

Submission
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INQUIRY INTO CURRENT AND FUTURE PUBLIC TRANSPORT NEEDS IN WESTERN SYDNEY

Organisation: Family Planning Australia

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Submission of Family Planning Australia

Current and future public transport needs in Western Sydney – NSW Legislative Council Inquiry

September 2023

NSW Government: Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No. 6 – Transport and the Arts
[Online submission](#) – Due 18 September 2023

Introduction

Family Planning Australia welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the NSW Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No. 6 – Transport and the Arts inquiry into and report on the current and future public transport needs for Western Sydney.

Family Planning Australia strongly affirms the need to place essential reproductive and sexual health services at the forefront of planning for future transport developments in Western Sydney. Access to such services is vital, and often time-sensitive, for the wellbeing of individuals and communities. We have our own clinics in Penrith and Newington, and form service delivery clinical, education and health promotion partnerships with many other organisations across Western Sydney. We are concerned that the lack of accessible transport and limited plans to connect Newington to the Sydney Metro West line will have considerable social and health impacts for communities, individuals and businesses, government institutions and recreational facilities across this region. As the state's leading reproductive and sexual health service, we are concerned that omitting Newington as a Sydney Metro West station will have significant impacts on individuals and the community's ability to access essential reproductive and sexual healthcare.

Our major concerns and the key opportunities are outlined below.

About Family Planning Australia

Family Planning Australia is the leading provider of reproductive and sexual health services in NSW and Australia. We are experts in clinical service provision, including contraception, pregnancy options, sexually transmissible infections, sexuality and sexual function, menstruation, menopause, common gynaecological and vaginal problems, cervical screening, breast awareness and men's and women's sexual health. Our mission is to enhance the reproductive and sexual health and rights of our communities by supporting all people to have control over and decide freely on all matters related to their reproductive and sexual health throughout their lives.

Each year we provide more than 30,000 clinical occasions of service to clients, information and health promotion activities to communities, and best practice education and training in reproductive and sexual health for doctors, nurses, teachers, disability support workers and other health, education, and welfare professionals.

Family Planning Australia has significant experience in the provision of reproductive and sexual health services, including for people of diverse sexualities and genders, people from culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, people with disability and young people. We work across the state of NSW including in regional communities with limited access to reproductive and sexual health care.

Our work is evidence-based, and shaped by our research, published clinical practice handbooks on reproductive and sexual health, nationally recognised data and evaluation and validated through extensive clinical practice.

The issue

In December 2021 Family Planning Australia relocated its head office to Newington, within the City of Parramatta. The Newington facility includes a new clinical space, inclusive of consultation rooms and interview rooms where we provide access to our full suite of reproductive and sexual health

clinical services. Clients also have the added benefit of access to a Day Surgery Unit, allowing Family Planning Australia to provide a full suite of reproductive and sexual health procedures, including vasectomies, colposcopies and surgical abortions.

At this new site, our Education Service and Health Promotion teams have state-of-the-art training and community education facilities including informal presentation areas and a simulation room for clinical training. Our Newington facility also houses our corporate support and Executive functions, our leading practice Research Centre, our International Development team and our communications and advocacy teams.

Our services are directed to marginalised and disadvantaged members of the community, including people from culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, refugees, people with disability, young people, and people from rural and remote communities. These priority populations have a greater reliance on public transport for accessing services. At our prior head office facility at Ashfield, we were located close to the Ashfield transport hub that included heavy rail. Consequently, clients would use bus or heavy rail to access our services, a pattern we also currently see at our other sites in Penrith and Fairfield that are also located close to railway stations.

Our current clients come from across metropolitan Sydney and from rural and regional NSW. We are keen to continue to increase access to our services to respond to community need, especially for socio-economically disadvantaged people.

We chose Newington as the home of our new Sydney metropolitan regional centre and statewide service hub because this location is central to clients, educators and community members from the northwest and southwestern Sydney growth corridors as well as the western and northern suburbs, the centre of Sydney and the Inner West.

Accessible and affordable public transport is a critical factor that ensures community members with high social and economic needs have equal access to all health services. Health services research around the world has shown that a lack of affordable transport is a key contributor to health inequalities⁽¹⁾. A large proportion of individuals who access our services are from marginalised and priority populations. It is, therefore, essential to ensure accessible public transport options, including the Sydney Metro West, are available in the Newington area.

The need for a strong public transport system in Western Sydney

There is a need to ensure strong public transport options to allow access to health services, communities, government institutions, businesses and recreational facilities. Family Planning Australia staff all work in our clinic and office locations to provide the essential health services we deliver 6 days per week. We have more than 100 employees based at Newington and a core team of 13 at Penrith. These workers travel to the site from across greater Sydney to deliver important healthcare to a population which typically experiences low levels of health and wellbeing. We estimate that approximately 50% of the Newington staff drive to work. Improved public transport options would reduce this proportion. Importantly, a train station at Newington will help meet the Government's employment access policy of workers having a 30-minute work to home journey.

Although there are existing bus routes that provide links to heavy rail stations at Auburn, Strathfield, Olympic Park, Rhodes and Parramatta, changing transport modes are a barrier for some people and buses are not always a preferred option for travellers. The development of a station in Newington would also ensure that the existing bus network is not strained, and that the transportation needs of

residents, workers and visitors are met. Priority populations accessing our services from across NSW and greater Sydney would be well supported by enhanced public transport.

We note that there is a service facility for the Sydney Metro West Project being built at Silverwater on the corner of Derby Street and Silverwater Road. This is, according to Google Maps, a 16 minute walk to the Family Planning Australia clinic along flat paths. This would be a viable option for a train station and would also provide access to the Sydney Metro West for shops and the many businesses located within the Newington/Silverwater precinct.

The Newington area has a growing population with many residents from culturally and linguistically diverse groups. More than 53.8 per cent of Newington's population were born overseas compared with the Sydney average of 42.9 per cent.⁽²⁾ In addition, there is strong community support for the development of a metro station in Newington.⁽³⁾ The population density of Newington is 68.9 people per hectare, significantly higher compared to Sydney Olympic Park (4.8 people per hectare) and Rosehill (13.5 people per hectare). The high population density creates a strain on the public transport network, where buses are currently the only available public transport option.

In addition, the residential precinct is located within a broader industrial context. Silverwater and Newington are characterised by a high concentration of small to medium enterprises and commercial centres. Justice and Justice Health services also provide essential services within the Newington area. Legal and health professionals and the public regularly visit Silverwater Jail. These businesses and services can benefit from improved access to public transport.

The Newington area is poised for growth. A station in this area would link future residential and employment growth with public transport. The principle of the Sydney Metro West project is to link health and knowledge centres. Family Planning Australia is co-located near a light industrial area surrounded by a low-socioeconomic area. A station at Newington could also help to address unemployment and low-class employment in the area by linking it with the Westmead Health precinct and advanced manufacturing zones as well as the Pyrmont knowledge precinct. The future requirements of Newington and Silverwater also need to be considered, including their potential for residential and employment growth. Setting up the necessary infrastructure for a train station in the area now would reduce subsequent cost burdens from expansion of the Sydney Metro West line in the future.

We believe that locating a Sydney Metro West passenger stop in Newington or Silverwater will make a material difference to the accessibility of our services to clients, educators and community workers from Greater Sydney and to people from rural NSW. It will also facilitate linkages for reproductive and sexual health training and development activities between our regional hub and the Westmead Health Hub and the multiple campuses of Western Sydney University.

The availability of reproductive and sexual health services in Western Sydney and the importance of ensuring the accessibility of these services

Reproductive and sexual health care is a fundamental part of ensuring physical and mental health and wellbeing, enabling individuals to function at an optimal level within society. Its importance as a health service, Family Planning Australia was recognised during COVID-19 lockdowns, when it was designated by NSW Health as an "essential service," allowing service delivery continuity during these difficult times. The health services that we provide to Western Sydney and the wider community include:

- clinical services
- health information

- professional education and support
- comprehensive sexuality education to people of all ages.

There were 12,945 clinical visits to our Newington and Penrith clinics and 276 people attending at Family Planning Australia's clinic and training rooms in Newington and Penrith in 2022-23, with demand expected to rise due to the projected population growth of the Western Sydney region.

We strongly affirm the need to place essential reproductive and sexual health services at the forefront of planning for future transport developments in Western Sydney. Access to such services is vital, and often time-sensitive, for the wellbeing of individuals and communities.

Family Planning Australia is a statewide service. We offer clinical services at five permanent sites across NSW (Dubbo, Newcastle, Penrith, Fairfield and Newington) and outreach sites in some of those regions, but we only have capacity to offer the full suite of clinical services at our Newington site, where the Day Surgery Unit is located. We therefore attract people for time-critical services from across NSW and, in particular, Greater Sydney. Rapid public transport such as the Sydney Metro West line is therefore needed to complement existing public transport routes.

The need for reproductive and sexual health services in Western Sydney

On average, individuals living in Western Sydney experience poorer reproductive and sexual health outcomes than people living elsewhere in NSW.

Poorer reproductive and sexual health outcomes often result from limited access to reproductive and sexual health information and care including in relation to contraception, abortion services and comprehensive sexuality education. The Western Sydney region experiences lower rates of cervical cancer screening in comparison to the NSW average and national average participation rates.⁽⁴⁾ The Western Sydney region also reports higher cases of gonorrhoea and infectious syphilis, particularly for men, reflecting the essential nature of accessible reproductive and sexual health services.⁽⁵⁾ Victims of domestic and family violence are also at risk of poor reproductive and sexual health outcomes. In 2019, there were 3,606 incidents of domestic violence-related assault recorded by NSW Police in Western Sydney Local Government Areas, making up 11.5% of the 31,187 incidents recorded in NSW.⁽⁶⁾

To improve health outcomes, there is a need to increase the accessibility of affordable reproductive and sexual health services, inclusive of public transportation options. Investing in reproductive and sexual health is cost-effective at a systematic and individual level.⁽⁷⁻⁹⁾ Good reproductive and sexual health has the potential to minimise costs to the health system and has significant benefits at personal, family and societal levels and as such should be accessible to all individuals.⁽⁷⁻⁹⁾

Conclusion

The development of an additional Sydney Metro West station at Newington/Silverwater will ensure that people living in Western Sydney have improved access via public transport to essential reproductive and sexual health services. Alternately, in lieu of an additional site, the expansion of the Silverwater service facility would provide public transport access, for people living in Western Sydney to access reproductive and sexual health services, alongside other health services and businesses in the light industrial area.

Ultimately, improving access to Family Planning Australia services based in Newington via public transport will improve reproductive and sexual health outcomes for communities in addition to increasing general accessibility and growth opportunities for the community and other businesses.

Recommendations

Family Planning Australia recommends that the NSW Government:

- recognise and respond to the reproductive and sexual health needs of Western Sydney residents, including those from marginalised and priority populations
- prioritise development of a Sydney Metro West station in the Newington/Silverwater precinct to improve access to public transport and reduce dependency on cars
- consider the present and future requirements of Newington/Silverwater, including the potential for retail, industrial, recreational and residential growth and the risk of high costs associated with later expansion of the Sydney Metro West line
- consider the present and future workforce requirements of Newington/Silverwater and the improved access such a station would create

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