

The Newcastle Response

Community Sector

City of Newcastle acknowledges that we operate on the grounds of the traditional country of the Awabakal and Worimi peoples. We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and continuing relationship with the land and waters, and that they are the proud survivors of more than two hundred years of dispossession. Council reiterates its commitment to address disadvantages and attain justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this community.

Job losses since March = 9,900

Unemployment rate in April = 7.7%

Youth unemployment rate = 18.7%

*All data represents Newcastle / Lake Macquarie SA4. Sourced from ABS Labour Force Detailed Data, April 2020.



Newcastle is an emerging global city well positioned to respond to the local community and economic challenges of COVID-19. We are resilient and dynamic; we welcome the piloting of

new programs and approaches. Newcastle is also a gateway to both global and regional connections; we can play an important role in restarting and providing new job opportunities for the future.

Most importantly, the leaders of Greater Newcastle are a united voice providing collaborative governance for our city. In response to COVID-19, a City Taskforce made up of 17 key city leaders from across, manufacturing,

small business, financial services, tourism, transport and logistics, arts and culture, workers, education, business and community sectors have been charting a path for our community and economic recovery.

The City Taskforce will be sharing our local stories and experiences to equip you to make decisions on COVID-19 policy responses. Called 'The Newcastle Response', these memos will outline the local community and business impacts, the effectiveness of current government measures, details on how we are mobilising our own resources and identify opportunities to partner with State and Federal Government bodies to accelerate and increase impact.

Each issue of the 'The Newcastle Response' will include a focus topic. The first edition examines our Community Sector, and how they have been responding to the COVID-19 crisis.

Nuatali Nelmes
Lord Mayor of Newcastle
Chair of Newcastle Taskforce



Newcastle's Community Sector

Policy Ask:

The City Taskforce advocates for a permanent and sustainable increase in support for the unemployed and vulnerable to prevent social security payments falling back to an inadequate rate. The Taskforce believes that current and ongoing social security payments should be independently reviewed and monitored to ensure that all Australians are adequately supported through unemployment and disadvantage. Furthermore, we ask the State and Federal Governments, through the National Cabinet, consider the development of policy measures to support the financial sustainability of the community sector, including dedicated engagement with First Nations Peoples and the disability sector.

Local insights

With COVID-19 and the necessary enforcing of physical distancing and lockdowns, our community services sector has seen many issues impacting vulnerable populations compounded and amplified. While not unique to the Greater Newcastle Region, the exacerbation of inequality has been identified as a primary challenge for our marginalised communities.

This letter only covers a small representation of the experiences of our community and it is important that we acknowledge the breadth of issues we are facing. We cannot cover all of them within this letter, so we welcome the opportunity to partner with government to dive deeper and to make connections with relevant organisations to ensure that all people are represented in those discussions.

Key local insights include:

Digital Inclusion/Exclusion

Our new world has rapidly turned online in a very short period of time. For our older community members, there are many who are ill-equipped to adapt to the technology, leaving them socially isolated and cut off from the most up to date information. There are similar issues for people with disability, however they also face challenges in relation to the accessibility of information and equipment.



People with disability who attend day programs have had to remain at home. For many people, this is their only social interaction with their peers. This can be compounded by difficulty in using or accessing technology. It is also difficult for their families, some of whom rely on day programs to give them an opportunity to work or take a break from caring.

Community Sector Survey May 2020

Financial Disadvantage

For many people who were already financially disadvantaged, there have been challenges adapting to home schooling due to unreliable access to technology or internet. Young people from low-income households already have lower educational outcomes than their peers and the increased exclusion from education because of digital access issues means they are at significant risk of falling further behind. People who are without work and ineligible for government support are deeply impacted, with no income to pay for food, bills or housing.

On the opposite side of this conversation are the thousands of people on JobSeeker who are finally able to afford the essentials. Community service organisations are hearing stories from their clients who, because of COVID-19 supplement, have been able to afford to fix their car, replace their broken fridge, and are catching up on their bills without having to skip meals.



COVID related requests for counselling and food and financial support have continued to increase. The planned expiration of the job keeper allowance will see a spike in support enquiries

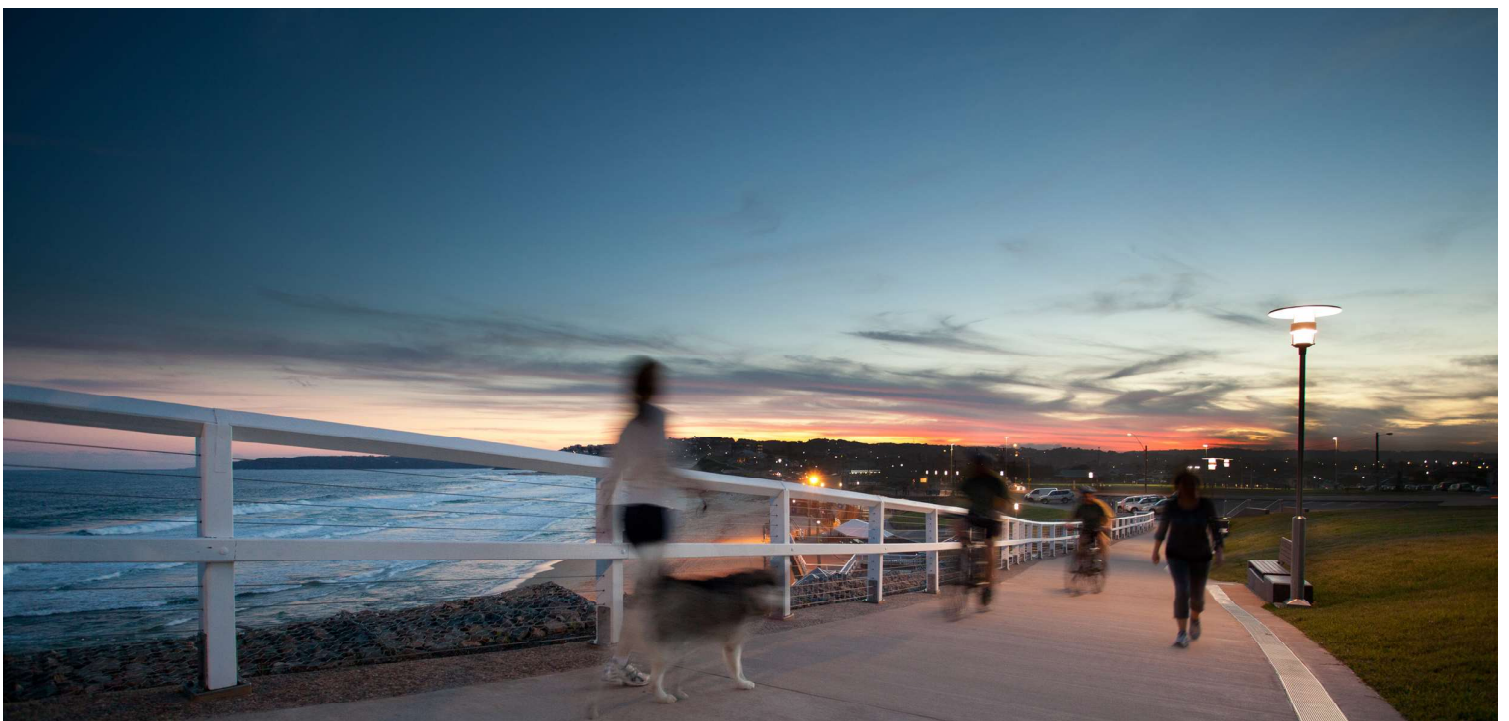
Community Sector Survey May 2020

Food and Emergency Relief Provision

Our region has witnessed a substantial increase in the number of people seeking help for emergency relief and food services, particularly in the last month as the impacts of layoffs are being felt and people's savings have dried up. Many of those people are seeking help for the first time and are unsure where to turn. Newcastle has a vibrant multicultural community and many of our migrant citizens are not supported by JobKeeper and JobSeeker.

Social Isolation

The impact of social isolation on mental health is pronounced and the sector have witnessed a steep increase in people seeking help. Those who were already isolated have been the worst hit, including people with disability, CaLD communities and older people, as for various reasons it is often harder for them to take up the virtual options on offer.





Vishal and Soniya's story

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In March we found out that the restaurant where I work as a chef would close for a while and we would be stood down. I knew I was part of the team there and I thought that whatever happened to the team would be the same for me.

When the government announced the coronavirus supplement for JobSeekers we realised we were not eligible because it was linked to Centrelink payments, which we cannot get as temporary visa holders. This was pretty upsetting because my wife had lost her job as well.

When we heard a week later about JobKeeper I felt hopeful again. Then the eligibility criteria was announced and we realised we were not eligible for that either, it was crushing.

We had family visiting at the same time and we were worried about them. They have been unable

to get home because India has been totally locked down. They were supposed to fly back on the 20th of May but the flights have been cancelled into India.

When the restaurant reopened for takeaways our boss started to give me some hours, even though they had enough staff on JobKeeper.

We had bills that we could not pay. I had already spent the holiday pay I had received from work and I had to contact the electricity company to ask them for advice about how to pay our bills. They gave us some numbers for organisations that could help us.

I was speaking with the head chef from my work at the same time and he got in touch with our bosses. My colleagues and bosses all spoke about it and put together some money to help us out. The Samaritans helped us with our bills and St Vincent DePaul helped us with some groceries. My landlord has also been really helpful, she has waived the rent on our apartment. Our friends and community in Newcastle have helped us through this so far.

We have had to apply for a new visa during this time as well because of the length of stay conditions, which has been very expensive.

There are many people who don't know how to get help or who to ask, and I want them to know that help is out there in the community. I have many friends who have support from the government, but it has been the community that has helped me most.

Vishal Sharma and his wife, Soniya, are in Australia on temporary work visas. When they lost their jobs because of the lockdowns, their friends and the community rallied behind them to make sure they had what they needed.

Local Responses

The case studies below have been sourced from the City of Newcastle's Boost our City Community Sector grants, which have provided funding for existing service providers to cope with increased urgency and demand. They demonstrate how the local community sector has taken the first steps to address COVID-19 barriers by pivoting, scaling and innovating to support vulnerable people in our Greater Newcastle community.



COVID-19 will be with us for a long time and therefore the way the world operated before the pandemic will not be the same and we will always need to be adjusting to the current situation at the time. Adaptability along with resilience will be required in order to survive.

Community Sector Survey May 2020

Digital Inclusion/Exclusion

Cerebral Palsy Alliance (CPA) used Boost Our City community grants to digital care and support. CPA supports more than 440 children and adults with disability, and their families, in the Newcastle area with therapy, programs and supports.

"On Friday 27th March, CPA suspended all face-to-face therapy due to COVID-19. With respiratory illness the leading cause of death for people with cerebral palsy, the immediate risk to the people we support was simply too great to continue. CPA's Telepractice service enables us to deliver evidence-based, industry-leading therapy via the healthdirect video-conferencing platform, designed specifically for health service delivery. Telepractice allows our clients to continue their vital therapy, which is critical to managing pain, maintaining wellbeing, and supporting quality of life, from the safety of their own homes."

Justiz Community also presented innovative ways to respond digitally. Justiz works locally with Aboriginal people with a disability and the Awabakal Elders Women's group. They have

received financial support to enable them to supply smart devices to their clients who are isolated and at risk of severe mental illness because their usual face to face supports could not continue. The devices have allowed them to stay connected, including through virtual cooking classes.

Financial Disadvantage

Zara's House Refugees and Partners are supporting asylum seeker families who are experiencing financial hardship because of COVID-19.

"Our greatest need is to support our asylum seeker families. Some have lost paid work and have no Centrelink. We feed and house them from our funds and donations received. Some are homeless and couch surfing with friends. They are feeding them. They have not enough for mobile connection. One left his student accommodation and lives in his car. He has nothing. He formerly worked in Charlestown. One is a mum with two little girls. She used to do aged care assistant in nursing. An elderly Australian couple cared for the children but are in isolation so she has nobody to care for the children. She and the children are living on beans and tomatoes. Another lives in my home garage as he was living in his car. Another is weeks behind in his rent. Nobody can afford fuel for their cars. It's cold and they need warm clothes. All face isolation."

Boost Our City grants were approved for many organisations supporting the community with basic needs including Nova for Women and Children, who support women and their children who are experiencing domestic violence and Muloobinba, which supports Aboriginal families.



I think we need to seek out the possibility of a living wage for those who are unable to work or who are seeking employment. There will be many who remain unemployed or underemployed...

Community Sector Survey May 2020

Food and Emergency Relief Provision

Food and emergency relief providers are responding to increased community demand and to a growing cohort of people experiencing financial hardship and vulnerability, potentially for the first time. Gateway Care is a key local enabler:

"A big challenge for us is ensuring non-profits have access to enough free food supplies. Gateway Care is appointed as the official Coles Second Bite Hub for the Newcastle district and supports all organizations in Newcastle. Currently we provide free bulk food & grocery items to several non-profit organisations including The Grainery, Soul Café, Baptist Care, Development and Relief (DARA), East Lakes Family Support, SDA Pantry Hamilton - the list is growing each week."



We need to ensure information on where to access assistance is available for those who have never been in a situation to need it.

Community Sector Survey May 2020

Social Isolation

In the city, sector feedback indicates that social isolation continues to be a primary concern. Agencies across the city have looked for innovative ways to keep their communities connected or connect vulnerable groups to appropriate care in the times of crisis. Home-Start National shifted their award-winning Volunteer Home Visiting Program to videoconferencing, and Path to Change delivered a new 'Empower Me' Life Skills program, which empowers homeless young people with life skills while engaging and connecting them with others and the community. Victims of Crime Assistance League, Hunter Women's Centre and Healthy Change Challenge are also examples of agencies keeping their community connected to support health and wellbeing.

Local Solutions

We are part of the solution. A number of City Taskforce members have contributed significantly to our community sector.

City of Newcastle (Local Government):

- **Boost our City Community Sector Grants program** worth \$800,000 in Phase I, including a rapid response component that enabled \$175,000 to be released to community organisations within two weeks of the declared pandemic. Council received 67 applications in the space of five weeks totalling more than \$1.2 million in asks (maximum grant amount = \$30,000). This highlights the level of need across our community.
- **Lean in Newy** – a new app to harness and guide our community spirit to the places where it's needed most. Lean in Newy connects people who want to help with charities and people who need support. It enables community to find creative ways to stay connected. Each challenge that is completed earns points redeemable for discounts or benefits at a selection of local business. The City of Newcastle is funding the value of the redeemed discount to the business during the COVID-19 recovery phase.

Newcastle Permanent:

- The Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation has brought forward the allocation of \$750,000 for new initiatives to provide immediate support to overcome specific community hardship. This has included delivering care packages and outreach services, support for mental health including assisting Batyr to launch online mental health discussions with school and university students for Term 2, a partnership with government health services to deliver targeted information on the impact of financial hardship to mental health and matched support for the Salvation Army Red Shield Appeal.

NIB

- \$1.5 million donated to community and clinical initiatives with NIB foundation
- \$250 wellness benefit for frontline healthcare workers
- 100,000 surgical masks donated to healthcare and allied healthcare workers

The opportunity to partner with us

The City Taskforce asks all decision-makers, at both a State and Federal level, to develop policy measures that support the financial sustainability of the community sector and establish dedicated engagement with First Nations and disability organisations.

As JobKeeper is reviewed by the Federal Government in the coming weeks, we ask that the access requirements for community organisations be simplified. The community sector is uniquely facing significant increases in demand for services, as evidenced by the local stories in Greater Newcastle, while facing significant reductions in donations / income sources. We ask that additional support measures be put in place to support the community sector when JobKeeper is wound back. The services provided by the community sector are vital to the well-being of our community in Newcastle. We're all leaning in to support them, we ask that all levels of Government do the same.



Those that were already unemployed prior to COVID-19 will find it harder to find employment once restrictions are lifted as there will be so many other people seeking employment they will be up against. Once the COVID-19 supplement from the government ends it is going to make it harder for the unemployed to survive financially and emotionally.

Community Sector Survey May 2020

Across our community the impacts of the COVID-19 restrictions have been felt very differently. We recognise that you can only understand the experience of a community if you are living that experience yourself. For this reason, it is important that whatever policy decisions are made, specific attention must be given to engaging with First Nations and disability organisations to ensure that the solutions proposed encompass strategies that meet the needs of all of our communities.

Furthermore, as JobSeeker is reviewed by the Federal Government in the coming weeks, we ask that a new approach be considered. The City Taskforce are proposing that an independent body be introduced that is responsible for monitoring social security rates and allowances. This would ensure that people are not living in poverty and able to afford essential living costs. Importantly, this would provide increased capacity for our local community sector to support underlying and inherent disadvantages that exist in our population.

Continue the Conversation


Mr Brad Webb, CEO of Samaritans, is a community sector representative on our City Taskforce. He also convenes a group of third sector leaders in the Greater Newcastle Region. Mr Webb can provide more insights on the local impacts to the community sector and is available to co-design future policy solutions. Mr Webb can be contacted on ceo@samaritans.org.au.

Further Updates

The City Taskforce warmly welcomes the announcement of Williamstown as a NSW Government Strategic Activation Precinct [SAP]. The new SAP will bring together planning and investment to focus on growing local jobs and economic activity in the area. Williamstown is set to become the state's premier location for defence and aerospace innovation. The City Taskforce will provide further local insights and advocate for the expansion of the Newcastle Airport in a future issue.

The next Newcastle Response will focus on our local tourism sector.


City Taskforce Members


Cr Nuatali Nelmes (Jun 4, 2020 20:52 GMT+10)

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Nuatali Nelmes
Lord Mayor Chair
City of Newcastle Newcastle Taskforce





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Daniel Wallace
Chief Executive - Secretary
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Peter Cock
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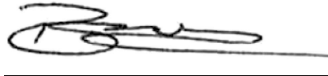



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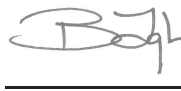



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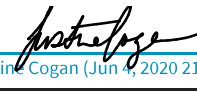



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Mark Fitzgibbon
Chief Executive Officer
NIB Health Funds




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Philip Gardner
Chief Executive Officer
West's Group



1. Catalyst Areas for Greater Newcastle Projects, as identified in the Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan

Large-scale priority infrastructure projects:



Coastal Management Planning and Erosion Management, especially at Stockton Beach



Flood mitigation at Wallsend



Newcastle Airport Expansion



Port of Newcastle Diversification



Hunter Sports and Entertainment Precinct



Newcastle Light Rail Expansion



Lower Hunter Freight Corridor



Affordable housing initiatives



Metropolitan wide active transport (walking & cycling) improvements



John Hunter Hospital campus upgrades



Newcastle Art Gallery Expansion



Local Sporting Amenity Upgrades



Local Playground upgrades, particularly for disability inclusion



Ferry Terminal at Wickham



Pensioner Rate Rebates

3. Local priority infrastructure projects:



Summerhill Waste Management Centre – Organics Processing Facility



Richmond Vale Rail Trail



Newcastle Beach Community Facility (Stage 2, Newcastle Beach – Bathers Way)



Junction to Merewether Cycleway



Newcastle West Bi-directional Cycleway – West End Stage 2, Phase 1



Newcastle East End Streetscape Upgrades and Cycleway



Foreshore Park All Abilities Playground



Western Corridor Active Hub



Local Centres Program