
Since my election in 2013, I’ve returned to my community after the Government has handed down the Federal Budget and asked the question, “what does it mean to you?” I seek advice, feedback and solutions to help the government improve the lives of people living in rural and regional Australia.

This process of engagement, community ownership and responsibility doesn’t end with the survey. I report back to Parliament in my Budget in Reply speech (page 15), and provide a copy of this report to the Government and Opposition to help inform their actions.

This year, overwhelmingly, respondents were concerned that the taxation measures of the 2018/19 Budget were unfair and would result in an increase in wealth inequality. Consistent with previous years there is also concern that too many policy and funding decisions fail to recognise the differing needs of regional Australia – one size does not fit all!

I urge you to share this report with your networks and encourage everyone to provide feedback and comments on all issues to cathy.mcgowan.mp@aph.gov.au

Cathy

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The Survey Process

Launched on Wednesday 9 May 2018, the Indi Budget Impact Survey was a three-week campaign seeking advice and comments from the electorate on the 2018/19 Federal Budget. 998 people responded. The main format for receiving responses was an on-line survey, via www.cathymcgowan.com.au. In Mansfield, Wangaratta, Wodonga and Benalla, 134 young people gathered before they headed to school, university, TAFE and work, to discuss their thoughts. For people without access to the internet, paper copies of the survey were made available. All responses received, regardless of format, are included in this report.

Firstly, respondents were asked to provide their personal details. This allowed us to measure the geographic and demographic representation of respondents. The results of these questions are on page 3.

Secondly, respondents were asked to list their three most important issues and to tell us why. This provided a snapshot of their priorities. The results of these questions are on page 4.

Finally, respondents were asked to rate how important (on a scale of 1 – 5, with 5 being very important) the following key issues are:

- National Broadband Network (NBN) and Mobile Phone Coverage
- Environment, Climate Change and Renewable Energy
- Education and Training
- Trains and Regional Transport
- Regional Policy
- Health and Aged Care Services
- National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)
- Indigenous Issues
- Social Services

The results of these questions, and a snapshot of the broad spectrum of views, are on pages 5 – 14.

The Indi Budget Impact Survey 2018 - Summary

The 2018/19 Budget Process

The results of the 2018 Indi Budget Impact Survey are fed into the federal budget process. This is done in advance of the 2018 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) and the 2019 Expenditure Review Committee of Cabinet’s establishment of 2019 budget priorities.

INDI’S RESPONSE TO THE 2018/19 FEDERAL BUDGET

Where did the responses come from?

998 SURVEYS COMPLETED

Total population of the Indi electorate

140,183

Area of Indi

28,567km²

Major Industries

Tourism
Forestry
Agriculture
Viticulture
Manufacturing

Gender of Indi residents according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Census:
Male 49.2%
Female 50.8%

Age of Indi residents according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Census:
0-19 24.0%
18-25 4.9%
26-49 12.83%
50-65 33.17%
Over 65 32.97%
Not supplied 2.71%

Source: www.censudata.abs.gov.au
Source: www.aec.gov.au
INDI RESPONDS - A SNAPSHOT OF OUR PRIORITIES

For more information visit www.cathymcgowan.com.au/budget_2018

People in Indi are also concerned about:

**Taxation**
Flattening out our progressive tax rate so that minimum wage earners pay the same rate of tax as high income earners up to $200,000 is patently unfair. This proposed change will lock in further inequity in the system for decades to come, and this at a time when income inequality is more pronounced than at any other time in living memory.

**Education and Training**
As a rural student one of my main community involvements is in the school community. The quality of education I receive is important as it shapes my future and opportunities and as such, the government should ensure that every student should receive a world-class standard of education to maximise opportunities and help give students a future they are proud of.

**Health and Aged Care**
We need to allow for equitable living for people with disabilities. This means affordable medication, access to services and well-funded mental health services. My clients need a paediatrician appointment and assessment to access support funding and NDIS. But they can’t afford a paediatrician appointment and are stuck.

**Environment, Climate Change and Renewable Energy**
Australia is losing the opportunity to lead the world in this technology. We have sun and wind aplenty yet we are beholden to fossil fuels.

**Social Services**
The rate of youth allowance impacts my access to higher education. Because I am most likely going to be affected by it next year (when I move to go to university) as well as many of the people I have grown up with.

Indi’s top concerns

1. Taxation
2. Education & Training
3. Environment, Climate Change & Renewable Energy
4. Social Services
5. Health & Aged Care

Source: The top five responses to the survey question - “Thinking about the 2018 Federal Budget and the top three important issues - what is the most important issue?”
There should be no tax concessions for big business. This money can be better spent on education and hospitals/medicine and infrastructure. Low to middle income earners need the relief, not people earning over $100,000. Small business needs the relief, it is hard enough to employ people as it is, so help is needed here.

Unnecessary tax cuts especially for big business that already avoid paying tax. the revenue is needed for essential services for the people. ◆ The proposed big business tax cuts. Because it distorts the financial priorities at a time when these resources should be going into basic provision of services eg health NDIS public transport infrastructure communications education ◆ Corporate tax cuts - there is no proof that this will create more jobs and give immediate tax relief to the middle-income tax level or to pensioners ◆ Funding for public education especially in regional areas. ◆ Funding for public health. Communication infrastructure in rural areas. Our young people are our future. This government seems intent in funding tax cuts at the expense of public education which will disadvantage the most disadvantaged ◆ Tax cuts to big business - Instead, this money should be used for debt reduction ◆ Ensuring multinationals pay their fair share of tax - As a small business owner it isn’t fair that gigantic companies can appear to pay a much lesser percentage of tax overall ◆ This is going to widen the gap even more separating the rich from the poor ◆ There needs to be a more equitable system to ensure high end earners and business pay their share of tax ◆ Tax relief - we pay too much tax at a lower level, time for big business and the rich to do their share ◆ Companies should not be allowed to avoid tax, their tax rates should be increased, not decreased because employees have to pay their tax (which goes to government services), but companies especially big ones pay little or no tax ◆ Any short-term revenue increase should go towards reducing the deficit, not to tax cuts that eventually go predominantly to the wealthy ◆ The burden of taxation should not rest on individual workers whilst big corporations get away with paying tax due to clever accounting and shifting profits overseas to tax havens ◆ When everyone contributes, meaning corporate Australia as well, not only working Australians, then it becomes fairer for all.
Key to employment and societal harmony. More can be done in rural areas to attract education providers. I would like to see more money not less going into higher education ie. university and TAFE. Without this there is no future. It is through education and training that Australia can grow. Affordable Education and Training should be available to all Australians. Essential features of any progressive society. Student fees should be subsidised. All education and training equivalent to a three-year degree should be free. It’s an investment in the future of the country not an expense. Without education and training we will have no future. A skills based community can survive economic undulations. We no longer have access to adult education in Bright and with a limited public transport system available travelling to a rural centre to complete education or training can be problematic. Education and training is the backbone of individual and collective prosperity. Education is the future that gives every student the opportunities to dream their dreams. Self-evident; any country worth its salt should be trying to ensure the quality of its education system including TAFE! Essential to future employment. There should be more on the job training (employer subsidies) and the costly on line training must be reviewed. Without good education and training our workforce will become a shambles. Do we want an amazing Australia with people in higher level education and specializations in key areas? Yeah. More trades people are needed! No point sending people to Uni, to accrue massive debts and never find a job. If we don’t focus more on Trades, we won’t even know how to change a light globe soon! Absolutely. Education is the most important factor in keeping a nation at the top of its game. VITAL. A good education is a gift for life. We need to train our own people to fill the current and future jobs. We used to be the smart country, but our smart people are leaving. Bring back reasonable costs for trades and higher learning. Education in trades is needed to supply a new generation of skilled workers. As a retired teacher I know that individualised learning is undeliverable. It is called tutoring and impossible to do in a classroom situation. The education system is not doing young people any good for making them employable young adults.

Survey respondents were concerned about the lack of funding for Education and Training in the Budget and a lack of access for people wanting to access tertiary education in regional Australia. Young respondents were particularly concerned about the lack of training options in regional Australia and the expense of getting to University.

A sample of verbatim survey responses:

"Country students are at a distinct disadvantage compared to city students who can stay living at home. Not all courses are available in the country. Much higher living costs, stresses, the need to work longer hours and therefore less time to study."

What Indi said about Education and Training

Indi Quick Stats

- 6.2% of people in Indi are currently studying at a University or Tertiary Institution compared to the national average of 16.1%.¹
- 13.9% of people in Indi have a tertiary degree (Bachelor Degree Level or Higher) compared to the national average of 22%.²
- Over one third of urban young adults study at university – but only 12.7% are from inner regional areas and 12.5% from outer regional areas.³

1,2,3. www.abs.gov.au

Key actions for Indi

- Hosted visits by Minister for Education and Training, Simon Birmingham and Assistant Minister for Vocational Education And Training, Karen Andrews.
- Supported government reforms to introduce a needs-based funding model that strongly reflects the recommendations of the Gonski review.
- Called on the government to recognise the importance of flexible childcare models in rural and regional Australia.
- Voted against cuts to University funding and lowering the HELP debt threshold.
Health and Aged Care services were a major concern for survey respondents. The main concerns were access to, and funding of, healthcare and the need for better aged care across the region. There was also concern around lack of access to mental health services.

Key actions for Indi
- Visit by Minister for Aged Care, Ken Wyatt, to John Richards Initiative at Latrobe University and St Catherine’s Hostel in Wangaratta.
- Supported an advocacy visit by Yackandandah Health to Parliament House to meet with Minister for Aged Care, Ken Wyatt, Minister for Health, Greg Hunt and Minister for Regional Health, Bridget McKenzie.
- Strongly advocated for the ongoing funding of Corryong, Indigo and Alpine Health services including support to the review of multipurpose services delivering health and aged care services to small rural communities.

The most important issues for me is the financial viability of smaller aged care facilities in rural regions. Currently due to the cutbacks the government have implemented many particularly smaller facilities are operating at a loss or have very little financial buffer.
Survey respondents were concerned that this Budget didn’t adequately address climate change and other environmental problems. There was also concern that it ignored energy transition and the opportunities of renewable energy.

A sample of verbatim survey responses:

“It (climate change) will have a major effect on many lives. It’s a problem that has the potential to accelerate of its own accord once it passes certain tipping points. That means we must address it now, not at some distant time in the future.”

Get rid of coal over the next 10 years, and move over to renewables. This could be our new ‘car’ industry. Stop Adani, it’s an insane idea and wrong on all levels. • Why isn’t the Government looking at “Geothermal” production of electricity? • Our future depends on renewable energy. • We need to ensure we have base load power source, more hydro-electricity and pumped hydro is needed, battery storage is still not there yet. • Local facility also means local growth and jobs. • There needs to be greater funding and encouragement to adopt renewable energy and get people off the grid. • Aside from increased energy cost, climate change is the single greater threat to life and wellbeing let alone the economy. • Yes, it may be more expensive, but we need to do something to help curb climate change. • I feel tax incentives or some other financial assistance needs to come in again for those wanting to purchase both solar panels and / or batteries. • Nuclear needs to put back on the agenda for debate. • Solar and battery storage should be compulsory with every new house build. • This is a high priority because it provides new jobs and cheaper electricity. We need to invest in technology and in solar and wind power. • We should be creating sustainable towns through renewable energy sources at a local level. This would not be difficult and it would pay for itself. • Storage of renewable energy should be number one priority. • Coal fired energy has got to cease, and incentives for renewable are imperative. • The price of electricity is too high. This is a disgrace. It is a basic living requirement. • We have to stop costing ourselves money while other countries do very little or nothing. • Renewables are too unreliable and expensive. • The primary thing government should do is keep power prices down. If that means a mixture of power resources so be it. • Of course my preference would be to use renewable energy sources, however, despite being frugal with heating, cooling, hot water, dryer, etc. my electricity bill is outrageous already, so I couldn’t support a switch to renewables if it was going to lead to an increase in prices. • The debate needs to get back to how we need a mix of energy sources - not coal v solar. When we keep it a black and white debate, people tend to be for or against.

What Indi said about Environment, Climate Change and Renewable Energy

Survey respondents were concerned that this Budget didn’t adequately address climate change and other environmental problems. There was also concern that it ignored energy transition and the opportunities of renewable energy.

Indi Quick Stats

• In Indi there are 13 communities developing and delivering community renewable energy projects.
• Approximately 48% of water in the Murray Darling Basin is sourced from Indi.¹
• Approximately 25% of dwellings in Indi have a solar PV system, compared to the state average of 15.5%, and the national average of 20.4%.²

2. Australian PV Institute (APVI) Solar Map

Key actions for Indi

• Hosted Minister for Environment and Energy, Josh Frydenberg MP, to meet with the Indi Renewable Energy Working Group at Yackandandah and Winton.
• Launched Towards a Totally Renewable Indi – A case study in community action, March 2018.
• Raised community renewable energy projects as a Matter of Public Importance highlighting the work of the community renewable energy projects in Indi.
What Indi said about Social Services

The key concerns of survey respondents related to the pension, the availability of the youth allowance for students moving to the city to study, and the decision not to raise the Newstart allowance. Many respondents have contrasted these issues with the pay increases to politicians and company tax cuts.

Some survey respondents have directly advocated for a more targeted approach to welfare. One respondent warned: ‘Especially for the aged and those that genuinely need assistance. Sometimes I think welfare is paid out to easily. It is not adequate for the needs of many who are in the lower income brackets. We are just numbers with bits of money attached to us. We are attended by a different Centrelink employee every time so it is often the case that they don’t understand our unique situation, let alone care.

In every society there are the vulnerable, the very needy, and Australia can well afford to provide a ‘safety net’ for these people. People need services and assistance. This idea of forcing young people unemployed off benefits when they have tried jobs is just pushing people into crime, depression, suicide etc.

With the restitutions to other sectors during the pandemic, many have suggested the time to re-focus on providing a more comprehensive social support system is now. People cannot provide for themselves and the cost should be shared across taxpayers. The system is supposed to help people get into a productive life, not an income device.

A sample of verbatim survey responses:

- The extremely low Newstart payment is impossible for those on it to live a satisfactory life – it creates a class of people in perpetual poverty. It makes one sad to be an Australian that we treat people this way.

- The key concerns of survey respondents related to the pension, the availability of the youth allowance for students moving to the city to study, and the decision not to raise the Newstart allowance. Many respondents have contrasted these issues with the pay increases to politicians and company tax cuts.

- Especially for the aged and those that genuinely need assistance.

- Centrelink forms could be made much more accessible for us old dodderers, to alleviate some of the anxiety involved in getting the damn things right.

Indi Quick Stats

- In Indi, 25.1% of households have a weekly household income of less than $650, compared to the national rate of 20%.

- In Indi, 7.4% of households have a weekly household income of more than $3000, compared to the national rate of 16.4%.

Key actions for Indi

- Raised housing affordability and homelessness in North East Victoria as a Matter of Public Importance, highlighting the work of Beyond Housing and Junction Services.

- Voted against the expansion of the Cashless Debit Card to other sites and supported extending the trial to enable a proper review of effectiveness.

- Moved a Notice of Motion in Parliament that called on the Government to introduce legislation that will address the increasing number of vulnerable borrowers impacted by payday lending practices.

- Consistently voted against cuts to social services and called for better Centrelink Services.
What Indi said about Trains and Regional Transport

Trains and Regional Transport featured strongly in the top three issues of survey respondents. People highlighted the importance of public transport to rural areas, and expressed concern about the lack of effective and reliable public transport in Indi and the impacts on rural people - including isolation and poor access to medical services.

A sample of verbatim survey responses:

“Fast train service to Melbourne - not one going 130 km/hr, but at least 160km/hr, commensurate with those on the Ballarat or Bendigo lines so people can seek employment in Melbourne. Alternatively de-centralise those jobs from either Spring St or Canberra!”

Without adequate transport people in rural areas would be even more isolated with an enormous effect on mental health, access to medical services etc. etc. ◆ Vital in rural communities ◆ Many people rely on regional transport to access medical treatment in Melbourne. Why, 18 years into the 21st century, we can’t have a reliable rail service is imponderable ◆ People need to be able to get around, need transport between station and town for low income earners ◆ Trains are critical to connecting people to essential and non-essential services, such as specialist medical services including hospitals, specialist dental services not available in regional areas, particularly where transport by car or bus is not an option. Non-essential reasons why people need to use trains are social - access to entertainment, shopping etc. Reliable, regular and fast train services are needed to move people around and reduce congestion and pollution on the freeways and major roads, into our case, Melbourne. Public transport is less expensive than driving to and parking in cities/larger regional centres, especially for elderly people and students studying and living away from home ◆ The Albury line! Good grief! ◆ Older people need reliable rail services to not only visit other places, but for medical and financial support services when they don’t feel comfortable driving in crowded city traffic, and when many medical diagnostic services are city based, and not available in rural areas ◆ Federal, state and local governments spend money where the votes are. They do not realise how important public transport is for rural communities to travel for business, health, recreation and to transport produce ◆ Our service is unreliable – I arrived home 3 hours late on one of my journeys due to the poor condition of the tracks ◆ It is very hard to maintain social connection when transport is so lacking. This is more prevalent in youth as they do not have access to a driving license ◆ Public Transport is essential ◆ I haven’t used a train in more than a decade ◆ Transport carries the nation...we all need low cost comfortable transport.

Indi Quick Stats

- Since 2004, at least $1.5 billion, including the recently announced $235 million has been committed to the North East Rail Line.¹
- In May 2018, VLine services between Albury Wodonga and Melbourne were 94.1% reliable (below the intended target of 96% reliability) and 69.9% punctual (below the intended target of 92% punctuality).²
- Of those not presently using the train, 72% would take the train and 57% would undertake additional trips if the service was improved.³

1. www.artc.com.au
3. Hume Corridor Passenger Rail Study 2017

Key actions for Indi

- Advocated for funding for North East Rail Line, attracting $100 million in 2017 and $135 million in 2018.
- Visit by Minister for Small and Family Business, the Workplace and Deregulation, Craig Laundy to address the cross - border anomaly of driving regulations particularly in relation to learner and probationary drivers.
What Indi said about the NBN and Mobile Phone Coverage

The National Broadband Network (NBN) and Mobile Phone Coverage continue to be an important issue for Indi. Survey respondents ranked it highly in terms of importance, and expressed concern that rural and regional people were still disadvantaged compared to metropolitan populations, in terms of fast and reliable internet and mobile phone coverage.

A sample of verbatim survey responses:

“The lack of new funding for mobile phone coverage shows a lack of understanding for all of us who don’t live and work in populated centres. The poor service that I experience on a daily basis is not just an inconvenience, I work alone with machinery that has the potential to seriously injure me, and by the time I’m regarded as overdue and then found I could well be dead. The talk of Australians moving into a new high tech economy sounds like nothing more than hollow rhetoric for a news sound bite when you are being left behind and described as not commercially viable.”

I’m concerned that the NBN will be redundant before finished. It is very expensive on both a community and individual level and therefore will not be fully utilised ◆ We can’t be innovative and smart without fast reliable and cheap services ◆ Connectivity with the world and Australia’s ability to interact in the world trade economy depends on reliable communications ◆ Vital in rural communities ◆ The internet needs to be much faster and more stable, especially in regional Australia ◆ Rural and regional people must have access to reliable and consistent connectivity for both personal and business purposes ◆ What a shame the NBN has not embraced nor allowed for the future ◆ The NBN is the one equalising factor that can help business more out into the region areas to stop urban sprawl and to provide new industries for regional areas. But the government appears too focused on supporting Foxtel and Murdoch media ◆ World is headed this way and have no option to stay up to date with easy access. Just imagine what other countries would say if they heard people in Australia in a city the size of ours still have some houses that are not connected yet the facility runs past the house! ◆ It helps education, connection and potentially saves a life ◆ I have the NBN here - no problems with it ◆ Communication is the lifeblood of the country particularly the rural country ◆ Why are we behind so many other countries in both speed and price? ◆ Fast and reliable internet will allow businesses to operate efficiently, small businesses to thrive, the agriculture sector to introduce technology for farming, and people with new ideas to take opportunities that have not previously existed ◆ My NBN at home is fine for my requirements, however at my workplace the internet is very slow. If I was a business owner I would be very frustrated ◆ I have heard from many people that NBN is the same or worse than their previous internet. I do not think it should be a priority ◆ I am pleased to note the improvements in service where I am, it is been a battle to get it working properly. The next objective needs to be getting competition on our towers so that we can enjoy city prices.

1.7 % of survey respondents listed NBN and Mobile Phone Coverage as their most important issue.
6.7 % of survey respondents listed NBN and Mobile Phone Coverage as one of their top three issues.
79.8 % of respondents ranked NBN and Mobile Phone Coverage as either very important or fairly important.

Indi Quick Stats

- Funding has been committed for 38 mobile phone base stations under the Australian Government mobile blackspot program.¹
- 29 of the funded 38 mobile phone base stations were operational by June 2018.²
- The build of the nbn™ access network is more than three quarters complete. Completion of the build is expected by mid-2019.³

1. www.communications.gov.au
2. www.nbnco.com.au
3. www.nbnco.com.au

Key actions for Indi

- Indi Telecommunications Action Group supported the NBN roadshow to visit Kinglake, Marysville, Eildon, Benalla, Mansfield, Yackandandah, Chiltern, Rutherglen, Wodonga and Beechworth.
- Victorian Minister for Trade & Investment, Innovation and the Digital Economy, Philip Dalidakis met with local government representatives in February 2018 to discuss mobile blackspot funding.
- Advocated to address on-going funding for mobile blackspots in regional Australia. In June 2018, the Federal Government committed $25million for a fourth round of the Mobile Black Spot Program.
- Hosted a public hearing of the Joint Standing Committee into the rollout of the NBN in Wodonga.
What Indi said about the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

Survey respondents ranked the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) highly as an issue of importance. Respondents expressed concerns with the roll-out of the NDIS, fearing that rural people who needed NDIS were falling between the cracks, citing a variety of reasons including the complexity of the application process.

A sample of verbatim survey responses:

“To be honest I was not sold on it being viable when Labor first announced it. The tax base is constantly being tinkered with and I do not feel in my heart that there is sufficient funding for the NDIS over the next decade let alone beyond.”

It is important to get it right. It seems there are a lot of people who are being left out because they don’t have the same level of advocacy as others. This scares me.

Not happy that LNP government has removed ongoing guaranteed funding in last budget. Modern sensibilities demand better care of our underprivileged. This NDIS is about dignity and security for all Australians with a disability as well as their family/carers. I have worked with disabled students in primary and secondary levels the NDIS has said it will offer the best for the future of those who are disabled. In rural areas, the opportunities are not always close at hand and distance is our disadvantage. I hope it gives all it says to those who are the most vulnerable. It has not been rolled out very well, and implementation has been very patchy. A lot of people falling through the gaps or being neglected. Complex, and daunting for older people. Online applications stressful for older family members. Everyone should be able to access services, engage in the community, and enjoy quality of life. Having adequate funding is essential for people with disabilities to be able to participate in the community. This along with dental health should be coming out of the Medicare levy if raised to 3 or 4% of which I am sure if argued respectfully would garner public support.

Intervention and prevention are vital and increases in debilitating disease need to be addressed. Very important and needs to be funded securely and well so that people are not always worrying about where the ongoing funding is coming from. The NDIS has restricted geographic availability and even when offered disbars many sufferers (e.g. of Lyme disease). Not a popular view, but I worry that the NDIS will be a bottomless pit. The enormous bureaucracy is massively expensive, although I freely admit I have been fortunate enough to have no contact with it. Of it was working and an efficient program. In regional Victoria it has caused more inequality and more expensive services. We as a nation are depending too much on such things instead of being involved in caring for others. It needs to be fixed and fully funded. Get rid of the long waiting lists. Classification of what qualifies as disabled is too generous. I’ve experienced people claiming to be disabled but more than capable of working.

Indi Quick Stats

- As at 31 March 2018, 31,540 Victorians are benefiting from the NDIS and 6,997 Victorians are accessing support for the first time.¹
- The NDIS is now available in the Ovens Murray area (Alpine, Benalla, Indigo, Mansfield, Towong, Wangaratta and Wodonga) and will be available in the Goulburn area (Murrindindi and Moira) in January 2019.²
- The Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) partner in the Ovens Murray is Merri Community Health Service, and the Local Area Coordination (LAC) partner is Latrobe Community Health Service.³

1,2,3. www.ndis.gov.au

Key actions for Indi

- Called on Minister for Social Services Dan Tehan in Parliament to address concerns regarding access to the NDIS for those on the autism spectrum and address delays experienced by those applying for the scheme. This, along with local community advocacy, resulted in the establishment of the Autism Advisory Group to provide advice and feedback to the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA).
- Provided ongoing support connecting NDIS clients with advocacy and support services in the electorate, and elevated these concerns to the Minister.
What Indi said about Indigenous Issues

Overwhelmingly, survey respondents support working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians toward better outcomes for our first peoples.

66.1% of survey respondents ranked Indigenous Issues as either very important or fairly important.

5.1% of respondents ranked Indigenous Issues as not important at all.

Indi Quick Stats

- In Indi there are 2,249 people who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, with a median age of 21 years.¹
- In Indi there are three Local Aboriginal Networks: Dirrawarra (Wangaratta), Wodonga and Gathaba (Mansfield).²
- The Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service (AWAHS) delivers support services to indigenous people suffering with chronic diseases in Wodonga, Wangaratta, Benalla and Mansfield.³
- The AWAHS patient transport service delivers 10,000 runs per year bringing people to and from the service for health and specialist appointments.⁴

Key actions for Indi

- Minister for Indigenous Health, Ken Wyatt met with Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service, Local Aboriginal Networks and North East Support and Action for Youth Inc (NESAY) in September 2017.
- Member of Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition Relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and encouraged submissions from Indi to ensure strong local representation.
- Ongoing involvement in and support of Local Aboriginal Networks.

A sample of verbatim survey responses:

We have left a shameful legacy of possibly well-intentioned but politically skewed policies over the last 40 years with in many regions, very little meaningful progress. Budget allocation aggregate is one thing. The hard part is the detail and that is political, not budgetary. We must respect the integrity of the indigenous community’s leadership processes. The Uluru declaration must be respected and considered and with proper leadership, implemented, and not fobbed off as too hard.

As outcomes in nearly every area are worse for indigenous people this should be a priority for the Government. So much work still needs to be done around the social determinant of health for indigenous Australians. I am ashamed of Australia’s statistics regarding Aboriginal health. Health issues, and education are huge problems in some communities. No simple answers, but discussions with indigenous leaders would be a start. We need to address the issues our Indigenous peoples face in a way that reflects their needs rather than what we think are ours. Cultural competence is a critical issue for all Australians. Reconciliation and recognition must be a goal if we are to progress to adulthood as a nation. The Government needs to take better control / education of our indigenous, rather than throwing money at the issues in the hope it will go away. We have to make progress here. We have much to learn from our indigenous people. Despite all that’s been done so far it seems the issues are no better. It is their land after all. Recognition would go a long way into evolving the Australian psyche into a more tangible life experience living here in Australia. We need to know more about how our community can engage with this rich heritage, today. Indigenous people need to be at the table for the solution. We need to take steps to ensure the Uluru statement is acted upon. Respect and dignity. Tired of having these thrust in my face. I don’t believe that Australia should continue to pay for past sins. I believe that something should be done to extend their life expectancy but how I am not sure what. Continually giving out money and grants is not working. We are one nation, they need support but it may be necessary for some to relocate to other areas for employment. We should treat all people who live in Australia as one race. Common sense is needed. Fair and reasonable but not over the top. I feel we are addressing this. Our first people need appropriate recognition and a helping hand until we have closed the gap for health, education and employment. The disregarding of the Uluru statement was a lost opportunity. This is a big issue costing large amounts and not necessarily producing good outcomes. Why give our indigenous family land rights, then mine the hell out of their land?

1. www.abs.gov.au
2. www.vic.gov.au
3, 4. www.awaahs.com.au

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What Indi said about Regional Policy

Regional Policy again ranked highly as an issue of importance to survey respondents. People expressed concern that the Federal Budget was too ‘city-centric’, and inadequately recognises the contribution of rural and regional areas and the current disadvantages of living outside metropolitan centres - e.g. good infrastructure and access to medical services.

Regional areas are, by and large, economically depressed. Rural electorates are among the poorest in Australia and current government policies accentuate this inequality.

Federal funding must trickle down to local councils in order to assist residents to obtain the best possible facilities, the rural / regional sector needs sustaining to keep areas alive and functioning. Regional policy and population distribution - equity and fairness - a city centric, infrastructure driven budget that fails to recognise the regions and the quality of life issues that regions offer.

Where I live, I need to wait for a week before I can see a GP. Integrated policy for regional areas is critical. For example, why do doctors not want to come to regional areas? Because they believe education opportunities for their children are second rate. Therefore, to attract more doctors to small regional towns, we need to look at schooling. We need to keep our regional towns vibrant and economic so our children don’t all flock to the cities for work, leaving ghost towns behind. The food producers of Australia need to have their needs met just as importantly as those not in rural and regional areas. Making sure the rural population receives fair expenditure according to population. This has never happened. Thinking on a state basis, more money should be spent on rural infrastructure as opposed to spending all the money on bypasses etc. in the city. Not everyone wishes to live in a city. Regions need to be able to offer employment, education and health services, but good connective public transport when trips to the city are necessary. Regions must be treated fairly financially. Perhaps fuel tax collected should stay within state borders for example, as well as a fair percentage of federal taxes collected based on population in states. Overrated. We need more global views. It should be important, but it is not. State and Federal agencies have their ‘global’ view of how the nation should be and the regional aspirations are routinely ignored. Good sound policy helps us plan for the future. So it’s very important. Would you build a house without a plan?

Indi Quick Stats

- There are 3695 registered Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing business in Indi.¹
- In 2016–17, the gross value of agricultural production in the Hume region was $828 million, which was 6% of the total gross value of agricultural production in Victoria.²
- The Hume region has a diverse agricultural sector; cattle and calves contribute $243 million; sheep and lambs $135 million; and poultry $82 million. Collectively these commodities contribute 56% of the total value of agricultural production in the region.³

1,2,3. www.agriculture.gov.au

Key actions for Indi

- Initiated the establishment of a Parliamentary Inquiry into Regional Development and Decentralisation.
- Member of the Joint Standing Committee on Regional Development and Decentralisation and encouraged strong local involvement, resulting in a public hearing in Wodonga and 44 submissions from Indi – more than any other electorate.
- Called on the Government to act quickly on the recommendations of the Committee’s final report, calling for a White Paper Green Paper process for regional policy, the Regional Deals and the strengthening of Regional Development Australia committees.
Cathy’s Budget in Reply speech

Colleagues, I rise today to speak about the 2018-19 budget, and in doing so will report on the findings of the Indi budget survey and the budget breakfasts, the impact of the budget on my community, and a call to action to do better in engaging and listening to regional community. I’d also like to welcome into the parliament colleagues and constituents from my electorate. Thank you very much for coming and giving us your time.

Over the past three weeks, 998 people answered my call to tell me what they thought of the budget—’What does it mean to you?’—through online surveys, postcards, listening posts, social media, Facebook, Twitter, emails, letters, supermarket conversations and focus groups. In Mansfield, Wangaratta, Wodonga and Benalla, 134 young people met with me, before they headed to school, university, TAFE and work, to give me their opinions. Thank you, Susila, Kirstin, Amanda, Laura, Jenny, Sal, Lana and Sheridan, for bringing together young people from your communities and your schools. And a special call-out to the schools: FCJ College Benalla, Benalla P-12 College, Mansfield Steiner School, Mansfield Secondary College, Galen Catholic College, Beechworth Secondary College, Mount Beauty Secondary College, Cathedral College Wangaratta, Wangaratta High School, Wodonga TAFE, Catholic College Wodonga, Wodonga Senior Secondary College, Wodonga Middle Years College, Victory Lutheran College and Tallangatta Secondary College.

Across my electorate, every local government was represented and responses were received from over 60 townships. Almost half of the respondents, 49.9 per cent, indicated they were female, 48.7 per cent were male, and 1.34 per cent chose not to identify. Most encouragingly, 19 per cent of the surveys were completed by those aged under 25. To these young people, I say thank you. Thank you for turning up, for having a voice and for making a very clear statement that young people are engaged in politics—they do care, they have a voice and they know that they’re part of the solution.

So, to the findings of this mammoth exercise. There were five main concerns. They were taxation, education and training, health and aged care, renewable energy and climate change, and social security services. On taxation: overwhelmingly, people were concerned that the tax measures were unfair and would lead to increased inequality. Tax reform, corporate tax or concerns with tax breaks for banks were listed by 23.6 per cent of people as their most important issue, and another 3.3 per cent listed increasing inequality stemming from tax changes as their biggest concern. Research shows that these concerns reflect the income and company turnover rates in Indi. 71.3 per cent of residents in my electorate earn below $52,000, and only six companies—two per cent—have a turnover of more than $50 million. What did my constituents tell me about taxes? One constituent wrote:

“There should be no tax concessions for big business. This money can be better spent on education and hospitals/medicine and infrastructure. Low to middle income earners need relief not people earning over 100K. Small business needs the relief; it is hard enough to employ people as it is, so help is needed here - you cannot guarantee that big business such as the banks won't just pass it onto shareholders and they will be the only ones to benefit.”

Another constituent, from Mount Beauty, said:

“Flattening out our progressive tax rate so that minimum wage earners pay the same rate of tax as high-income earners up to $200,000 is patently unfair. This proposed change will lock in further inequality in the system for decades to come and this is at a time when income inequality is more pronounced than at any other time in living memory.”

The second priority is education and training. A lack of funding in the budget for education and training closely followed taxation as a key concern. Young people in particular spoke of a lack of access for people wanting to pursue further training or tertiary education in regional Australia. And for those who want to travel for university or TAFE, there are financial barriers. Nearly one-quarter—23.7 per cent of respondents—listed education and training as the second-most-important issue. Eighty-one per cent of respondents ranked education and training as very important, and this was more than any other issue.

These survey results, as you would know from rural and regional Australia, Deputy Speaker Gee, are no surprise. Regional students remain under-represented in higher education institutions. Only 12.7 per cent are from inner regional areas and 12.5 per cent are from outer regional areas. The impact of this is that only six per cent of Indi residents have a tertiary degree, almost three times lower than the state average of 17.8 per cent, so we’re starting way behind the eight ball.
To quote from the survey:

“Country students are at a distinct disadvantage compared to city students who can stay living at home. Not all courses are available in the country. Much higher living costs, stresses, need to work longer hours and therefore, less time to study. Some ‘flow on’ effects from this can be seen in less Medical specialists in the country areas.”

I have another quote from Wodonga:

“The quality of education I receive is important as it shapes my future and opportunities and as such, the government should ensure that every student should receive a world-class standard of education to maximise opportunities and help give students a future they are proud of.”

One-fifth, or 20.24 per cent, of respondents listed health and aged care as their highest concern or second-most-important issue. Concerns centred on a lack of access and funding, specifically for aged and mental health care. A constituent from Wodonga says on mental health:

Such a common thing that occurs all the time, all around the world, to almost everyone and there needs to be awareness to the unavoidable issues in today’s society that everyone faces at some point in his or her lives.

Sadly, the high rate of suicide in rural and regional Australia supports these words. As the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health reported in April 2017:

“In every state in Australia, the rate of suicide among those who live outside the greater capital cities is higher than that for residents that live within them, and the rate has risen much higher in rural areas over the period 2011-2015.”

Caring for older people in our community with dignity and compassion is a significant issue for the 39 aged-care facilities in Indi. We know this, and again I quote:

Due to the cutbacks the government have implemented, many, particularly smaller facilities are operating at a loss or have very little financial buffer.

A constituent from Wodonga, who replied to the online survey, said:

“We need to allow for equitable living for people with disabilities. This means affordable medication, access to services and well-funded mental health services. My clients need a paediatric appointment and assessment to access support funding and NDIS. But they can't afford a paediatrician appointment and are stuck.”

While the pension and increase in the Newstart allowance and access to youth allowance for students moving to the city were core concerns, the overarching concern that the budget will lead to increased inequality and higher reliance on social security services is driven, in part, by personal circumstance. Low levels of personal and household income, as well as high rates of underemployment, all contribute to inequality.

In Indi, 92 per cent of residents earn below $91,000, and the average household income is $1,126. That’s approximately 22 per cent lower than the national average. The rate of part-time workers is 33.6 per cent, which is higher than the national average of 32.4 per cent. So this speaks to a level of poverty. Dare I say, in my community, lack of money is certainly an inhibitor to advancement, but we are wealthy in so many other ways. The point I’m trying to make about these statistics is that my community actually understands how important taxation is—how important it is to actually understand that in rural and regional Australia, one size does not fit all. I’m not actually saying that poverty or low incomes lead to greater lack of community; it just expresses the inequality that my community recognises.

A constituent from Chiltern raised the decision not to increase the Newstart allowance as her single most important issue. She says:

“It is impossible for those on it to live a satisfactory life—creates a class of people in perpetual poverty—makes one sad to be an Australian—that we treat people this way.”

Another constituent, from Beechworth, said:

“I am expected to live on approximately $700 a fortnight and actively job search. I work as a casual cleaner, but the government lets me have the first $100 then takes 50c in the $ off me! Some people can’t even find menial work, I was lucky, so I have no idea how they manage to pay their rent. This is why homelessness is such an issue.”
I understand these issues are not specific to only my community or only rural and regional Australia. But, for me, the impact of the government’s health, taxation and education policies very often have a disproportional impact on regional Australia.

If I could reflect on the words of the Treasurer on budget night, he told us that the budget was about: “A stronger economy. More jobs. Guaranteeing essential services. The Government living within its means.” He also told us Australians wanted to answer these three questions: “What have you - being the government - achieved? What are you going to do now? What does it mean for me?” Let me say that again: “What does it mean for me?” It struck me that these questions are part of the problem. The answer to having a common wealth and strong, resilient communities in Australia doesn’t only lie with government; it also lies with the community. Strong and resilient communities don’t exist because of government programs only, but also because of community leadership, collaboration and a real and genuine commitment to make things better.

Every year that I’ve been in parliament, I’ve returned to my community post-budget for feedback, for advice and for solutions. This is how I investigate, how I measure and how I report back to parliament. But this process of engagement, community ownership and responsibility doesn’t end with my actions. The next step I do is public the Indi budget report that will report back to my community, to the Prime Minister and to the leaders in this place on what I’ve heard. I also encourage communities to stand up and fight for their solutions. We call this type of engagement and responsibility the Indi way.

Clearly, it’s not the only way. There are mechanisms and frameworks in place to help the government better understand the impact of decisions on rural and regional Australia and to work across portfolios to develop solutions that meet the needs of our communities. One such mechanism is the Regional Ministerial Taskforce. It was established by the government in 2017. We were told that a cross-portfolio task force was the best way to implement good regional policy. It was made up of cabinet ministers, and it would focus on closing the gap between the bush and the city in terms of health, education and infrastructure. But 14 months after it was established, we’ve yet to see a single report. I suspect its omission from Ministers McCormack and McVeigh’s 2018 ministerial budget statement is a sign that we never will. How disappointing. Is there nothing in this report, Regional Australia—A stronger economy delivering stronger regions, that tells us that the government has a plan or strategy for regional Australia? There is nothing in this that tells me that the government actually understands the statistics that I have brought to this parliament today.

Another technique that’s available to the government is regional impact statements. They first appeared in 1988 as part of the cabinet process, and were designed to mitigate against negative impact to rural Australians. My concern is that this process of regional impact statement linked to cabinet papers is now falling short of the desired outcome. Consequently, I’ve called on the Australian National Audit Office to investigate.

In closing, Deputy Speaker, colleagues and members of my community, I say to those in my community: there is an absence of government solutions, an absence of recognition that one size does not fit all. But I say to my community: keep going, keep turning up, have your say, use your voice, form a group, create your own solutions and use your members of parliament to represent your concerns in parliament. And I say in closing to the government that the unit of measurement should not be: will someone be worse off? The unit of measurement should be: where is the benefit; where is the opportunity; and how can we support our communities to reach their potential?
Acknowledgements

Thank you Indi for stepping up and having a say!

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- SNAP Printing in Wodonga for printing the report

There are many ways to stay in touch to keep up with what is happening around Indi and find out how to get involved:

**Sign up for weekly news updates** ('The Scoop') at:
www.cathymcgowan.com.au/sign_up

**Find Cathy on social media:**
- CathyMcgowanForIndi
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Other reports - and where to find them:
- 2016-17 Budget Impact Tour Report
- Putting Indi First June 2016
- 2015-16 Budget Impact Tour Report
- Indi Summit Report 2015
- Kitchen Table Conversations Report 2015
- 2014-15 Budget Impact Tour Report
- Indi Talks 2013

Find all these by searching at:
www.cathymcgowan.com.au/action_for_indi or contact the office for copies.