



## **2007 State Election Community Wellbeing Policy Platform**

### **Executive Summary:**

The platform outlines community initiatives affecting Local Government, especially concerns regarding funding shortages for recreation, welfare and education facilities and services. It recommends NSW Government action.

### **Background:**

The LGSA *Policy Platform for the 2007 State Election* stresses that “Local communities require a sense of identity, and ‘community’ facilities, services and activities to promote their physical and social health, welfare and wellbeing”. The platform also highlights that significant challenges which make it harder for councils to provide services as efficiently and effectively as possible include skill shortages, sparsely populated rural areas, and the phenomenon of ‘sea change and tree change’.

Amongst the measures to address these challenges LGSA recommends that the State Government:

- Promote healthy and fit communities by supporting the establishment of contemporary sport and recreation facilities which reflect changing social and cultural trends;
- Enhance funding for prevention/early intervention services such as community and youth work, neighbourhood centres and family support (including the funding of salary increases);
- Encourage older people and people with a disability to maintain independence and contribute to the community by enhancing the Home and Community Care (HACC) Program;
- Guarantee all preschool aged children access to preschool education in the year prior to school; and
- Roll out programs for expanding Aboriginal people’s access to mainstream Local Government professional and technical careers (e.g. Elsa Dixon Program).

### **Current Position:**

The NSW Department of Sport and Recreation provides funding under the Capital Assistance and the Regional Sports Facility Programs. These programs assist with the construction of community based local and major sport and recreation facilities. The State Government has provided more than \$42 million under these programs in the past six years. LGSA and the NSW Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works concur greater investment is needed.<sup>1</sup>

Local Government has welcomed past NSW Government initiatives such as Families First program and the 2002 announcement of the \$1.2 billion funding package to boost child and family services, including the Early Intervention Program. Nonetheless, Community Services Grants Program (CSGP) services need a significant boost.

The NSW Government emphasises the need for a broad, whole-of-community approach to population ageing based on the scale of future demographic change.<sup>2</sup> The NSW Government budget and especially the HACC Program will need ongoing enhancement if we are to adequately plan for population ageing.

Local Government welcomed recent NSW Government initiatives to boost preschool funding such as the Preschool Investment and Reform Plan which involves \$77.2 million funding to strengthen the community-based preschool sector in NSW, and \$8 million one-off emergency funding to help vulnerable preschools.

Local Government welcomes the NSW Liberal/Nationals preschool policy, which will provide more than \$362 million over 4 years in the following ways:

- an additional \$217 m for preschools funded through the Department of Community Services (DoCS);
- \$115 million to enable more 4-year olds to attend preschool at least 2 days a week; and
- \$30 million to upgrade preschool facilities in NSW with funds to be distributed in consultation with the preschool sector. (NB: the policy also involves the transfer of responsibility for NSW preschools from DoCS to Education).

<sup>1</sup> NSW Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works *Inquiry into Sportsground Management in NSW 2006*

<sup>2</sup> *NSW Health and Ageing Framework 2004-2009*

The Elsa Dixon Aboriginal Employment Program is a NSW Government initiative to encourage job opportunities and career advancement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Approximately \$1.5 million is provided for the program each year.

**Comment:**

There are a number of human services where greater NSW Government funding effort is needed to meet strongly demonstrated needs across a variety of population groups.

*Recreation Infrastructure*

Councils make a big effort in providing recreation infrastructure to their communities, but have limited resources at their disposal. Nonetheless, the public recreation infrastructure system is under increasing stress<sup>3</sup>. There is a wide variety of demographic, social, economic and other trends making the challenge of providing local public recreation infrastructure even more difficult. The level of and diversity in demand and the rates of change mean there is a strong case for increased financial support from both the Australian and NSW Governments to councils.

*Community Services Grants Program*

Secondly, it is time to deal with some of the essential services provided under Community Services Grants Program (CSGP), such as Local and non-government community and youth work, neighbourhood centres and family support. LGSA strongly support the view that despite their high commitment, years of financial neglect mean CSGP services are struggling and thinly stretched. It is a policy and operational imperative to increase the capacity of the existing services rather than preside over a crumbling infrastructure. Enhancement is necessary to improve the program's capacity to deliver services that support communities and fulfil government policy of prevention and early intervention. This enhancement will require additional resources beyond basic catch up funding. Specifically there is a need for improved funds to engage young people with their communities and divert them from crime, through contact and participation with Local Government and non-government services.

*Home and Community Care*

Home and Community Care (HACC) needs new resources. We know that NSW's population aged 65 and older is projected to increase from 907,000 at June 2004 to 1.5 million in 2021 and to 2.5 million in 2051.<sup>4</sup> NSW currently has 19 local government areas (LGAs) out of 152 with more elderly than children. By 2022 this will have increased to 135 LGAs which equates to approximately 90%.

Local Government believes that older people and people with a disability have a right to quality facilities, services and programs that enable them to remain living in their own homes and active in their communities. Through the provision of Local Government and non-government HACC services older people and people with a disability are supported to remain living in the wider community, and where possible their own homes. Throughout NSW, Local Government has commenced planning for the opportunities and challenges of population ageing. Consultation with Local Government and non-government organisations has highlighted various pressures on the NSW HACC System and providers such as:

- Mounting viability costs such as: inadequate indexation, insurance, administration costs;
- Viability for regional and rural services;
- The need for regular and ongoing training for providers and staff;
- The inability to meet the needs in other systems increasing the demand for HACC services;
- The need for improved assessment within the HACC system;
- Acknowledgement that most HACC services require a transport component; and
- Changes to the Home Care policy such as capping the number of hours per client, will have an impact on non-government HACC providers.

*Preschools*

More also needs to be done to ensure all NSW children enter school healthy and ready to learn. Despite recent funding boosts, NSW has the lowest preschool participation rates in Australia and high fees. In NSW less than 60% of children attend preschool immediately prior to starting primary school whilst in other states the figure is approximately 90%. NSW Local Government endorses a vision for children's services, which acknowledges i) that children's best interests are the primary consideration; ii) that high quality children's services is an investment which enhances the well-being of the entire community; and iii) that there is persuasive empirical evidence that spending on early intervention, is as effective and much cheaper than law

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<sup>3</sup> NSW Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works *Inquiry into Sportsground Management in NSW 2006*

<sup>4</sup> LGSA *Planning the local government response to ageing and place 2004*

and order approaches to crime prevention. An important contribution to this vision is making preschool opportunities accessible to all children.

*Aboriginal career development*

The Elsa Dixon program's main aim is to promote innovation and service responsiveness in the NSW workforce by reducing barriers to employment and promotion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Programs like this are essential to Aboriginal peoples attaining higher levels of education and advancing their careers.

**Recommendation:**

That the Government, Opposition and other candidates standing for election support and commit to the NSW Government:

- increasing the budget item Sport and Recreation Development Grants and subsidies Local Government sporting facilities capital grants, by \$4 million per year;
- enhancing the Department of Community Services budget items Community Services: and Prevention & Early Intervention Services: Grants and subsidies to ensure sustainability and growth of council and non-government early intervention and prevention services by \$26.3 million per year;
- increasing its financial contribution to the Home and Community Care Program by a significant boost of \$37.49 million per year;
- increasing its financial contribution to preschool education to ensure all preschool children access to preschool education in the year prior to school, by a significant increase of \$57 million per year; and
- enhancing its financial contribution to Elsa Dixon Program to improve Aboriginal peoples' access to mainstream Local Government professional and technical careers at a cost \$2 million per year.

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