

**INQUIRY INTO HEALTH OUTCOMES AND ACCESS TO
HEALTH AND HOSPITAL SERVICES IN RURAL,
REGIONAL AND REMOTE NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS)

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The Hon. Greg Donnelly MLC
Chair
Portfolio Committee No.2 – Health
Parliament of New South Wales

Via email: portfoliocommittee2@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Donnelly,

Inquiry into health outcomes and access to health and hospital services in rural, regional and remote New South Wales

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the Parliamentary inquiry into health outcomes and access to health and hospital services in rural, regional and remote NSW.

We would like to bring to the Committee's attention new research commissioned by NCOSS that explores the relationship between economic disadvantage and patient experience of health services across NSW. Undertaken with the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM), [Mapping Patient Experience and Economic Disadvantage in NSW](#) (**attached**) focuses on the costs, delays and expectations experienced by patients of General Practitioner, private and public dental, and medical specialist services in NSW.

This research is particularly relevant to the following Terms of Reference:

- c) access to health and hospital services in rural, regional and remote NSW including service availability, barriers to access and quality of services;
- d) patient experience, wait-times and quality of care in rural, regional and remote NSW and how it compares to metropolitan NSW.

The research reveals that not everyone accesses or experiences health services equally, and that there is significant variation in patient experience by region. This regional variation is evident in the [online interactive maps](#) accompanying the report that show demographic breakdown of patient experience measures by Statistical Area Level 2 (SA2).¹

Key findings across a range of patient experience measures include:

- Regional NSW residents are twice as likely to delay a visit to the GP due to cost.
- Single parents and people who are unemployed in regional NSW are even more likely – at twice the regional average – to delay GP visits due to cost.
- Regional residents are more than twice as likely as Sydney residents to wait more than 24 hours between booking and receiving GP services.
- In regional NSW, almost half of those who are unemployed delay a dental visit due to cost.

¹ Available at maps.ncoss.org.au/patientexperience

- Regional residents are more likely to wait to access public dental care.
- Low-income earners in regional NSW are twice as likely to be dissatisfied with their time spent with dentists.
- Regional residents who live alone experience dramatically reduced levels of satisfaction with their time spent with medical specialists.

Overall, this research tells us that NSW residents who are unemployed have the poorest access to and the worst experience of health services in the state; that those living in regional areas, living alone or parenting alone are also more likely to have a poor experience; and that cost continues to be a major barrier for many people, particularly for dental services.

NCOSS also released an important companion piece of research that puts a human face to the demographic and geographic data contained in the *Mapping Patient Experience and Economic Disadvantage in NSW* report and online maps. Undertaken by Health Consumers NSW on behalf of NCOSS, [Consumer Stories of Patient Experience and Economic Disadvantage in NSW](#) (attached) draws on recent survey findings, real-life experiences and consumer stories to highlight the multiple, diverse and complex challenges facing many people in the community. It illustrates that the costs of healthcare are often unaffordable and can compound other cost-of-living expenses, placing households in financial precarity and stress.

These reports come at a time of significant stress in NSW and across the country. COVID-19 has brought into stark relief the intersection between public health, social issues and economic factors, and their impact on the wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. Importantly, *Mapping Patient Experience and Economic Disadvantage in NSW* considers economic disadvantage in terms of relative unemployment, low income and labour force status – issues particularly relevant as we experience rising unemployment and the worst economic recession since the Great Depression.

Both pieces of research together highlight the importance of ensuring those experiencing economic, social and geographical disadvantage can access the right healthcare supports and services to improve their wellbeing. Crucial to this is continued support for telehealth services and adequately resourcing important state initiatives such as regional and rural eHealth, public dental care, the Primary School Mobile Dental Program, integrated care, community transport and the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Scheme (IPTAAS), and community-based healthcare.

We hope you find this important new research a valuable contribution to this inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Joanna Quilty
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NSW Council of Social Service