



# Trish Doyle MP

## Member for Blue Mountains



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### **New South Wales Parliament Legislative Assembly**

### **Blue Mountains Community Services**

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I commend the work of Blue Mountains community sector organisations for providing services to my local community. I also publicly declare my continued support of those services. I value my longstanding relationship with the sector and will use every opportunity I have to advocate on behalf of the best interests of the Blue Mountains community sector. Many of our organisations have evolved from the Area Assistance Plan, which was established during the Whitlam reforms to address unmet needs in local communities in the outlying suburbs and regions of New South Wales. The Western Sydney Area Assistance Scheme [WSAAS], an initiative of the Wran Labor Government, laid the foundation for the community sector in the Blue Mountains. The success of the WSAAS model led to Labor expanding the model across other parts of the State. As a result of WSAAS, many of the Blue Mountains community sector organisations were established in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The Blue Mountains community sector encompasses a wide range of services which include: a network of six local neighbourhood centres; family support services; child and family services; women's health and domestic violence court advocacy services; a domestic violence refuge for women and children; Aboriginal community organisations; community housing; community transport; and disability, youth and older people's services, to name just a few. The Blue Mountains community sector knows its community. They know the areas of disadvantage. They have established trust with our most vulnerable citizens. They know the service networks and referral pathways. They are some of the most effective and passionate advocates one could meet. Collaboration is a key factor.

The sector works cooperatively with one another and is particularly effective in meeting the needs of vulnerable populations and those living on the fringes, such as women experiencing domestic violence, people living with mental illness, people with disabilities, and those who are socially isolated. The Blue Mountains community sector receives funding from a variety of sources. The New South Wales Department

of Family and Community Services [FACS] is a primary source of funding for many of those organisations. Following the debacle and mismanagement of the Going Home Staying Home program, many community services have expressed serious concerns regarding their funding future. The recently published KPMG review of Going Home Staying Home noted:

The decision to open up funding for homelessness services to a competitive bidding process ultimately drove an outcome where there were clear winners and losers.

This is the aspect of reform that has attracted the most criticism. Before Going Home Staying Home, 27.5 per cent of the homelessness services in New South Wales were independent women's services. The reform caused this figure to drop almost 10 per cent. The loss of those specialist services will have a long-lasting impact on the sector and the communities that were affected. I urge the Government to learn from the mistakes made during the implementation of the Going Home Staying Home changes. The Government must also recognise that community services are not businesses. Competitive tendering processes do not necessarily achieve selection of the best and most appropriate service providers. Competitive tendering generally favours larger organisations, which may benefit from economies of scale and a greater cash flow that helps them to weather the vagaries of the funding cycle.

Contestability has undermined the longstanding trust and cooperation that existed between organisations. Instead of forming partnerships to deliver the best outcome, services are now in competition with one another. The Government must commit to ensuring that only true not-for-profit organisations are eligible to apply for government funding. For-profit organisations must not be eligible to profit from service provision to our most vulnerable citizens. Since the Government commenced its review of funding programs in FACS and Health, many community sector organisations have been funded through a series of annual rollover contracts. My community is concerned about the short-term status of funding contracts, the enormous difficulties and stresses it creates around service planning, the employment and retention of quality staff, and the impact on service delivery to vulnerable people.

The Government must commit to the establishment of longer term funding cycles that enable the sector to plan for the future so they can offer certainty for service users and staff. I challenge the Government to equal or better Labor's commitment to a sustainable five-year funding cycle. I also call on the Minister for Family and Community Services to consult with the community sector and to listen to what it has to say. Those organisations are the experts on these matters and they know best what our communities need. The Government must take a big picture view of the value of community services and the complementary nature of the programs provided. It has taken nearly 40 years to establish this network of services and they cannot be easily replaced. I commend the good work and support of the fabulous Australian Services Union, which supports its members—the highly valued workers in this vital sector—on a daily basis