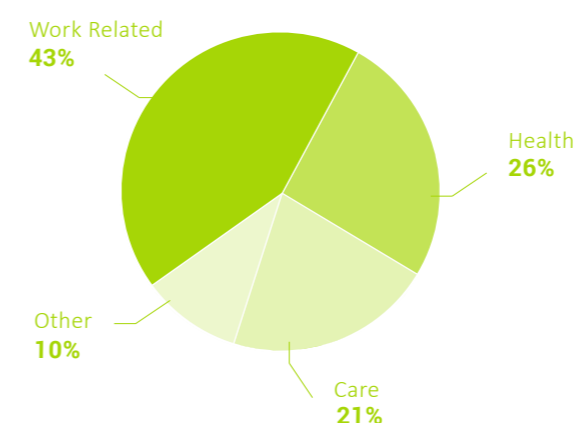
Disparities in the labour force results in inequitable outcomes

There are large disparities between economic outcomes for First Nations communities and the broader population and this requires strengths-based, holistic, community-led initiatives.²¹

Women are carrying the burden of children and family care and responsibilities while maintaining paid employment for survival.

Parity of labour force participation between young migrants and the Australian born population could increase the size of the Australian economy by \$44 billion from 2022-23 to 2031-32 and create 54,000 full time equivalent jobs²².

90 percent of the workforce will need digital skills by 2023 or they will be left behind in the digital transformation of the Australian economy²³.



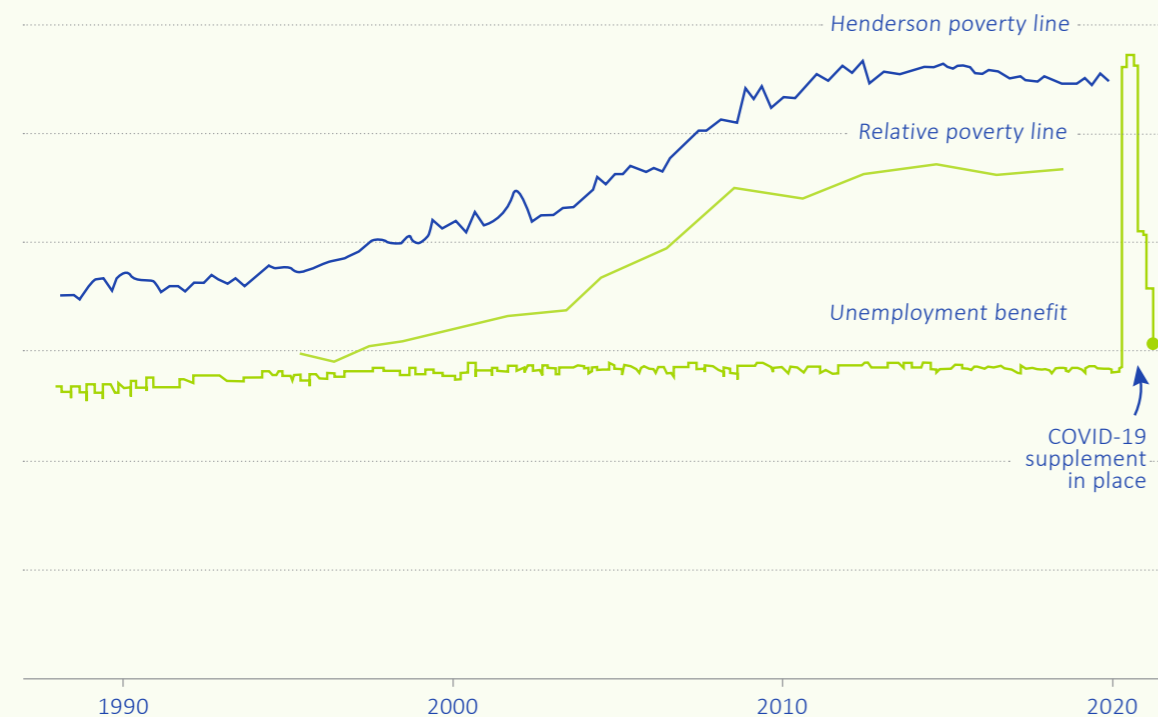
Reasons for leaving home during stay-at-home orders.¹⁹



ACTIONS FOR IMMEDIATE SURVIVAL

- Provide in language support to access income support payments including disaster payments, test and isolate payments and pandemic leave
- Extend JobSaver and business and micro-business grants until organisations and businesses are viable and provide secure employment, particularly for small to medium sized operators in the care, tourism and hospitality sectors
- Extend the Residential Tenancy Support Package moratorium period to protect tenants from eviction and waive utility and other costs for those hardest hit
- Increase JobSeeker income support urgently to address inequities and ensure people on temporary visas can access income support
- Invest in additional support to small business targeting local operators in local government areas of concern impacted by extended restrictions
- Provide special assistance for informal care arrangements and specifically financial aid to target and cover businesses which are primarily represented by women managing unpaid care work with employment in the local government areas of concern

Job Seeker and Poverty Lines²⁴



ACTIONS TO SECURE RECOVERY

- Develop and expand employment services and job networks linked to place-based community led organisations for First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- Provide English language and digital skills training with built-in work experience and placements for refugees and migrants
- Invest in specialised programs that focus on women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds with limited or no work experience and competing priorities of family and childcare via intensive employment support
- Develop a plan that provides for secure and stable employment across greater Western Sydney including social procurement approaches that prioritise First Nations communities, older workers, young people, women and culturally and linguistically diverse communities

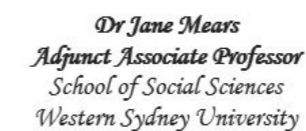
2020 Employment and business in Western Sydney²⁵

Local Government Area	Largest Industry by Employment	Number of Local Businesses	Gross Regional Product
Blacktown	Transport, Postal and Warehousing	25,141	21.98 billion
Blue Mountains	Health Care & Social Assistance	5,602	2.84 billion
Camden	Retail Trade	8,125	5.74 billion
Campbelltown	Manufacturing	10,421	7.95 billion
Canterbury Bankstown	Manufacturing	37,560	15.83 billion
Cumberland	Manufacturing	24,750	12.39 billion
Fairfield	Manufacturing	16,413	10.15 billion
Hawkesbury	Construction	7,134	3.53 billion
Liverpool	Health Care & Social Assistance	17,962	13.03 billion
Parramatta	Health Care & Social Assistance	28,655	31.36 billion
Penrith	Construction	14,862	11.31 billion
The Hills	Retail Trade	22,927	12.09 billion
Wollondilly	Construction	4,635	2.21 billion

↑
Essential Workers

↑
225,000 Local Businesses

Endorsements



Endnotes

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