

GOVERNMENT SERVICE DELIVERY STANDARDS IN REGIONAL NSW

Organisation: Wesley Mission

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Mr Roy Butler MP
Committee Chair
Legislative Assembly Committee on
Investment, Industry & Regional Development
NSW Parliament
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

20 February 2026

Submission to the Inquiry into Government Service Delivery Standards in Regional NSW

Dear Committee Chair and Members,

Wesley Mission welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the NSW Legislative Assembly Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development's inquiry into government service delivery standards in regional NSW.

Wesley Mission is a community services provider and church supporting people across NSW and the ACT. We operate frontline services, including Lifeline Sydney and Sutherland, and work to address systemic inequities such as housing insecurity and gambling harm. For more than 200 years, we have delivered vital services to children and families, older Australians, people with disability and individuals experiencing homelessness, addiction, mental health challenges and financial hardship.

This submission responds to **Term of Reference (c): differences in government service delivery standards between metropolitan and regional areas**. While this Inquiry examines government service delivery across all sectors in NSW, our observations draw primarily on Wesley Mission's extensive experience delivering child, youth and family services funded by the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), including permanency support programs across Tamworth, Armidale, Grafton, Taree, Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour.

As a major provider operating across both metropolitan and regional NSW, we are uniquely positioned to see and experience discrepancies in service access, workforce conditions and delivery standards between these settings. Our observations reflect both long-term operational experience and the compounding impacts of workforce shortages, cost-of-living pressures and successive natural disasters. While this submission reflects our experience within community services, we expect similar patterns are observable across other service systems, regions and funding portfolios.

We share here our experience of four areas in which regional services can be disadvantaged compared to metropolitan services:

- the increased operational costs in delivering responsive and quality services in regional NSW,
- the negative impact that a lack of specialist clinical services can have on outcomes,
- the impacts of workforce shortages and skills gaps,
- the challenges arising from variable service standards being applied across regions, particularly in DCJ contracts, which then challenges consistent service delivery.



To meet the needs of community across regional areas, our services frequently incur higher travel and transport costs for visits to carers and children in care, as well as to enable contact with birth parents or access to specialist allied health supports. The travel costs, which includes petrol and regular maintenance, as well as additional labour costs for staff who work longer hours due to the commute between clients is not reflected in statewide contracts. This challenges the financial sustainability of regional services.

In addition to the costs referred to above, children and young people in regional areas often face reduced access to specialist services, including paediatricians, speech therapy and occupational therapy. This results in extended wait times for children—often six months or longer for paediatric assessments and six to nine months for allied health services—leading to escalating needs and increased service requirements which impacts placement stability and can lead to poorer long-term outcomes for the child. This then can lead to otherwise avoidable downstream expenses if a placement breaks down or if a child's condition worsens during the wait period. In many instances non-profit providers must fill these gaps in unmet need by engaging private providers at additional cost.

Regional service delivery is also significantly impacted by workforce shortages. Recruitment timelines are longer and providers must sometimes appoint candidates without 'ideal' qualifications due to limited availability of applicants. This creates additional supervisory, training and capability-building demands and increases delivery costs. Wesley Mission has often had to invest in unanticipated additional on-the-job capability-building on multiple occasions when appointing staff in regional locations, adding to program costs.

One of the greatest frustrations with regional service delivery are the inconsistencies between districts in service expectations and oversight, which creates unnecessary complexity for staff. Wesley Mission's multi-regional footprint delivers services across numerous districts, highlighting significant inconsistencies in service delivery and oversight across DCJ districts, Community Services Centres (CSCs) and Regional Child and Family District Units (CFDUs). These inconsistencies include:

- Variation in approval processes, timelines and expectations across districts
- Misalignment between local, regional and central operational directives
- Inconsistent interpretation of funding provisions, particularly for staffing, transport and carer support
- Lack of consistent evaluation of care models across providers.

These challenges were acknowledged in the NSW DCJ's 2024 System Review into Out-of-Home Care, which identified "*significant inconsistencies in how DCJ districts manage service providers*"¹ leading to fragmented service delivery, duplication, administrative burden and disconnects between policy, operational and provider levels. The review emphasised the need for greater consistency, clearer communication and stronger system coordination, and recommended urgent action. Taken together, these operational inconsistencies point to broader systemic accountability gaps.

While services are increasingly delivered through outsourced models, there is no clearly articulated, region-specific service delivery standard against which equity of access, timeliness or quality can be consistently measured. Variability across districts in interpretation, approval processes and oversight suggests structural governance weaknesses between local, regional and central functions, and leads to confusion and increased costs for multi-region providers such as Wesley Mission. Without clearer lines of accountability and consistent application of standards,

¹ NSW Department of Community Services; System Review into Out-of-Home Care. October 2024; page 3.



inequities between metropolitan and regional communities can persist despite policy intent.

Finally, current monitoring and reporting mechanisms also rely heavily on aggregated data, which obscures regional variation. Aggregated metropolitan–regional reporting masks differences in workforce availability, service timeliness and access to specialist supports. Without disaggregated, region-specific performance data, systemic disparities are less visible and therefore less likely to trigger corrective commissioning or policy responses. More contextual region-specific reporting is essential to accurately identify service gaps and inform targeted responses.

Recommendations

Acknowledging these points, Wesley Mission recommends that the Committee calls for the NSW Government to:

1. Fund the true cost of delivering community services in regional areas, recognising higher workforce, travel, recruitment, training and operational costs.
2. Invest in growing and sustaining the regional community services workforce, including targeted recruitment, training, and retention strategies.

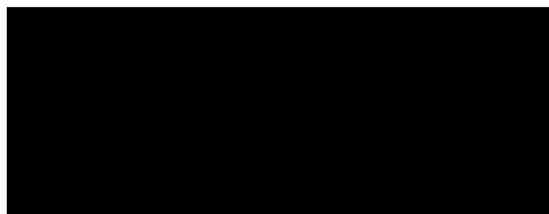
Furthermore, Wesley Mission recommends the Committee calls for DCJ to:

3. Clarify governance and accountability arrangements between local, regional and central commissioning functions to ensure consistent interpretation of funding provisions, approval processes and oversight expectations across districts.
4. Introduce disaggregated regional performance reporting across government-funded services, including clear metrics on service access, timeliness, workforce stability and outcomes.

Wesley Mission appreciates the Committee's focus on improving service delivery for regional communities. Given our cross-regional operational footprint and comparative metropolitan experience, we would welcome the opportunity to provide oral evidence to assist the Committee's deliberations.

Please contact [REDACTED] if you have any questions about the information shared above.

Yours sincerely,



Bay Warburton
Executive Director, Community Services
Wesley Mission