



14<sup>th</sup> July 2016

Mr Adam Marshall MP  
The Chair  
Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

By email: [communityservices@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:communityservices@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Mr Marshall,

**Inquiry into access to transport for seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW.**

Shelter NSW is a non-government, non-profit, social change agency committed to working for a fair and just housing system. We are the state's peak advocate for housing justice uniting the voices of low-income households and non-profit organisations working on their behalf. Shelter NSW advocates for the housing interests of low-to moderate-income and disadvantaged people, and provides community education to build the capacity of non-profit organisations to provide housing and housing-related services.

Shelter is currently undertaking a project gathering perspectives from residents and service providers about housing issues in their local area and what proposals they believe might address these issues. A significant proportion of participants are staff working for specialist homelessness services and feedback has therefore concentrated on the housing issues affecting people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This is a particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable group of people.

The project involves consultation workshops across the state and eight workshops have been held so far. These have mostly been in the Sydney metropolitan area with the bulk of rural and regional workshops planned for the next few months. Shelter has, however, held workshops in the Illawarra, Central Coast and Hunter regions.

In the Illawarra, Central Coast and Hunter workshops, transport has been raised as an issue in the following ways:

**Shelter NSW**

Suite 2, Level 4, 377-383 Sussex Street, Sydney NSW 2000 – [www.sheltersnsw.org.au](http://www.sheltersnsw.org.au) – ABN 95 942 688 134

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1. There is a lack of affordable housing options located close to public transport. This has the consequence of people needing a car, or having use of one, to access suitable and affordable housing as well as education, employment, shopping and their particular support services. For people on limited incomes this is an added expense that puts pressure on already stretched household budgets. Older people and young people are particularly affected as they are less likely to drive and so are more reliant on others to get around.
2. In some areas support services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, other specialist services (such as health, mental health, employment support, and training) and attendance at Government offices for interviews associated with receiving welfare payments and other government support are not located near enough to each other or to transport hubs meaning time and money to get between multiple services and appointments. While there is more use of telephone and internet based systems to access support and information these also have their limitations (costs associated with calls and downloads for example) and do not completely replace the need for attending services and support.
3. Young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are particularly affected by a lack of public transport options. Travelling between appointments and services is costly, time consuming and not always straightforward. We heard that caseworkers will often drive young clients rather than have them use public transport. When this happens workers are not available for other clients putting further pressure on services that are already struggling to meet demand.
4. Frustration was expressed with the centralised homelessness intake telephone service, Link2home, because of a perceived lack of understanding of the practicalities of travelling in areas outside metropolitan Sydney. An example was given of a young person seeking crisis accommodation from the Lake Macquarie area being referred to a service in Maitland, a journey that would take one and a half hours by car and approximately 3 hours by public transport.

Participants in the workshops identified a number of practical solutions to address the issues raised. These included:

1. Investigating what models of “service hubs” ( where both government and non – government services are sharing space or are located close to each other so access for clients is easier) exist in different regions and under what conditions they work best. There are several examples that currently exist that could be built upon or expanded into other areas
  - a. A range of disability focussed services are located in and around the Charlestown Square shopping area. Investigating how assistance could be provided to services to set up offices near to complementary services could see this model replicated in other locations.
  - b. The FACS Housing office in Newcastle has allocated space for NGOs to work from. This has also helped build better understanding and collaboration between NGOs and Department staff.
  - c. A number of NGOs and local governments host outreach services in their offices/buildings on a regular basis which allows different service providers to see clients and for clients to access different services in one location. This is sometimes offered on a “by appointment” basis and sometimes as a drop-in service.

2. Having specific funds available to provide or assist clients to top up their Opal cards. Toukley Neighbourhood Centre has been doing this using funds generated by their social enterprises. Specialist homelessness services can use brokerage funds for transport costs but there are limits to this.

Should you wish to discuss any of these points further please contact Alison Peters, locum Policy Officer at Shelter on 02 9267 5733 ext 12 or by email at [policy@sheltersw.org.au](mailto:policy@sheltersw.org.au)

Sincerely

Mary Perkins  
Executive Officer