



## 2022 POLICY PLATFORM

### DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

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to

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## A new context – ongoing growth coupled with inequitable access to basic services

### The Covid impact on the outer suburbs is enormous

**Key message: The Covid -19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted growth area communities in Sydney and Melbourne. Growth area councils have been dealing with the impacts of high infection rates, lower vaccination rates due to lack of nearby vaccination hubs and a shortage of GPs and culturally sensitive services.**

Victorian and NSW growth area communities have borne the brunt of Covid infection. As growth continues, many NGAA councils, especially in the eastern states have the added pressure of highly impacted services and communities, and the ongoing cost of recovery. Government focus has been on the impact of the pandemic on Sydney and Melbourne CBDs, but the impact on outer suburban councils is high and hidden.

The impact of the Covid-pandemic in Victoria and NSW has fallen disproportionately on growth area communities. NGAA members including Hume, Wyndham, Whittlesea and Liverpool have some of the highest rates of infection in Australia. They also had lower than average vaccination rates and long wait times for access to vaccinations until more recent, targeted programs to improve vaccination rates in the community<sup>1</sup> – a service that was also delivered by councils alongside state hubs and GP.

The growth areas sit low on the SEIFA index with large numbers of workers in casualised jobs, or essential worker roles such as aged care nurses and security guards. Casualised, insecure employment forces people to hold multiple jobs to earn a living wage. They are more likely to go to work if they've got symptoms because they don't have sick pay. This increases the risk of transmission<sup>2</sup>. Many growth areas have large migrant populations that experience other barriers such as language, low health literacy and poor access to health services per head of population including culturally appropriate health services<sup>3</sup>

In WA and SA the Covid impact has been different. Growth area councils report labour shortages due to closed borders have impacted many businesses including professional services, manufacturing and construction<sup>4</sup>. As state borders open up, SA and WA Councils are likely to experience an increase in infections. Targeted health services are necessary to achieve high vaccination rates and address health inequality in 'hard-to-reach' communities in growth areas<sup>5</sup> where language barriers and distance are an issue.

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*“Our outer suburbs are home to the most essential workers and faced the strictest lockdowns. These are the communities that saw us through the pandemic and to date governments have failed to understand their needs. Governments must join the dots between high COVID rates, high outbreak risk factors and the lag in social infrastructure in fast growing outer suburbs”*

*Bronwen Clark, CEO NGAA*

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-09-13/melbourne-northern-suburbs-vaccination-push/100455862>

<sup>2</sup> Closing the Divide: Essential workers, Australia cities and Covid-19, SGS Economic and Planning, October 2021, and <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/a-city-divided-covid-19-finds-a-weakness-in-melbourne-s-social-fault-lines-20200807-p55ji2.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://sph.med.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/sphcm/News/Enhancing-supporting-COVID-19-vaccination-program.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://cciwa.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/0321-business-confidence.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/priority-postcodes-targeted-local-vaccination-push>

## **Government stimulus means another outer suburban population boom is imminent**

Outer suburban growth areas are booming. Until March 2020, Australia had one of the highest population growth rates in the OECD. This was evident in NGAA councils on the outskirts of Australia's capital cities with population growth rates year on year growth that were double the national average. The break in international migration means high rates of growth in outer suburban growth areas decreased in late 2020/early 2021. All indications are that lower growth rates were a temporary response to the uncertainty of the pandemic. Record building and subdivision permits over the past three quarters show growth is continuing and looks to be increasing<sup>6</sup>. NGAA member Councils are saying it has never been busier.

'From Paddocks to Postcodes' is not a catch-phrase – it is the real, daily experience of growth councils dealing with hundreds of new people moving into their municipality every week, all requiring infrastructure and services to support their daily lives.

One in every four babies in Australia is born in a fast-growing outer suburb. In NSW, Camden Council absorbed 123 new residents every week of the 2019-20 year – almost 6400 people in a year. This is a Council that is still largely rural. These high rates of growth are replicated across NGAA members across the country.

In Victoria, ABS data shows the population of Wyndham Council grew by 12,687 in 2020. With an annual growth rate of 4.7 per cent, there are 244 additional people arriving in Wyndham every week of the year adding to demand for infrastructure and services. In 2018-19 the growth rate was 5.9 per cent.

In SA, Mt Barker grew by 3.2 per cent against the greater Adelaide average of 1.19 per cent.

Growth is still occurring – whilst the *rate* of growth that has fallen over the last two years, all indicators are that very high rates of growth are returning and will increase with an open international border.

There are multiple drivers of housing demand that will contribute to above average rates of growth in outer suburban growth areas for the foreseeable future.

### **Government stimulus targeted to new homes and low interest rates**

Government stimulus as a pandemic response has triggered high demand. Land sales in outer suburbs surged off the back of Home Builder grant<sup>7</sup>. The Federal government provided the New Home Guarantee which enables first home buyers to purchase with only a 5 per cent deposit. Interest rates are at record lows. As an economic measure it has been successful, but impacts on housing affordability and infrastructure are also a consequence.

### **Internal demand for larger houses and new working arrangements**

Significant migration to outer suburbs from inner cities is occurring as families seek larger houses and more open space to enable families to be comfortable at home and accommodate increased options for working from home<sup>8</sup>.

### **External migration**

Young skilled migrants who form families and purchase homes in outer suburban growth areas have been a significant source of housing demand and growth. Australia has a labour shortage which will attract new migrants. As international migration resumes with borders

<sup>6</sup> [www.realestate.com.au/news/twoyear-wait-to-build-amid-record-melbourne-boom/](http://www.realestate.com.au/news/twoyear-wait-to-build-amid-record-melbourne-boom/)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.realestate.com.au/news/homebuilder-grants-house-and-land-sales-surge-across-melbourne/?rsf=syn:news:nca:hs:socref>

<sup>8</sup> [www.realestate.com.au/news/the-cost-of-space-as-aussie-buyers-crave-bigger-homes-post-covid/](http://www.realestate.com.au/news/the-cost-of-space-as-aussie-buyers-crave-bigger-homes-post-covid/)

opening, new migrants are expected to continue to choose outer suburban areas to purchase a home due to the (relative) affordability of housing, existing migrant communities and lifestyle opportunities. Expats returning to Australia are also stimulating demand and this may increase as the border opens. The census data to be released in 2022 will give an indication of the extent of expat immigration settlement in growth areas.

**Priority: Immediately start tri-level strategic planning to manage the impacts on growth areas of the current and next population boom.**

## Australian Government leadership for a more sustainable model of outer suburban development

**Key message: National leadership is urgently needed to improve the sustainable development of growth area suburbs.**

Climate change poses enormous challenges to the outer suburbs. Heat related impacts will be exacerbated by poor mature tree canopy, houses on small lots with limited or no private green space and the financial costs of cooling a hot house. In Western Sydney, Penrith Council is working to understand the households most at risk of a hotter climate especially those living in rental accommodation<sup>9</sup>. Storms, floods and fire all pose incredible risk to outer suburban and peri-urban communities.

### **The greenfields development model is not delivering the suburbs and housing we need**

The model of development in the outer suburbs is inherently unsustainable. It is premised on cheap land, car-based planning frameworks, low density with poor or no public transport at the time residents move in. Growth area councils are trying to support communities to become more sustainable and resilient, but many of the structural issues such as developer-driven development, national road standards, lack of forward planning by transport agencies, and land use planning and decisions by state agencies are beyond the control or influence of councils.

There are multiple types of households that are not being serviced by the current model of greenfields residential development. The market-based approach that lets private developers determine subdivision and lot size is fundamentally flawed. It is producing urban development that will trap growth area communities in a cycle of climate-related disaster, increased housing and financial stress and continued poor health and wellbeing indicators. Affordable housing needs to be understood in the broadest sense rather than smaller lot sizes. Building diverse, affordable and resilient housing must be the new focus with diverse housing that supports and encourages growth area residents to transition in price and size of housing over time. This has been the model of development in older suburbs where first home buyers could purchase apartments or units as an entry point into the housing market.

The NGAA calls for national and state leadership to reimagine the outer suburbs and work with greenfield developers to ensure they build more sustainable, resilient urban environments. The private sector is essential to meet housing demand but the market is not delivering the suburbs we need for the future.

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<sup>9</sup> Resilient Penrith Action Plan 2021-2030 [https://www.penrithcity.nsw.gov.au/images/building-development/infrastructure/resilient\\_penrith\\_action\\_plan\\_access.pdf](https://www.penrithcity.nsw.gov.au/images/building-development/infrastructure/resilient_penrith_action_plan_access.pdf)

Low density greenfield development is fundamentally unsustainable and condemns future communities to financial and climate-related disasters. Density needs to be secured differently rather than cutting land up into smaller and smaller parcels with no room for the cooling effect of trees and the complete loss of ecosystem services they provide. Governments set the planning and policy framework and need to quickly establish new benchmarks and expectations and delivery models in partnership with the greenfield development sector.

Increased growth areas zoned for mixed land use might allow a range of housing to be developed to support diverse households and housing needs in growth areas. Outer urban growth areas are already home to a range of age groups and housing diversity is needed to meet the demand of a diverse mix of first homebuyers, upgraders, downgraders and retirees. Planning for more mixed use development would also support better integration of commercial and office land-use (in time) with residential development bringing jobs closer to where people live. Residential development is typically delivered more quickly. Planning for future jobs and ensuring land is kept available and not rezoned for residential development requires strong planning discipline by state and local government with the support of the Australian Government.

Infrastructure Australia recently observed that climate change impacts are not being built into infrastructure projects that Australian Government is funding. All state and Australian Government infrastructure proposals should be tested and interrogated against climate change impacts throughout the development of the business case and through detailed design.

**PRIORITY: National leadership to ensure the suburbs we are building today are sustainable and deliver diverse housing for diverse communities.**

**PRIORITY: Immediately prioritise investment in appropriate planning, funding and design of resilient infrastructure that needs to operate in a climate impacted future, starting with a focus on climate resilient new infrastructure then options for retrofitting existing infrastructure**

## **Invest in walkable, liveable, green suburbs with good access to high quality, useable recreation and open space**

COVID-19 highlighted the disparity of green and active space distribution across Australia's cities. People with easy access to well established paths and trails, regional and local parks, and recreation spaces are able to exercise and maintain health and wellbeing without an increased risk of exposure to the virus.

Multiple planning policies are failing to deliver walkable, liveable growth areas. Large road reservations and multiple lane arterial roads focus on efficient movement of vehicles and assume poor provision of rapid public transport. Large retail catchments with single ownership shopping centres result in a lack of walkable distances to shops and services for many residents in growth areas. Modern planning and land use decisions for growth areas reinforces car-based residential development and sets growth areas up for multiple problems in the face of climate change impacts.

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*"All Australian capital cities appear to value walkability and liveability, but there is little evidence that the policies reviewed are sufficient to create, maintain and enhance urban liveability in Australia" A Report Card on Australian Cities. Centre for Urban Research, RMIT.*

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In many outer suburban growth areas, limited provision of recreation and open space correlates with poor health and wellbeing outcome. Children can't play team sport because there aren't enough sports fields to meet demand. Adults can't exercise because paths and trails are disconnected or too far from homes. Limited or no funding to for regional sporting facilities limits the pathways of talented sports people. Limited or poor open space or large parks means there is little opportunity for residents of growth areas to escape the urban environment and engage with nature, and all the wellbeing that offers.

The inner suburbs of Australia's capital cities and many middle-ring suburbs meet a 20-minute neighbourhood test. Most growth area suburbs fail to do so<sup>10</sup>. The model of greenfield development across Australia magnifies other disadvantages that may be experienced by residents of outer growth areas.

Delivering 20 minute neighbourhoods requires land to be set aside in growth areas for higher density development to come online when feasible, and more zoning for mixed use on parcels of land (such as a vertical mixed-use zone). It requires funding and land to be set aside for parks and open space and sports grounds close to where people live. Collaborative planning, innovative practice and a commitment to sustainable and resilient outer suburbs must drive every planning and infrastructure decision.

**PRIORITY: Recognise and help fund regional recreational facilities and support adequate allocation of land for open space, parks and sportsfields and recreational facilities such as pavilions.**

### **Support emergency management nodes in growth areas**

The emergency management and response sector in outer suburbs is generally volunteers many coming off a rural base. New urban residents may not have the tradition, experience, or cultural appreciation of the role of volunteer organisations. Calls have been made for a "larger, paid, trained, professional emergency management workforce... Severe weather seasons are starting earlier and lasting longer, so these professionals will be busy."<sup>11</sup>

Fringe councils in peri-urban and the outer suburbs locations can be hard hit by natural disasters and emergencies. Highly vulnerable populations in growth areas increase the likely demand for emergency support. A rethink of emergency management in growth areas is required with the Australian government and state governments working with councils to implement locally based emergency management nodes in growth areas. These nodes can prepare for and manage the local impacts of national emergencies. It could also support the transition of traditionally volunteer based roles such as SES and volunteer fire fighters to paid employment opportunities for residents.

**PRIORITY: Emergency management planning and funding should recognise the inherent challenges of volunteer -based organisations servicing larger populations and the challenges of recruiting more volunteers from new, diverse communities.**

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<sup>10</sup> Stanley, et al., 2020

<sup>11</sup> Australia can expect far more fire catastrophes, Dominey-Howes, et al., 2020

## Growth area communities – under the radar with underfunded infrastructure needs

NGAA has a proud history of advocating for the infrastructure and service needs of outer suburban growth areas. These growth areas have consistently experienced double the national growth average, often off a rural base. Former ‘country towns’ are now busy and thriving suburbs, or in the process of transitioning – but the infrastructure needed to support the growth is years behind.

Outer suburban growth areas are under immense pressure – and they are under the radar of the Australian Government. Growth area councils are a cohort with distinct characteristics and specific needs. Investment in growth areas increasingly reflects political dynamics rather than a response to evidence-based need across growth area communities.

This means infrastructure is underfunded and the communities are woefully under serviced. Their voices are not represented in debates about capital cities and they are not rural or regional.

In summary the needs of growth area councils and the communities they serve are under-represented at the Federal level and this needs to change.

NGAA Member Councils are united by their shared experiences of:

- Population growth rates at double the national average
- Inadequate infrastructure to cope with the increased demand
- Long-term strategic Federal government under investment in roads, public transport and essential services.
- Inadequate federally funded services

NGAA calls for elevated attention by the Australian Government to drive policy and strategy across departments and with states to address growth areas issues consistently and for the long term.

**Priority: A Minister for Growth Areas within the cities portfolio who understands the characteristics of the outer suburbs and growth area communities and can advocate and coordinate a response to the evidence-based need.**

### Commit long term to fund outer suburban infrastructure

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<sup>12</sup>. A place-based approach to planning with targeted funding will make sure money goes to where it is needed, and gives confidence to the community that taxpayer’s money is being spent well.

Growth area Councils need long term infrastructure investment commitments not short term politically focused funding announcements. Too often Federal and state funding grants and funding rounds require councils to find money to co-invest quickly and with no respect for 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 sit and jointly plan for the medium

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<sup>12</sup> Infrastructure Plan 2021, Infrastructure Australia.

to long term and advise what their infrastructure needs will be. Growth area councils know their communities, understand changing demographics and need, and can inform and support cost-effective, well planned investment in their communities.

**PRIORITY: Invite growth area Councils to provide the Australian and respective state governments with an annual outline of their 5-10 year capital works program so grant opportunities can be better targeted to reflect local need, rather than political whim.**

**PRIORITY: The Urban Infrastructure Fund should have a significant funding stream dedicated to growth areas. Projects and preliminary business cases should be jointly developed with growth area councils.**

## **Work with growth area Councils to understand community needs**

The tri-level governance and coordinated planning for the Western Sydney City Deal is resource intensive but is leading to significantly better outcomes for communities. NGAA calls on the Australian and state governments to build on the City Deal model and implement collaborative place-based planning. Working with growth areas councils at a regional scale can encourage infrastructure planning beyond municipal boundaries.

Councils can help define the needs of their communities and support an informed response from other levels of government and with developers. Growth areas councils are skilled at brokering outcomes with state agencies, large landowners and developers to deliver well sequenced development with high amenity. This unique place-based knowledge and skill set should be recognised and better utilised by state and federal governments in their infrastructure planning.

Integrated community hubs if planned and designed well, can support service delivery by councils, state and federal agencies, and even the community/for purpose sector such as financial counselling, private playgroups and legal aid. These bring services to the community rather than requiring the community to travel to different areas to access services that are planned for and delivered independently of each other.

Growth areas continue to be car-based urban developments with large retail and service catchments. This is a very different model of development to older suburbs where multiple services can be accessed easily in neighbourhood shopping strips. Dispersed services and large service catchments in growth areas can entrench disadvantage, especially where public transport is poor or doesn't exist. State and Federal service agencies should find ways to bring services to people and use community hubs delivered by councils to offer outreach services. If service needs are made known to councils early, then community facilities can be designed to help deliver the services of other levels of government, even if it's an interim solution.

**Priority: Establish a growth areas unit within the Cities Directorate and a coordinating unit in state infrastructure departments that works with outer suburban growth areas councils and across relevant government agencies, to better understand development sequencing, jointly plan infrastructure and support timely delivery of state and Australian Government services to new communities**

## **Plan and help deliver an integrated transport network rather than isolated funding announcements.**

Planning and design of transit-oriented development around urban rail and other mass-transit options is a valuable planning tool for unlocking the value around transport corridors in the outer urban growth areas, leading to increased densification and access to amenity and jobs and the potential creation of great places.

A well-functioning integrated transport network is needed to be planned for and delivered early in a growth area. This includes upgraded major roads, public transport infrastructure and services, walkable paths and bicycle trails that connect to areas of activity such as shopping centres and community hubs and recreational reserves. The costs of underdeveloped infrastructure, including for active transport, are borne by households who need to buy an extra car or who can't access essential services. Parents at home looking after children and young people need good access to active transport options and public transport so they can participate. The greatest benefit for early investment in active transport infrastructure and public transport is avoided car ownership<sup>13</sup>.

Achieving connectivity and sustainable movement in growth areas requires coordinated investment across three levels of government to strategically invest in connecting communities through upgraded roads, walkable paths and trails and infrastructure that supports planning and delivery of accessible, high frequency, reliable public transport.

Place-based solutions including 'last mile' innovation can support transport rich hubs in outer suburbs even where lower densities exist. Neighbourhood transport and 'last-mile' solutions including active and shared transport options, can help address local congestion and should be a priority in neighbourhood layout before long term dependency on private vehicle use becomes entrenched. Freeway upgrades and busy arterial roads may need pedestrian bridge crossings rather than relying on intersection crossings. More dense outer suburbs are necessary to make public transport viable. Better integration of land use and transport planning is needed to realise denser suburbs with genuine public transport options.

## **Address transport inequity in growth areas**

Access to transport remains a critical social equity consideration for the outer suburbs of Australia's cities. These areas generally have an undersupply of transport services (especially public transport) and of local employment options<sup>14</sup>.

Research for the NGAA 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<sup>15</sup>. Reduced commuting time supports time with families – and enables people to participate in sport and community activities that improve their health and wellbeing.

In 2015 avoidable congestion costs in Melbourne alone were estimated at \$4.6 billion<sup>16</sup>. Under-developed infrastructure in growth areas contributes to congestion, pollution and costs in time to people who live in the outer suburbs.

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<sup>13</sup> [https://cur.org.au/cms/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/costs-and-benefits-of-early-delivery-of-transport-option\\_november-2021.pdf](https://cur.org.au/cms/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/costs-and-benefits-of-early-delivery-of-transport-option_november-2021.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Infrastructure Australia 2016 and Astrolabe, 2020

<sup>15</sup> Jobs and Commuting in Outer Growth Suburbs, Astrolabe for NGAA 2020

<sup>16</sup> Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics (BITRE) report which quantified costs from traffic congestion levels in Australian Capital City and Regions

Well maintained paths support people without a car or good access to public transport, to access services and improves a community's overall health. Upgrade of the road network in growth areas is crucial for people and businesses to move around. Even with a more integrated approach to transport planning, and an emphasis on public and active transport, ongoing investment in a safe arterial road network and upgrade of rural roads is essential.

Heavy rail is expensive but the benefits accrue immediately to growth areas communities and over decades in avoided congestion, an alternative to purchasing a second or third cars in a household and opening up land use for more intense development near train station. Recognising the long term benefits of early delivery of heavy rail, governments should examine debt options to bring forward investment in heavy rail for growth areas.

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. For the majority of commuters from outer growth suburbs, commuting by car is the only choice because public transport options are limited<sup>17</sup> or slow. Road infrastructure must be delivered with a focus on providing attractive and quick alternatives to the car such as high frequency buses operating in bus lanes separated from general traffic, so people have a genuine transport choice and can access services.

**PRIORITY: Ongoing funding for road upgrades, heavy rail and dedicated bus lanes is essential to develop an integrated transport system in outer suburban growth areas. Arterial roads and freeway upgrades should include dedicated bus lanes to support high frequency services and give a genuine, attractive alternative to the car, address transport inequity and support sustainable mode shift.**

## **Paths and trails for local connections and sustainable transport alternatives**

Australian Government funding has focused on roads and growth areas councils recognise the benefits for their communities, but a road-heavy focus from state and federal governments and their planning agencies 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.

Typical Australian households in metropolitan areas are spending a record 14.9 per cent of their income on transport which equates to a yearly transport expenditure of \$20,520<sup>18</sup>. With further distances to travel to work and study, tolls and poor public transport this amount is likely to be higher for households in growth areas.

Active transport infrastructure is an investment in the health of people in outer suburban areas. Research shows higher levels of diabetes, obesity and other health conditions associated with lack of exercise. Active transport infrastructure can support improved health and wellbeing outcomes in communities who are time poor due to demographics and long commutes.

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*“Without doubt, active transport (working, cycling, and the use of public transport), transport systems, and urban design significantly impact population health” The Effect of Active Transport, Transport Systems, and Urban Design on Population Health. Wen et al, 2013*

**PRIORITY: All Australian Government funded road infrastructure projects should fund safe, separated active transport options (paths and trails) within the road reserve.**

<sup>17</sup> Jobs and Commuting in Outer Growth Suburbs, Astrolabe for NGAA, July 2020

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.aaa.asn.au/transport-affordability-index-q2-2021/>

## Digital and Smart by design

Data can optimise the way infrastructure is used. Innovation in infrastructure design and delivery can support sustainable use of the infrastructure and extend its life. Data analytics can support more efficient use of existing infrastructure, enable less land for roads by supporting efficient and smart contraflow management and help reduce congestion by optimising movement and traffic flow. In community facilities, smart buildings can reduce emissions, reduce operating costs and enable access and different uses to occur outside of traditional hours.

**PRIORITY: All Australian Government funded grants should require clear, 'smart' and digital objectives as part of delivery requirements, with flexibility for councils to respond consistent with their internal systems and their sustainability and digital objectives.**

## Revitalise Australia's economic engine room in the outer suburbs

**Key message: Communities need time and space to create their own special place. We can truly realise the vision of the sustainable 20 minute neighbourhood by building on the positive unexpected changes that have come from the pandemic such as home or local employment as a hybrid option, and an alternative to long commutes. The productivity gains with new models of working and education will directly address barriers experienced by many outer suburban residents.**

The workforce in outer suburbs is 2.21 million. That is 18.7 per cent of the total Australian workforce, up from 14 per cent in 2006. It is also the heart of diversity in Australia. The economic potential of growth areas is great – what is needed is clever, targeted investment to help unlock long term, sustainable economic growth that builds off the population growth, provides long term viable economic activity rather than the 'sugar boost' of short-term construction jobs building housing.

Research shows employment is unevenly distributed with higher unemployment for youth. A tight 'spatial leash' results in women less willing to travel long distances for work due to caring responsibilities which contributes to the perpetuation of traditional gender roles and reduces economic security for women<sup>19</sup>. The pandemic has given governments, employers and the community a basis to reset economic geographies. Realising productivity opportunities for residents in outer suburbs and growth areas will support more people to more fully participate in the economy.

Working from home has been proven - it can work when employers put in place support and understand the value of flexible work. NGAA is calling for the government and all businesses to, where they can, support work arrangements that enable people who live in growth areas to finally achieve a better balance between working and family life. A recent Productivity Commission report highlights the benefit of working from home

“Avoiding the commute reduces the 'cost' of working, and this is expected to induce an increase in labour supply. This may include more work opportunities for people who face barriers to labour force participation. This includes carers, parents of young children, some people with disabilities, as well as people living in remote or regional

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<sup>19</sup> Whittlesea gender equity in employment analysis. SGS Economics 2021

areas where there are often fewer job opportunities in close physical proximity. Working from home policies can also promote a more gender-balanced workforce”<sup>20</sup>

Flexible working at offsite locations such as coworking hubs, can protect and bolster local economies. Local work encourages disposable income to remain in growth areas and can fast track the establishment and expansion of local services and businesses.

### **Unlock labour productivity in growth areas.**

The shift to working from home has had the strongest, most positive impact on people who live in growth areas. NGAA research found that residents of growth areas who switched to working from home during COVID-19 were saving up to three hours per day commuting. This additional time was being used to exercise, spend time with family or for study or professional development. The average daily cost to get to and from work in outer growth suburbs is \$58.64 by car<sup>21</sup>. For the benefit of commuters and growth area economies, encouraging local jobs close to where people live must be a focus for all levels of government.

Growth area demographics are an economic resource that is underutilised. Growth areas are filled with talented and diverse migrant communities with an energy and enthusiasm that is valued by all Australians. They are home to highly educated women who, due to family commitments, are often under employed in lower skilled jobs closer to home. Growth areas also have large numbers of young people looking to study and work close their families and contribute to the economy.

All of these working age cohorts are under-utilised and a focus on reducing barriers will help to realise productivity gains as well as improve people’s lives.

Growth area residents need local access to tertiary education providers with courses that qualify them to work in jobs that support growth area communities. Labouring and trades, services and retail, aged and disability care, health care, and the primary and secondary teachers are all in high demand and sources of employment in growth areas. Better matching tertiary qualifications with these jobs would help address the disconnect in the labour market in growth areas.

### **Focus on reducing unemployment and underemployment in growth areas.**

At July 2020, the rate of jobseeker and youth allowance recipients in growth areas was at 11.1% compared to 5.1% the previous year in June 2019 (.id.2020). NGAA research found that if jobs were made available to working from home or at a local coworking hub, residents not in the workforce would be likely to reenter the workforce. In growth areas, under 40s not currently in the workforce were significantly more likely to seek part-time employment if they were able to work from home some of the time (64%), and those with children aged under 5 in the household were also more likely to seek part-time work (65%) (Quantum, 2020).

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<sup>20</sup> Productivity Commission Working from Home Research Report, September 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Jobs and Commuting in Outer Growth Suburbs, Astrolabe for NGAA, July 2020. Includes running costs, tolls, parking and standing costs (insurance, registration etc)

## Understand the barriers to employment for women that live in growth areas

Research shows that women in growth areas are educated, underemployed and constrained by barriers to employment. For many parents, and especially women, with school aged children or elderly parents, the impacts on family life of jobs far from home are too great. Research by SGS for the City of Whittlesea shows women in growth areas are more likely than men to be tertiary educated, but almost twice as many men as women are working full time. The job prospects for these women are constrained in growth areas with a loss to the economy as a whole<sup>22</sup>. Across capital cities, between 53 and 58 per cent of part time workers who live in the outer suburbs have long commutes over 10kms<sup>23</sup>. This is a significant financial and time burden on people working part-time who may also have caring responsibilities or other commitments.

The rise in female employment since 1974 has been estimated to result in a 22 per cent increase in economic activity<sup>24</sup>. Projections by KPMG indicate that if the labour force gap between men and women was halved, Australia's annual GDP would increase by \$60 Billion in 20 years with cumulative living standards increasing by \$140 Billion<sup>25</sup>. The productivity gains of being able to work closer to home, or in the home, especially for women and less mobile employees is tremendous. NGAA calls for all levels of government to understand the lived experience of working parents in growth areas, especially women with caring responsibilities, and the challenges they face to enter employment, increase their hours or commit to full time work while trying to manage the care of children or elderly parents. Support for women to increase their participation in the workforce, and access professional jobs, including part time work closer to home will increase productivity and support economic growth<sup>26</sup>.

## Young people in growth areas need support

Poor access is the greatest barrier to young people in growth areas taking up education opportunities and employment. Poor access to jobs, poor or no access to public transport, poor affordable housing options and poor access to tertiary and vocational education. Car usage is high in growth areas. The cost of running a car for young people who are generally low-income workers, can be prohibitive alongside the costs of education. The challenges for young people in outer suburban growth areas include fee debt, low Austudy payments, transport costs, along with lack of local work and lack of diverse, smaller housing options.

These factors combined pose significant challenges and 'risky transition' when young people in growth areas either need to move away from home or face a long and costly commute to their place of study. In families already struggling, income support from within the family is not an option. Long commutes for education make part-time work difficult to access. These factors

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<sup>22</sup> Whittlesea gender equity in employment analysis. SGS Economics 2021

<https://www.sgsep.com.au/projects/whittlesea-gender-equity-in-employment-analysis>

<sup>23</sup> Jobs and Commuting in Outer Growth Suburbs, Astrolabe for NGAA, July 2020

<sup>24</sup> Goldman and Sachs & JBWere (2009), Australia's hidden resource: the economic case for increasing Female Participation,

[http://www.asx.com.au/documents/about/gsjbw\\_economic\\_case\\_for\\_increasing\\_female\\_participation.pdf](http://www.asx.com.au/documents/about/gsjbw_economic_case_for_increasing_female_participation.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> KPMG 2018, Ending Workforce Discrimination Against Women.

<https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/au/pdf/2018/ending-workforce-discrimination-against-women-april-2018.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> <https://womensworkforceparticipation.pmc.gov.au/womens-workforce-participation-economic-priority.html>

of themselves and combined place young people at risk of homelessness, mental health issues or disengagement from education. For example, research in the City of Armadale indicates youth unemployment and disengagement around 26-27 per cent, a high Aboriginal youth population, around 20 per cent of children developmentally vulnerable and low educational levels<sup>27</sup>.

**PRIORITY: Understand the skills and education needs of growth area communities and better understand the barriers for culturally diverse populations, women returning to the workforce and young people, and tailor federal programs accordingly.**

## **Support micro, home-based and small local businesses**

Growth areas are a crucible of entrepreneurship and jobs diversity. Many small businesses are started in response to poor employment opportunities and the need for flexible work for parents with caring responsibilities.

Small businesses are the engine rooms of the economy and small business in growth areas is booming. In 2018 the Victorian local government areas with the largest growth in small businesses were Wyndham (17.7 %), Melton (13.1% increase) and Hume (11.8 %) <sup>28</sup> increase. Many small businesses have been severely impacted by the pandemic. Conversely, some local businesses have thrived because of the increase in people shopping locally. Targeted support for small businesses to recover and evolve their businesses will help them to stabilise after the pandemic, expand and provide more local jobs.

Growth areas are home to thriving home based and micro businesses, many set up by women. Programs directed through Council economic development teams can provide mentoring and support to home based and micro businesses, connect them with each other and support an entrepreneurial community to grow local jobs. In Kwinana WA, the council with the support of Small Business WA, has focused on reducing the regulatory burden on home-based business to support their economic potential<sup>29</sup>. Financial support from the Federal government for Councils to deliver programs for micro, small and home based businesses means programs can be tailored for local economic characteristics than programs designed and delivered nationally or even at state-level.

The Federal Government's stimulus investment supported the large-scale residential construction industry. This benefited the 'big end of town' and favours male-dominated construction jobs rather than the thousands of smaller businesses that employ locally. Cash grants for councils to deliver smaller infrastructure projects such as parks, playgrounds, cultural centres and sports facilities can be designed to support Council procurement from local construction businesses, craftspeople, artists, manufacturers and service providers with direct support for growing local jobs.

**PRIORITY: Provide support for Councils to work with micro, home and small businesses to help these businesses to grow and provide local jobs for growth area communities**

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<sup>27</sup> Dis/Advantage: Young People in Australia's outer suburbs after Covid 19. NGAA webinar with the research of Dr Lizzie Knight, Centre for International Research in Education Systems, Victoria University

<sup>28</sup> <https://business.vic.gov.au/news-and-updates/2019/victoria-records-highest-small-business-growth-in-australia>

<sup>29</sup> NGAA 2021 Research Symposium presentation, July 2021

## Working close to home - grants for educational and co-working hubs in growth areas

Disparity of access is not just an issue for rural and remote students. Universities can offer remote learning opportunities but if a study space or internet is not available at a person's home, it is difficult for young people to focus on study. Students from growth areas are already less likely to attend university than their inner-city peers because of cost and transport barriers. Family household size or financial circumstances mean many young people are unable to access a quiet space for school or university work. This is also a challenging situation for families with parents managing work from home. Growth area councils are trialling innovative ways to progress digital equity.

Local educational hubs can accommodate university and vocational learning by remote learning. Funding for Council community facilities, such as libraries and community hubs to be developed or upgraded with dedicated study rooms and spaces for students to study online would support young people to undertake tertiary study close to home and reduce barriers to successful study. Secondary students will also benefit, with evidence that many high school students in growth areas use library and youth facilities for a space to do their homework after school. The Covid pandemic has highlighted the additional disadvantage students from lower socio-economic households experience with online learning including limited technology and ICT resources and restricted parental capacity to provide support<sup>30</sup>.

Coworking hubs can support people not in the workforce to seek part-time or full-time work opportunities or start their own businesses and build a network. NGAA research found that 33 per cent of surveyed residents in growth areas were somewhat to very likely to take up entrepreneurial or new business activity if coworking space was made available. Two thirds of residents surveyed in growth areas said they'd consider working in a coworking hub to provide a more flexible and social approach to working locally<sup>31</sup>.

Residents were more likely to use local services if they were working from home or in local hub. The economic impact of each growth area resident purchasing their morning coffee locally is a \$1.4B across Australia per year. Commuters travelling from growth areas pre-COVID-19 were spending on average \$58.64 every day travelling to work by car (which is 74.5% of commuters in growth areas). This includes petrol, tolls and parking as well as car running costs. The total impact of this is \$6.9B per year across Australia<sup>32</sup>. Diverting disposable income from commuting costs to local services boosts local economies and especially small businesses in growth areas.

Coworking models come in multiple forms and local governments can pilot several versions in existing premises. However, there is some financial assistance required to run a coworking hub, namely the hub host, who is generally employed by the council. Coworking hubs are more successful if a host is employed to encourage collaboration and networking.

Growth areas can invest in flexible accommodation such as coworking hubs, satellite offices, neighbourhood co-ops and incubators to take advantage of this shift. This is largely because of the ready and available skilled labour residing in growth areas. With a halt on skilled migration due to COVID-19, these workers will be in greater demand than ever before. Before the pandemic Pre-COVID, growth areas experience an exodus of students and young people to inner cities each year for study and work opportunities. Connecting remote learning, remote

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<sup>30</sup> Impact of learning from home on educational outcomes for disadvantaged children  
<https://www.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/impact-of-learning-from-home-federal-government-brief-mitchell-institute.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> Quantum Market Research for NGAA, 2020

<sup>32</sup> Jobs and Commuting in Outer Growth Suburbs, Astrolabe for NGAA, 2020

professional development and working from home can allow young people to remain in and enter the work force in growth areas.

In 2020, COVID-19 related reductions in car and public transport commutes in the Greater Sydney Metropolitan Area saved an estimated \$5.6 billion in annual travel time costs. Much of this saving can be attributed to decreases in congestion<sup>33</sup>

**PRIORITY: Recognise the transformational role that technology and hybrid working arrangements can have for growth area families. Provide funding support for local education spaces, employment hubs and co-working spaces so workers and young people can access education and workspaces outside their home.**

## Investment to aid community recovery, build resilience and support social capital

**Key message: The social capital of growth communities has been tried and tested over the past two years and prior to the pandemic with communities impacted by fires, storms, floods and record heat. The pandemic has thrown great challenges to growth area councils but has also highlighted the strengths of growth area communities which are young, dynamic and diverse. Outer suburb planning and design must evolve to support large populations living and working locally and generating local economic value.**

The SEIFA average for growth areas is considerably lower than the Australian average and household income is generally below the average of the major capital cities<sup>34</sup> with the average number of children in each household higher<sup>35</sup>.

Community leadership in migrant and diverse communities within growth areas, has helped with health messaging amongst non-English speakers especially older people, and encouraged vaccination. The diversity of growth areas communities is one of their greatest strengths and should be celebrated and supported. Growth area councils are working on resilience and climate change adaptation plans to support their communities. However the built form of new suburbs is unsustainable and potentially disastrous for communities that are already vulnerable.

## **Recognise that timely social infrastructure is essential to support quality of life in outer suburbs**

Social infrastructure is the facilities, spaces, services and networks that support the quality of life and wellbeing of communities. Social infrastructure assets are the buildings and spaces that support delivery of social services by governments and other service providers. Social infrastructure networks play a nationally significant role in supporting Australia's economy, liveability and sustainability<sup>36</sup>. NGAA welcomes Infrastructure Australia broadening its understand of the important role social infrastructure plays in building community. Outer suburban growth areas are experiencing rapid population growth, but often without commensurate social infrastructure and services needed to support communities and maintain liveability.

The cost of land and competition for space means employment buildings and residential housing are being delivered without sufficient access to social infrastructure, such as green

<sup>33</sup> Productivity Commissions 2021, citing Henscher et al 2021

<sup>34</sup> Community profile, NGAA councils, <https://profile.id.com.au/ngaa>

<sup>35</sup> NGAA Community Profile, id Informed Decisions <https://profile.id.com.au/ngaa>

<sup>36</sup> Australian Infrastructure Audit 2019, Infrastructure Australia

space. Infrastructure Australia notes the timely delivery of new and upgraded social infrastructure is integral to the success of Australia's cities as they grow. It also observes that sector-based planning, funding and governance structures limit the incentives for different infrastructure sectors to work together to improve benefits to communities. This is especially the case in growth areas where lack of forward, coordinated infrastructure planning and delivery results in poor community outcomes. Growth area councils are continually seeking to engage with state and federal infrastructure planners to better sequence delivery of services with development, but generally with limited success.

**PRIORITY: Establish a growth areas unit within the Cities Directorate and a coordinating unit in state infrastructure departments that works with outer suburban growth areas councils and across relevant government agencies, to better understand development sequencing, jointly plan infrastructure and support timely delivery of state and Australian Government services to new communities.**

### **Australian Government funded health services have not kept pace with population growth**

The South East Melbourne and North West Melbourne Primary Health networks between them support over 3.2 million people (2016 data). These two PHNs far exceed in population other PHNs and the population data is well out of date. As an example, the Primary Health Network Needs Assessment for South East Melbourne shows low rates of screening for cancers, high rates of avoidable deaths from various health issues and diseases and high rates of people engaging in risky behaviours<sup>37</sup>.

The undersupply story is similar for GPs. Growth in demand for GP services in urban areas has grown significantly in the 5 years and a significant undersupply is forecast to 2030. There is an existing undersupply of GPs in urban areas of 5.7 per cent with the largest deficit of GPs in 2030 forecast in Victoria (3,900 FTE GPs) and NSW (3,400 FTE GPs) and Queensland (1,500 FTE GPs) with the deficit most pronounced in urban areas<sup>38</sup>.

Growth areas have lower than average numbers of GPs per 1000 people already compared to metropolitan averages. 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.

Growth area councils have been dealing with the impacts of high infection rates, lower vaccination rates due to lack of nearby vaccination hubs and a shortage of GPs and culturally sensitive services. At the same time, the communities in growth areas, especially amongst migrant and religious groups have shown incredible leadership<sup>39</sup>. Migrant women in Melbourne's west have helped hard to reach women access vaccinations in a culturally safe way.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See for example, South East Melbourne PHN Core Needs Assessment 2019. [https://www.semphn.org.au/SEMPHN\\_Core\\_Needs\\_Assessment\\_2019\\_SEMPHN\\_WEBSITE\\_VERSION.pdf](https://www.semphn.org.au/SEMPHN_Core_Needs_Assessment_2019_SEMPHN_WEBSITE_VERSION.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> General Practitioner Workforce report 2019. Cornerstone Health Pty Ltd, Deloitte Access Economics

<sup>3939</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-10-06/northern-suburbs-of-melbourne-raise-vaccination-rate/100513594>

<sup>4040</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-10-15/victoria-vaccination-target-migrant-women-left-behind/100528706>

Mental health services are vastly inadequate for the current population in outer suburban growth areas. There are multiple variables that point to a need for a significant increase in mental health facilities and services in 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. Secure crisis facilities are almost non-existent in growth areas meaning people at risk of suicide or self harm are taken to facilities far away from their support networks. Families may not be able to visit due to poor public transport or long distances.

**NEED INFO OR INSIGHT HERE FROM COUNCILS – what are the services most needed, stats on waiting times for access mental health facilities ,how accessible are they, waiting lists etc**

**PRIORITY: Plan for and fund culturally appropriate, primary health care in growth areas and support access to GPs in outer suburban growth areas.**

**PRIORITY: A significant ongoing investment in mental health services and facilities in growth areas across Australia to respond to undersupply and vastly inadequate service provision.**

### **Understand the constraints on competitively funded models of service delivery in growth areas**

The Australian Government's approach to funded services is based on a competitive model which assumes there is a market that can respond and meet demand. In growth areas there are multiple variables that show this model does not work well for disability services, social housing, supported accommodation or aged care facilities where providers are limited, and can therefore charge more. Shopfront access to important Australian Government service agencies such as Centrelink are frequently far from where people live, with public transport access poor. Not for profit/for purpose service providers often cannot access commercial space or acquire the land needed to establish a facility from which to run services. The start up costs for service providers to support vulnerable populations across multiple growth fronts on the outskirts of capital cities are prohibitive.

**PRIORITY: Design Australian Government services with an understanding that a competitive model cannot operate successfully in new suburbs and impacts equity of access and price. Look at innovative ways to support not-for-profit/for purpose service providers to establish early in growth areas and provide much needed social services**

### **Support local religious and community leaders and groups to strengthen community in growth areas**

The human capital of growth area continues to build and support the waves of new residents and businesses who are choosing to invest and immerse themselves in these communities. Established migrant community groups provide invaluable support and resources to new Australian immigrants, whether they are skilled migrants or refugees. Leadership and support programs that are targeted to diverse communities can build skills and social capital, address cultural needs and English-language capability, and support isolated families many of whom do not have family in Australia. The Australian Government, which is responsible

for immigration numbers and visas, should be actively supporting the successful settlement of new Australians in outer suburban growth areas.

Investment in community leaders and support groups in growth areas provides essential support to new communities. Leaders and groups bring people together where there are no existing neighbours, and deliver services to new immigrants. This is vital to address social and cultural dislocation issues, and bridge the gap between service delivery and individual needs.

**PRIORITY: Dedicated funding support for community leaders and groups in outer suburban growth areas with demonstrated success in building social capital.**

### **Protect against mounting vulnerability in outer urban areas**

The JobSeeker subsidy was a life saver for many vulnerable communities in growth areas. The rate of residents on Newstart or Austudy has more than doubled in the previous 12 months (as of July 2020). The percentage of people on Jobseeker or Austudy is higher than the average across Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane and Adelaide<sup>41</sup> The SEIFA average for growth areas falls well short of the Australian average and household income is generally below the average of the major capital cities, despite the average number of children in each household being higher.

The JobSeeker payment helped weather the initial impact of COVID-19 related job losses, but it is a band-aid for the existing disadvantage experienced in growth areas due to lack of social services and local job prospects. Many residents living in growth areas are on temporary visas, including international students and working visa holders. Research suggests up to 90 per cent of international students have lost their part-time or casual work<sup>42</sup> and many were not entitled to government support. These visa holders are not captured in the above figures and therefore the total number of residents requiring some form of assistance is much higher than reported. NGAA member councils and community groups have shouldered the burden to assist these residents with food and support services, before they fall into poverty and homelessness.

The pandemic has aggravated existing vulnerabilities and inequities<sup>43</sup> (O'Sullivan, et al., 2020). As such, there is opportunity to stimulate local economies by investing in local services (such as allied health and mental health provision) and address existing disadvantage.

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<sup>41</sup> .id, 2020

<sup>42</sup> AHURI, 2020

<sup>43</sup> The impact and implications of Covid 19: An Australian Perspective, O'Sullivan, et al., 2020

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