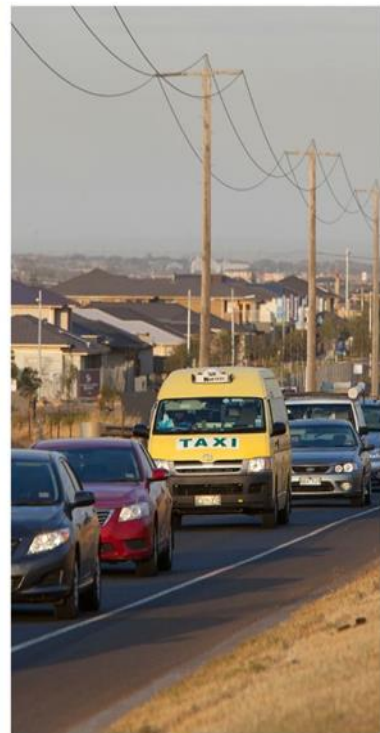




**NATIONAL
Growth Areas
ALLIANCE**

2023-24 Pre-Budget Submission



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ABOUT THE NGAA

We are the peak body for local governments in Australia's outer metropolitan growth areas, funded by our member councils. Our members are united by experiences of rapid population growth and infrastructure deficits. Together, we represent more than 5.3 million people living in the fast-growing suburbs around Australia's capital cities.

Our policy positions are built on a comprehensive research base and the experience of our member councils.

Outer suburban growth area experts

The National Growth Areas Alliance (NGAA) has more than a decade of evidence-based advocacy and a strong history of collaborating and building partnerships across government and with the private sector. We are highly regarded for our policy expertise and insights into growth areas. Our extensive growth area networks enable us to bridge the divide between urban research and urban reality in the outer suburbs.

Urban Policy Forum

NGAA would welcome being part of the Urban Policy Forum. We can productively contribute to a whole-of-government understanding and approach which recognises the distinct experience of outer suburban growth area councils.

Partnerships and collaborations

The NGAA holds a partnership arrangement with the **Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Children and Families over the Life Course (the Life Course Centre)**. We work with Queensland-based Suburban Futures. We commission research and collaborate with universities and research institutes around Australia.

We engage with many other advocacy and professional bodies in the sector such as the Planning Institute of Australia and state and federal infrastructure bodies.

NGAA PRIORITIES FOR THE 2023-24 BUDGET AND THE NEXT PARLIAMENT

Foreword

The NGAA is pleased to provide input to the 2023 – 2024 Federal Budget from the perspective of the 5.3 million Australians who live in an outer suburban growth area. We would also welcome bringing this important perspective to the Urban Policy Forum.

'From Paddocks to Postcodes' is the real experience of growth area councils across our nation responding to hundreds of new people moving into their municipalities every week, all requiring the basic infrastructure and services that most areas take for granted.

Twenty per cent of Australia's population lives in an outer suburban growth area around our major cities. These areas are growing at nearly three times as fast as the rest of the nation. The growth areas population has increased by 34% in the past decade, while Australia's population grew by just 15%.

Growth in the outer suburbs continued during the Covid-19 pandemic, fuelled by government housing stimulus and low interest rates. The pace has eased, but the 2022 Population Statementⁱ notes similar patterns of population growth experienced before the pandemic are forecast to return. All indicators point to ongoing, rapid growth in the outer suburbs for decades to come.

Ongoing investment in vital infrastructure and services for new communities is needed to achieve equity with existing urban areas and keep pace with growing populations. Because every Australian deserves to live in a safe, sustainable, and liveable community – regardless of their postcode.

The NGAA's submission sets out 4 key recommendations and a list of priority projects from our Member Councils for the next Federal Budget in order to help achieve our vision of resilient, liveable and thriving outer suburban communities. We look forward to working with the Government on these issues.

Four key recommendations

1. Australian Government leadership for climate adapted, resilient suburbs
2. Infrastructure to transform outer suburban communities
3. Realising the economic potential of growth areas
4. Invest in community resilience and social capital

Australia's outer urban growth areas today

Still experiencing high growth

The population of Australia's outer metropolitan growth local government areas (LGAs) grew at a rate of 2.9% per annum in the five years from 2016 to 2021ⁱⁱ compared to an average rate of 1.2% for the rest of our nation. In 2021, the total population of 29 outer metropolitan growth LGAs was more than 5.3 million, an increase of 683,500 residents since 2016.

Government stimulus is increasing the need for infrastructure and services in the outer suburbs

Government stimulus as a pandemic response triggered high demand for housing in the outer suburbs and growth in land sales that will see houses on the ground long before vital infrastructure is planned and funded, let alone delivered. There have been record building approval numbers in all growth area LGAs off the back of the Homebuilder grantⁱⁱⁱ and the New Home Guarantee.

The NGAA welcomes the new government's focus on improving the supply of affordable and social housing – indeed, this is a priority project of some NGAA Member councils. Federal and State commitment is needed to provide the infrastructure and services that people living in new neighbourhoods need. The Housing Accord will further increase the need for national coordination of infrastructure and service provision in growth areas.

Other drivers of housing demand will contribute to high growth rates in outer suburban LGAs for the foreseeable future, including the relative affordability of the outer suburbs, lifestyle factors and preferences for larger dwellings for young families, and the aspirations of recent migrants to purchase a home. (In 2021, 33.4% of all residents in NGAA councils were born overseas, higher than in Australia (27.7%).

Distinct characteristics of outer suburban communities drive complex services demand

The outer suburbs have specific needs, characteristics and unmet needs that make them distinct from CBDs and regions. NGAA councils and their communities are impacted by:

- inadequate transport, health, education, community, and social infrastructure to respond to increasing population, and
- a long-term lack of government focus on the health, education, and employment prospects of communities in rapidly developing greenfield suburbs.

Demand for services is driven by high population growth and the distinct demographic profile of the outer suburbs. There is a large cohort of young families with children and children moving into young adulthood with particular needs for primary health care and mental health services. Diverse social and linguistic communities, high rates of family violence, disability, and lower socio-economic status on average, add complexity to service demand.

Low-density built form and poor public transport makes accessing scarce services even harder, especially for people experiencing disadvantage.

Climate change impacts will exacerbate existing structural disadvantage and unsustainable new urban development will make the impacts of climate change more pronounced in the outer suburbs.

Our Vision for outer suburban growth communities - resilient, liveable and thriving

NGAA members have a shared vision of growing communities that are resilient, liveable, and thriving. But we can't do this alone. This vision is unachievable without national policy leadership to support all stakeholders to reimagine the future of outer suburban development.

Policy leadership must be supported by long term funding commitments for urban-standard infrastructure and better federal and state services in the outer suburbs.

The NGAA is calling for a comprehensive national approach with all levels of government working together to address the uneven distribution of people, jobs, houses and infrastructure around the country.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Australian government leadership for climate adapted, resilient suburbs

Suburbia 3.0

Outer suburban development as it is currently delivered is not sustainable. The NGAA is calling for cross sectoral, tri-level commitment to well planned, climate adapted, resilient suburbs – we are calling for Suburbia 3.0.

The first generation of urban development forms the heart of the inner suburbs of our capital cities; the second generation of middle ring suburbs responded to the expansion of heavy rail and private vehicle ownership. Suburbs expanded outwards and low-density built form

has spread beyond town centres, without reliable public transport. The result has been congestion and dependency on private vehicles. Roads and other hard services contribute to the flood impact of high rainfall, the environmental degradation of local waterways and the urban heat effect.

Climate change is exacerbating existing development problems. The third generation of suburban development must be climate adaptive, resilient and deliver liveable communities under climate scenarios. It has to take the best aspects of the compactness and dwelling diversity of the inner suburbs and the open space and attributes of the middle ring.

Cheaper housing and land, low density and lack of housing diversity is not affordable living. Suburbia 3.0 needs the shared agreement and vision of all stakeholders involved in greenfields development. Multiple aspects of development practice must be turned on its head. Outer suburban planning and design must evolve to support large populations living healthy, sustainable lives.

Multiple and frequent emergencies in outer metropolitan areas are likely to significantly increase. We must not keep building suburbs on land that is high risk for fire or flood. We cannot deliver 'cheaper housing' without understanding how these climate-exacerbated emergencies will impact on highly mortgaged communities.

The National Urban Policy should embed core objectives for sustainable urban development in the outer suburbs:

- Resilient built form – where to build, what to build and to what standard
- Self-sustaining
- Better sequencing of investment and delivering of infrastructure
- Climate impact must be addressed by the development sector and new regulatory standards put in place to prevent poor development
- Mandated coordination across levels of government with a respect for local government knowledge, priorities and funding issues
- A focus on planning best practice in growth areas.

A renewed call for a partnership model of infrastructure investment

NGAA continues to advocate for a coordinating Minister or Assistant Minister for Urban Growth to lead on urban policy and understand the unique nature of growth in the outer suburbs. National and State infrastructure advisory bodies have called for a focus on growth areas (iv and v).

Growth areas need assurance that Federal infrastructure investment will be allocated on the basis of greatest need and impact.

Leadership and engagement at the Federal level is vital to drive reforms and deliver transformational infrastructure in partnership with states and councils. City Deals have not delivered for many NGAA councils who have invested scarce resources in advocacy and developing regional priorities in anticipation of a partnership model.

NGAA welcomes the Government's approach to the Regional Precincts and Partnerships program. We are seeking a similar approach and commitment to outer suburban growth areas.

NGAA supports the position of the Australian Local Government Association to return Financial Assistance Grants to 1 per cent Commonwealth taxation revenue to support local governments and our communities.

Policy Priorities and Projects

NGAA calls for the Federal Government to put climate change and sustainable development in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals at the heart of the National Urban Policy.

NGAA is seeking:

- Funding for pilot local government programs to improve resilience and adaptation.
- Funding for research into building carbon positive suburbs.
- Funding to support Councils to plan for and adapt vital community infrastructure in the face of climate risk
- Clear and mandatory expectations for climate sensitive design and resilience when funding infrastructure in the outer suburbs

A new model for city/suburban partnerships between the Australian, State and Local government to replace City Deals.

A commitment to a transparent funding program for infrastructure projects in the outer metropolitan suburbs

We encourage the Government to learn from past areas experience and rethink the way that infrastructure is delivered in new and developing communities. We have this opportunity now in new developments and in more recent growth areas like Wollondilly in Sydney's south.

Details of priority projects in growth areas that require Australian Government funding are listed in Appendix 1: NGAA Priority Projects 2023-24.

2. Infrastructure to transform growth area communities

NGAA has long advocated for the infrastructure needs of outer suburban growth areas. Growth areas infrastructure is underfunded, and communities are under serviced.

The decade-long population boom in the outer suburbs and the social inequities highlighted during the pandemic bring lessons for government. Vast, low density urban development built around largely rural roads makes the daily commute a nightmare for thousands of Australians.

A financing mechanism to secure current and future infrastructure delivery, and a strong, integrated approach by national and state infrastructure bodies is critical.

Social infrastructure such as community hubs and sports facilities are vital to support new residents to connect and establish themselves in new suburbs. Existing funding and financing approaches at Federal and State level cannot meet current demand for social infrastructure let alone increased demand. Strong leadership is required at Federal level to address this national crisis.

There are already around a million young people in growth areas who will need work or higher education in the next decade. Federal Government infrastructure contracts should require contractors to prioritise local employment and invest in local apprenticeships and skill development. This will help address labour market shortages and support the development of skills for young people who live in the outer suburbs.

For example, there is an incredible opportunity with the announced investment in the Beveridge Intermodal Freight Terminal and the Western Interstate Freight Terminal to use these projects to engage local contractors and sub-contractors and require demonstrated employment outcomes for young people, people with disability and First Peoples.

Commit to long term, evidence-based funding of outer suburban infrastructure

The NGAA welcomes the announcement of a revitalised Infrastructure Australia, and the policy direction for IA to better connect with state infrastructure bodies. NGAA Councils need long-term capital works planning and funding solutions that deliver infrastructure as communities are formed – not decades later.

NGAA recognises that resources are scarce, and demand is high. NGAA endorses Infrastructure Australia's call for place-based planning to unlock the potential of every outer suburban growth area in Australia^{vi}.

Too often Federal and state funding grants and funding rounds require councils to find money to co-invest quickly and without considering existing council budgets, capital works programs and statutory obligations.

Integrated strategic infrastructure planning is needed so growth area councils can manage their capital works programs without projects coming from left field from other levels of government. Councils would welcome the opportunity to jointly plan for the medium to long term and advise what their infrastructure needs will be. Growth area councils know their own communities, understand changing demographics and community need, and can inform cost-effective, well planned investment in their communities.

Address transport inequity in growth areas

Access to transport is a critical social equity consideration for the outer suburbs. These areas generally have an undersupply of transport services (especially public transport) and of local employment options^{vii}.

NGAA research indicates the annual cost for long distance commuting paid by workers in the outer growth suburbs is \$5.6 Billion. The cost savings across households due to changed travel patterns because of the pandemic is money that can be spent locally^{viii}. Reduced commuting time supports time with families – and enables people to participate in sport and community activities that improve their health and wellbeing.

Avoidable congestion costs in Melbourne alone were estimated at \$4.6 billion^{ix} in 2015. Under-developed infrastructure in growth areas contributes to congestion, pollution and costs in time to people who live in the outer suburbs.

Commuters in outer growth suburbs face the double challenge of distance from jobs and poor road infrastructure. This can make even a short commute time-consuming for car commuters and unattractive for a mode shift to buses that also get caught in congestion. Road and heavy rail infrastructure must be delivered with a focus on providing attractive and quick alternatives to the car. Road design standards should support high frequency buses operating in bus lanes separated from general traffic, so people have genuine, accessible, faster transport choices.

Paths and trails for local connections and sustainable transport alternatives

Government funding has focused on roads and growth area councils recognise the benefits, but this focus is leading to unsustainable outer urban communities. Road upgrades are needed but there is an opportunity for national leadership for sustainable communities with a focus on active transport infrastructure as well as roads.

Active transport infrastructure can support improved health and wellbeing outcomes in communities who are time poor due to demographics and long commutes.

Recent research shows that inadequate bikeways in urban areas, unsafe conditions for cyclists and lack of connections to major transport hubs are significant barriers to increasing the number of cycling trips each week.^x

NGAA calls for all state and federal investment in road projects to prioritise the delivery of active trails, and pedestrian connections that support walkable neighbourhoods.

Priority Projects

The majority of NGAA member council priority projects that require federal funding are for transformative transport infrastructure projects, including major freeway and road links which will have significant economic and other flow-on benefits.

Examples of priority infrastructure projects for which federal funding is being sought are:

NSW

- Picton Bypass – Wollondilly Shire
- Fifteenth Avenue Smart Corridor - Liverpool City Council

VIC

- Western Intermodal Freight Terminal – Wyndham City, City of Melton
- Beveridge Intermodal Freight Terminal – Mitchell Shire
- Thompson’s Road upgrade – City of Casey, Cardinia Shire
- Outer Metropolitan Ring Road – City of Hume, Mitchell Shire
- Western Highway – Melton City
- Westlink stage 2 – Wyndham City

SA

- South East Freeway Upgrades – Mount Barker Shire
- Curtis Road duplication – City of Playford

WA

- Australian Marine Complex high wide load route - City of Cockburn, City of Kwinana
- Outer Harbour road corridor – City of Kwinana
- Daviot Road extension – City of Swan
- Neerabup Strategic Link – City of Wanneroo.

Social infrastructure, sports and recreation priority projects include:

- Family and domestic violence support and accommodation - City of Wanneroo
- Aquatics and Leisure Centre – Penrith City Council
- Regional and Aquatic Sports Centre – City of Whittlesea
- Indoor sport and performing arts centres – Wyndham City

Details of these and other priority projects are in Appendix 1: NGAA Priority Projects 2023-24.

3. Realising the economic potential of growth areas

NGAA applauds the Government for initiating the Jobs Summit and looks forward to the Employment White Paper.

Growth areas are a national economic asset, with a 2.2 million-strong workforce, large tracts of land ready to be transformed into industrial, manufacturing and high employment zones and a record of business growth well above the national average.

Reducing barriers to education and employment will support more people in the outer suburbs to participate in the economy more fully.

The NGAA believes expanding growth area economies needs a multi-pronged approach. Targeted investment can help unlock long term, sustainable economic growth that builds off population growth, improves productivity and provides long term viable economic activity rather than the ‘sugar hit’ of short-term construction jobs.

Unlock labour productivity by embracing flexible working arrangements

The pandemic has provided the opportunity to reset economic geographies. Our research showed that the shift to hybrid working and working from home has a particularly strong and positive impact on people who live in growth areas.

New models of working and studying directly address the barriers experienced by many outer suburban residents. For example, a tight ‘spatial leash’ results in women in growth areas being less willing or able to travel for work due to their caring responsibilities^{xi}.

NGAA calls for all levels of government and the private sector to support work arrangements that enable people who live in growth areas to achieve a better balance between working and family life.

Understand the barriers to employment for some residents of growth areas

Almost 6 per cent (5.9%) of the population in NGAA councils was unemployed compared to 5.1 per cent across Australia. Australia’s future prosperity depends on all the workforce in the growth areas being fully productive.

Growth area residents need local access to tertiary education providers with courses that qualify them to work in jobs that support local communities. Labouring and trades, services and retail, aged and disability care, health care workers, and teachers are all in high demand in growth areas^{xii}.

Research by SGS for City of Whittlesea shows women in growth areas are more likely than men to be tertiary educated, but less likely to work full time. Job prospects for women with caring responsibilities are constrained in growth areas, with a loss to the economy as a whole^{xiii}. Between 53 and 58 per cent of part-time workers who live in the outer suburbs have long commutes over 10kms^{xiv}. This is a significant financial and time burden on people who may also have caring responsibilities.

Hybrid working arrangements can help, but diverse employment and employers need to be encouraged and incentivised to locate and expand into the outer suburbs.

NGAA urges the Federal Government to consider the lived experience of working parents in growth areas in the Employment White Paper. Joint investing with local government in business hubs, co-working spaces and integrated community facilities supports micro and small business and creates jobs.

Young people in growth areas need integrated and coordinated support

Poor access is the greatest barrier to young people in growth areas taking up education opportunities and employment: access to jobs, public transport, affordable housing options and to tertiary and vocational education.

These factors pose significant challenges when young people in growth areas need to relocate or commute to work or study. They place young people at risk of homelessness, mental health issues or disengagement from education. For example, City of Armadale research indicates youth unemployment and disengagement at around 26-27%, with a high Aboriginal youth population, around 20% of children developmentally vulnerable and low educational levels^{xv}.

Improved online education delivery is not an excuse to reduce funding for tertiary education facilities in the outer suburbs.

The NGAA seeks focused investment in programs and institutions that support disadvantaged young people to access employment and education and better policy understanding by governments of the geographic and structural barriers faced by young people in the outer suburbs.

Support micro, home-based and small local businesses

Small business in growth areas is booming, with many thriving home-based and micro-businesses set up by women. In 2018 the Victorian local government areas with the largest growth in small businesses were Wyndham (17.7 % increase), Melton (13.1%) and Hume (11.8 %).^{xvi}

Local government programs provide support to home based and micro businesses and help a community to grow local jobs. For example, the City of Kwinana, with Small Business WA, has focused on reducing the regulatory burden on home-based business to support their economic potential^{xvii}. Federal government financial support for local government programs for micro and small businesses means those programs can be tailored for local characteristics.

NGAA calls on the Federal Government to provide cash grants to Councils to deliver programs that support micro and small business to ‘start up’ and scale up as a key contribution to local jobs and economies.

Support to work and study ‘closer’ to home - grants for educational and co-working hubs in growth areas

Community hubs are trialling innovative ways to progress digital equity for growth area students, with dedicated study spaces. The pandemic highlighted the disadvantage students from lower socio-economic households experience with online learning^{xviii}.

Growth area commuters spent on average \$58.64 every day travelling to work by car^{xix} pre-Covid. Another benefit of local co-working hubs is that diverting disposable income from commuting costs to local services would boost local economies and small businesses.

Growth area LGAs have developed different co-working hub models. Our research shows that the most successful are those supported by a hub host generally employed by the local council.

NGAA calls on the Federal government for ongoing commitment to partnership with Councils to develop co-working and community hubs in growth areas.

Priority Projects

Priority education, wellbeing and employment projects in growth areas include:

- University Campus, City of Playford SA
- Regional University Hub, Mount Barker District Council, SA
- Seymour Community Wellbeing Hub, Mitchell Shire, Vic
- Tertiary Education project, City of Hume, Vic
- Delivery of Latitude 32 (Regional Employment Centre), City of Cockburn, WA

Details of these and other priority projects are in Appendix 1: NGAA Priority Projects 2023-24.

4. Investment to build community resilience and support social capital

NGAA welcomes the establishment of the National Emergency Management Agency and focus on resilience as well as emergency response. The NGAA applauds the Preparing Australian Communities Program – Local funding stream and notes some of our member councils were successful in securing grant money.

Growth communities, particularly in NSW and Victoria, bore the brunt of Covid infections and lockdowns, and have also had to deal with fires, storms, floods and record heat. Outer suburban councils are already home to many of Australia's most vulnerable residents.^{xx xxi} Climate change and disasters will exacerbate existing disadvantage.

Invest in social infrastructure to improve quality of life in outer suburbs

Social infrastructure - the facilities, spaces, services and networks that support the quality of life and wellbeing of communities - has a nationally significant role in supporting Australia's economy, liveability and sustainability^{xxii}.

The timely delivery of new and upgraded social infrastructure is integral to the success of Australia's cities as they grow.

Growth area councils are continually seeking to engage with state and federal infrastructure planners to better sequence delivery of services with development.

Australian Government funded primary and mental health services have not kept pace with population growth

The South East Melbourne and North West Melbourne Primary Health Networks together support more than 3.2 million people (2016). These two PHNs far exceed in population other PHNs, even without the population growth since 2016. The pressure on services is demonstrated by the PHN Needs Assessment for South East Melbourne which shows low rates of cancer screening, high rates of avoidable deaths from health issues and diseases and high rates of people engaging in risky behaviours^{xxiii}.

Growth in demand for GP services in urban areas has risen significantly and there is an existing undersupply of GPs in urban areas of 5.7 per cent with the deficit most pronounced in outer urban areas^{xxiv}.

For example, Melton Council has 6 GPs per 1000 people compared to the Greater Melbourne average of 10 per 1000. Blacktown has 8 per 1000 compared to a central Sydney average of 19 per 1000 and a Greater Sydney average of 10 per 1000.

Mental health services are vastly inadequate in outer suburban growth areas. Financial stress, the size of the youth cohort, high youth unemployment, communities that have escaped trauma and high incidence of family violence reports demonstrates that access to mental health services is significantly underprovided.

Priority Projects

Three member councils – Hume, Whittlesea and Casey – are seeking funding for mental health services.

Details of these and other priority projects are in Appendix 1: NGAA Priority Projects 2023-24.

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