

Insights Paper

Building a liveable Mount Druitt to improve employment outcomes

April 2024



This paper has been written by The Hive and BaptistCare HopeStreet, with contributions from Bidwill Uniting, Workforce Australia, Real Futures Australia, Macquarie Community College, Kids First Australia, The Salvation Army and local residents.

About The Hive and BaptistCare HopeStreet and our Insights Paper series

The Hive is developing an Insights Paper series to drive an advocacy agenda and contribute to systemic change that improves outcomes for the outer suburbs of Mount Druitt. We have developed this Insights Paper together with BaptistCare HopeStreet.

The Hive is one of Australia's most established and effective place-based collective impact initiatives



The Hive has a goal for all children in Mount Druitt to start school well, with equal opportunity to learn, be healthy and participate in quality community life.

Since 2015, we have been embedded in the Mount Druitt community, helping bring community aspirations to life. Our staff live and work in and around the community and are committed to long-term change. The Hive is part of United Way Australia (UWA).

The Hive provides a community backbone and works in close collaboration with key partner organisations, identifies local priorities, collaborates on innovative solutions and advocates for system wide change.

The Collective organisations have a place-based approach focusing on four key outer suburbs in the Mount Druitt postcode. These suburbs are Willmot, Lethbridge Park, Tregear and Bidwill. We understand that there are higher levels of disadvantage in these key suburbs, and that these suburbs have less investment and connection to resources and services.

What we do:

- Collaboration and partnership building
- Leadership and advocacy
- Planning and innovation
- Learning

BaptistCare HopeStreet Western Sydney



We walk alongside and support families where they live, working together to build a stronger community where individuals and families achieve their goals and thrive.

What we do

We partner with residents, collaborate with local services, businesses and government-funded entities to support families to develop economic resilience in Willmot and Lethbridge Park.

We do this through community engagement and collective action, elevating community voice to advocate for systemic change. We offer wrap-around employment support to empower individuals in overcoming barriers to employment.

Our Insights Series

Working on the ground in Mount Druitt, we hear consistent themes from the community and our partners. We want to capture and share what we've learned and contribute to sustainable systemic change. Our Insights Series will:

- Distill our knowledge and insights about what works to increase access to services and help grow empowered families and communities.
- Be evidence-based and solutions oriented.
- Build a case for system-level change and support real change – so all children in Mount Druitt are supported to start school well.

Executive summary

To achieve the aspiration of the outer suburbs of Mount Druitt as a thriving community, barriers to employment must be addressed through investment and other system level changes.



Aspiration

We want Mount Druitt to be known as a thriving community where people have access to work and strengthened opportunities to live well. To achieve this, Mount Druitt needs a holistic approach to address barriers to employment, local jobs and infrastructure.



Barriers

Mount Druitt residents experience barriers to entering employment in four main ways:

Barriers prior to seeking employment



The current system results in individuals not having their basic needs met including food, housing, safety and wellbeing. These needs must be met before considering seeking employment.

Barriers when seeking employment



The limited availability of jobs, combined with challenges meeting the basic eligibility requirements necessary to apply for a job, creates significant barriers for Mount Druitt residents when seeking employment.

Barriers to engaging in employment



Being unable to consistently and affordably commute to work and arrange care for children or other family members can be a barrier to getting into and remaining engaged in meaningful employment.

Issues with employment services model



Employment services providers exist to support job-seekers into employment. However, we heard from residents that the current employment services model is not person centred and lacks place-based coordinated support.



What needs to change

We're proposing a staged approach that starts by addressing the necessary conditions for change, before addressing other changes that can make a difference within the existing system.



Increasing investment for a thriving Mount Druitt

Greater investment in local infrastructure projects will support local job growth and connectivity within Mount Druitt. Local employers are an essential stakeholder in improving employment opportunities for residents.



Improving transport options

Transport in Mt Druitt is inadequate to meet resident needs, including their ability to access work, education and training. Improving public transport and expanding community transport access can address this issue.



Early childhood education and care

Ensuring carers can access affordable and accessible early childhood education and care (ECEC), including out of school hours care, is essential for their employment outcomes. Providing flexible work arrangements and leave entitlements to meet the needs of care providers is also critical.



Building employer engagement with community to build local capacity

Reducing the stigma in local businesses around hiring local residents and providing support to employers to better understand and connect with community can strengthen employment outcomes.



Increased support for wraparound place-based initiatives

Continued support / funding is needed for organisations offering successful programs / wraparound support that job-seekers need.



Reorienting existing Commonwealth employment services

Improving current service delivery by employment service providers, as well as redefining what employment service providers require of community members, will strengthen their role in supporting jobseekers.

Our aspiration

Aspiration

Residents in the outer suburbs of Mount Druitt aspire to have a thriving community where people have access to work and strengthened opportunities to live well. Greater investment in the Mount Druitt community can create a virtuous circle of improved liveability and employment outcomes. But to achieve this aspiration, a holistic approach is required.

Local employment

When employees live closer to their workplaces, transport becomes less of a barrier. A community with local job opportunities can support better employment outcomes.

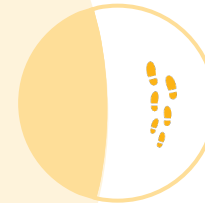


Social infrastructure

Social infrastructure includes community and individual support services and resources such as health, education, early childhood, and community support. The provision of well-planned social infrastructure supports the liveability of communities by promoting walking and community social interaction.

Public open space

Public open spaces such as parks, public gardens and civic areas are important as they provide places for people to meet, socialise and connect. Large public open spaces are needed to allow for larger sections of the community to connect.



Walkability

Walkability considers how people move around their local neighbourhoods to complete everyday activities and access to supermarkets, convenience stores, petrol stations and public transport stops. Walkability also includes pedestrian safety as they commute within community.

Public transport

Access to public transport is a key ingredient for liveability. Efficient and accessible public transport reduces inequities by facilitating access to services, education and jobs.



Housing affordability

Secure, safe and suitable housing is essential if the physical and mental health of individuals is to be maintained. Affordable housing supports physical and mental health and is an important social determinant of health and wellbeing.

Current state of employment in Mt DrUITT

Unemployment differs across the Mt DrUITT 2770 postcode with higher unemployment rates in key suburbs (Willmot, Lethbridge Park, Tregear and Bidwill) compared to the suburb of Mt DrUITT and Blacktown. This has been consistent over time.

Demographic snapshot

Mount DrUITT covers a cluster of 12 diverse suburbs in Greater Western Sydney (postcode 2770). Most Mt DrUITT suburbs are among the top 2-3% most disadvantaged suburbs in Australia. Mt DrUITT has a unique demographic profile that must be taken into account when considering the issues of liveability and employment:



Median weekly household income is \$1,159, well below the NSW average of \$1,486.



30% of families are single-parent families, nearly double the NSW average of 16%.

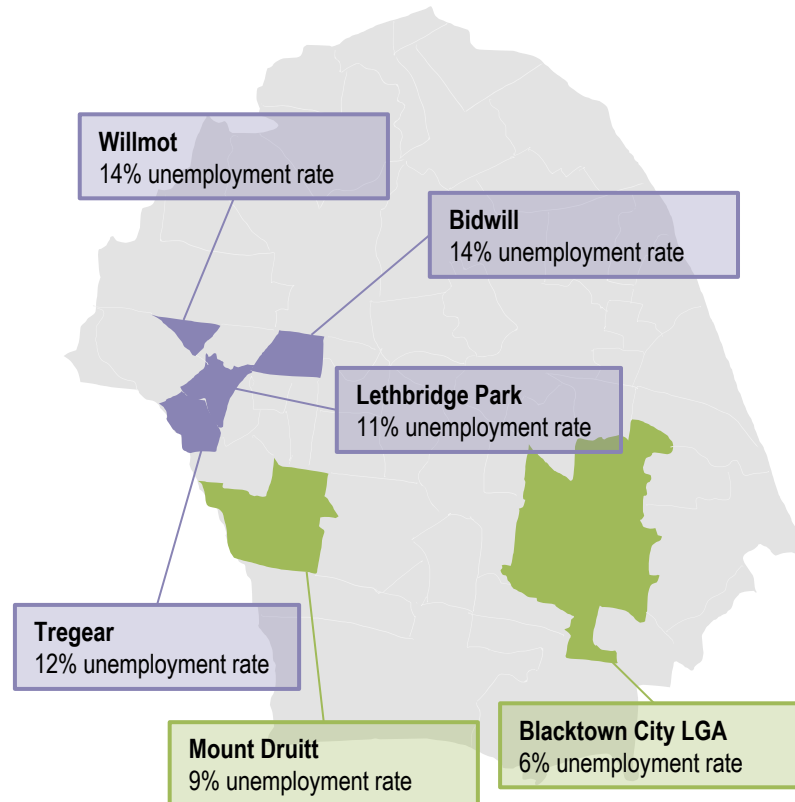


Between 10-13% of the population in the suburbs in which The Hive works is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (more than three times the NSW average).

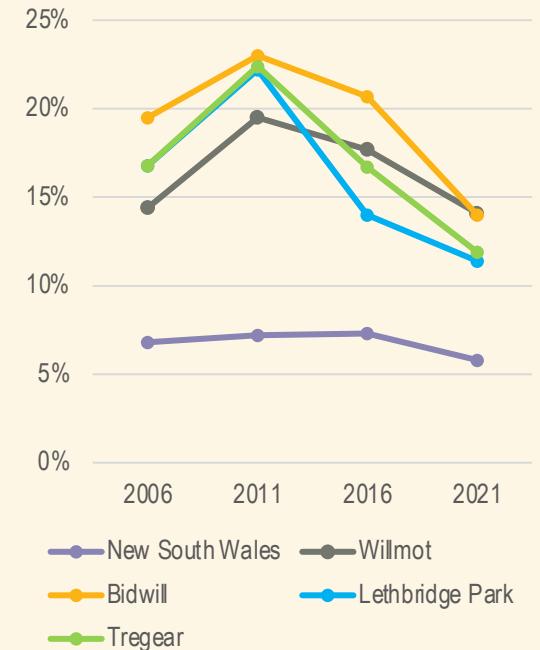


Mount DrUITT is home to many refugees and new migrants, with 38% of the population born overseas (compared to the national average of 29%).

Unemployment rate in key suburbs



Unemployment rate over time in key suburbs



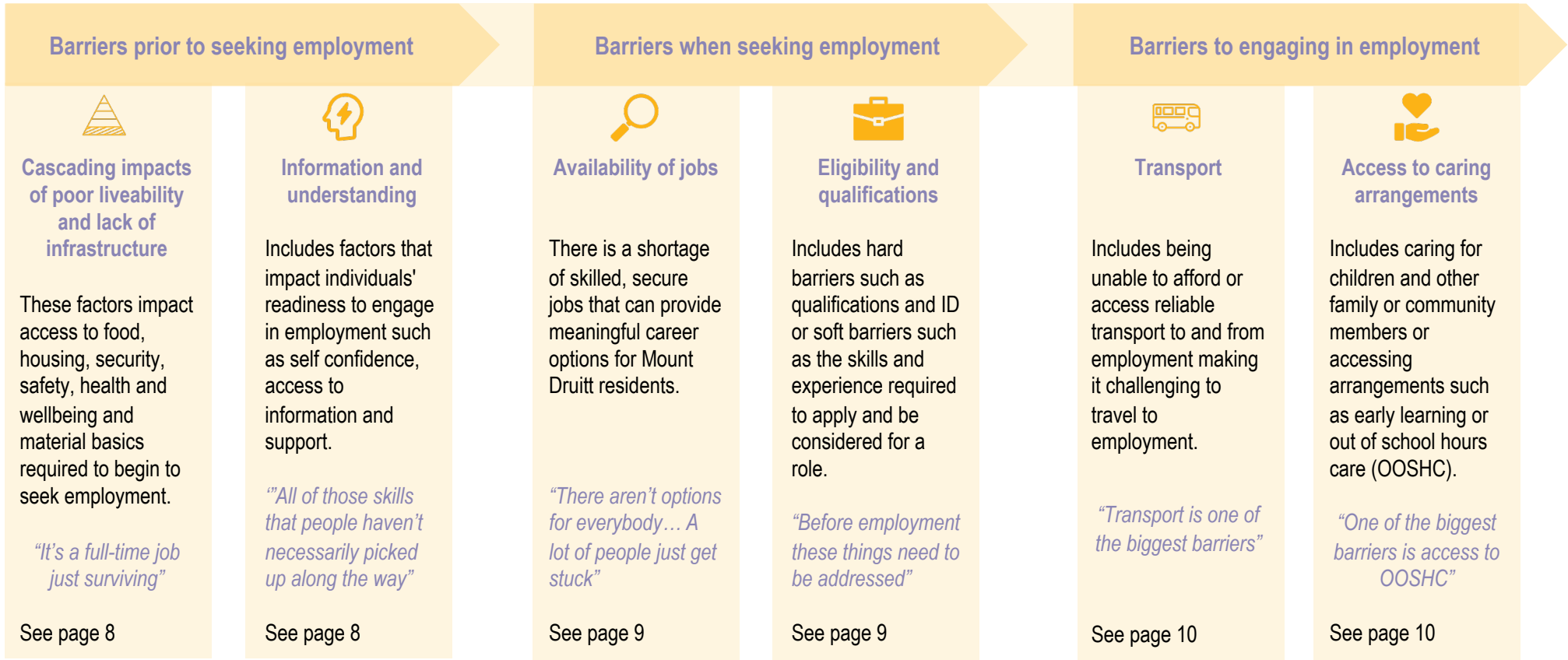
The unemployment rate in key suburbs have decreased over time, however are significantly higher than the New South Wales rate. Bidwill has had the highest unemployment rate consistently over time.

“Opportunities in Australia’s economy have not always been shared equally... Disadvantage reduces the employment prospects of many people and can lead to intergenerational cycles of joblessness. Entrenched disadvantage often starts from birth and follows people throughout their life. Compounding local factors, complex personal circumstances and discrimination can make engagement in work challenging for families and communities, including to break out of cycles of disadvantage.” – Australian Government’s White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities

Barriers

Barriers to entering and remaining in employment

A range of practical and systemic barriers perpetuate cycles of unemployment in Mt Druiitt. These barriers are not necessarily linear and can compound to create systemic barriers to employment.



Employment services model

Employment services exist to address the barriers that exist at every stage of the employment journey, but the current model is compliance-driven and fails to provide appropriate support, particularly in communities experiencing systemic disadvantage and cycles of unemployment.

See page 11

Barriers prior to seeking employment

The current system results in individuals not having their basic needs met including food, housing, safety and wellbeing, or lacking information and understanding. These issues must be addressed before an individual is ready to seek employment.

Liveability of Mt Druitt

The poor liveability of Mt Druitt results in unmet basic needs such as food, housing, safety, and physical and mental health and wellbeing, which can be barriers to engagement in employment. These needs can increase or decrease over time which impacts employment stability.

If residents don't have enough food to eat, are in an unstable, insecure housing situation, or are struggling with their physical or mental wellbeing it is exceptionally challenging to engage in seeking employment.

'It's a full-time job just surviving'. – Local community worker

The support required to meet residents' basic needs varies depending on individual situations. Navigating housing access is a major issue for many residents. There are residents experiencing domestic and family violence. Other residents are trying to navigate the hospital system to seek healthcare. There are also residents who do not have enough money to buy phone credit or access transport. These unmet basic needs can be a major barrier to residents beginning the journey into employment.

'Young people we're engaging with have a multitude of challenges... Intergenerational trauma, mental illness, anxiety around challenging themselves with something new... things can deteriorate quite rapidly.' – Local community worker

What impact does it have?

If residents are facing daily battles to have their basic needs met, this can make it difficult to transition into, and remain in, stable ongoing employment.

Information and understanding

Many Mount Druitt residents lack the information and support they need to be ready to engage in employment, understand employment pathways and see themselves in employment.

There are many varied factors relating to information and understanding that impact residents' readiness to begin seeking employment. This can be particularly acute for residents in families and communities with a high concentration of long-term unemployment.

From the workshops we heard that residents of Mt Druitt often have insufficient information to engage in work or begin the employment process and can be unsure about how to begin the process of getting into employment.

Others may not understand the benefits of long-term, stable employment, and how these could work in their own lives – especially for individuals who lack role models in their own families and communities.

Even those who do have sufficient information may be lacking in self-confidence, trust in employers, or soft skills that would enable them to succeed in seeking employment.

'A lot of people don't generally have a lot of sense of self-worth and aren't hopeful about the future. They accept the status quo as it is' – Local community worker

'There is a sense of powerlessness' – Local community worker

What impact does it have?

If residents lack information and self-confidence, they may struggle to engage in the employment process as they don't believe they will be successful and can't see themselves in employment.

Barriers when seeking employment

The limited availability of jobs combined with challenges meeting the basic eligibility requirements necessary to apply for a job create significant barriers for Mt Druitt residents when seeking employment.

Availability of jobs

The lack of jobs available within Mt Druitt mean that many residents must travel outside of Mt Druitt to find employment.

Jobs that do exist in Mt Druitt are in a limited number of industries, often insecure and 'unskilled'.

Jobs that are available may not provide long-term stability or career progression, forcing residents into cycles of unstable and insecure work. There are only jobs in a limited number of industries in Mt Druitt – predominantly in hospitality and retail – limiting residents' options for employment.

Residents described the available jobs in Mt Druitt as 'unskilled' or 'for young people' and are often insecure forms of employment.

There is a perception that local employers can be hesitant to hire local residents. Residents feel this may be due to existing relationships, pre-conceptions or perceived conflicts of interest. If local employers don't want to hire local residents, this would make it even more challenging to find employment within Mt Druitt.

What impact does it have?

The lack of available jobs Mt Druitt makes it challenging for local residents to find local employment, and means most people have to travel out of Mount Druitt for work.

'Most of the jobs in the area are retail, hospitality and fast food – try to mostly hire young people and you only get a few days a week, so aren't stable or liveable incomes' - Mount Druitt resident

'There aren't options for everybody...A lot of people just get stuck' – Mount Druitt resident

Eligibility and qualifications

Residents may face barriers in entering employment as they lack or don't have access to the basic requirements of employment. These requirements may be hard barriers such as qualifications and ID or soft barriers such as the skills and experience required to apply and be considered for a role.

Residents can face hard barriers such as not having the right qualifications, formal identification or visa to seek employment. Residents may not be able to access training due to significant out of pocket costs. Other barriers such as not having a birth certificate or appropriate visa can limit residents' ability to seek employment.

When applying for jobs residents may not have a resume, recent work experience, interviews skills or other needs such as professional clothes and shoes. Residents may also not have reliable access to internet or a phone, making contacting employers and applying for jobs very difficult.

What impact does it have?

Without sufficient support along their employment journey to overcome hard and soft eligibility and qualifications barriers, even if residents are engaged in recruitment processes, they may find it exceptionally challenging to become employed.

'Getting clothes for a job interview is difficult...At 18 for my first job interview I didn't know what to wear. All my clothes are from Kmart and they are just T-shirts and jeans' - Mount Druitt resident

'Professionalism, having the ability to be able to code-switch [and other soft skills] are things that don't come naturally to people, but also aren't taught to people' – Mount Druitt resident

Barriers to engaging in employment

Being unable to consistently and affordably commute to work and arrange care for children or other family members can be a barrier to getting into and remaining engaged in meaningful employment.

Transport

Access to affordable, accessible, reliable transport is one of the biggest barriers to engaging in employment in Mt Druitt.

Many residents can't afford to own and maintain a car. Owning a car can sometimes make employment more tenuous due to the costs that come with car ownership such as insurance and mechanic costs if it breaks down.

'Transport is one of the biggest barriers' – Mount Druitt resident

'A lot of people get Ubers around this area, and the cost of that is a lot' – Mount Druitt resident

If you can't afford a car, you need reliable, efficient, affordable public transport to get to work, or employment related activities.

Residents need transport not only to travel to work, but also to travel to interviews and employment services appointments.

'To go to another suburb in Mount Druitt you might need to change buses and get two buses. For example, to go to Bidwill, or the hospital or TAFE, I have to get two buses or I have to walk a long way' – Mount Druitt resident

The current public transport in Mt Druitt does not serve the needs of the community. The bus network doesn't go through some suburbs, requiring residents to walk large distances between bus stops. To get a distance that is 10 minutes by car it can take up to 1 hr 30 mins by public transport. Public transport can also be unreliable.

What impact does it have?

The lack of access to transport makes getting to work a challenge and many residents are forced to seek other options such as ride share services, which comes at a considerable cost.

Access to caring arrangements

Caring responsibilities, in particular the need to for arrange care for children and other family members, is a significant barrier to engaging in the employment process and maintaining employment.

Residents may need to arrange care for children or other family members, particularly older family members, to engage in employment. Caring arrangements can include out of school hours care (OOSHC), early learning or other forms of care.

'One of the biggest barriers is access to OOSHC' – HopeStreet

Caring arrangements can be difficult to access due to high cost, lack of availability, and lack of transport. A bond of \$200-300 can be required for early learning centres, which many families cannot afford. Willmot Public School is piloting afterschool care until the end of the year, but many other schools don't have an OOSHC program such as Lethbridge, Park, Bidwill and other suburbs.

'It's a massive barrier, especially when there's a lack of flexibility in the workplace...it's really difficult for families to access timely support and get the support they need' – HopeStreet

Few jobs in Mt Druitt offer the flexibility required for residents to balance care and work responsibilities. This could include part-time hours and start and finish times that enable residents to balance care responsibilities (e.g., to be available for school pick ups / drop offs). Insecure, unpredictable jobs (such as casual work) can also make it challenging to embed regular care arrangements.

What impact does it have?

If parents and carers can't access caring arrangements, then they are unable to engage and maintain employment.

Issues with employment services model

Employment services providers exist to support job-seekers into employment. However, we heard from residents that the current employment services model is not person-centred and lacks place-based coordinated support.

What are the issues with the employment services model?

Unemployed jobseekers must meet mutual obligation requirements to receive income support payments. Employment services providers exist to support jobseekers and address the barriers they face when seeking employment and to meet their mutual obligations – but do not do so effectively.

There are a number of reasons that the current employment service model does not meet the needs of Mt Druitt residents:

- The current Commonwealth-funded employment services model is heavily compliance driven. Services are incentivised to focus on high numbers of job-seekers, and to ensure they are complying with mutual obligations.
- Employment services categorises Mt Druitt as a metropolitan area for the purposes of resourcing service providers and extending mutual obligations to job-seekers (in contrast to remote areas, where there is recognition of greater community need, and a lack of suitable employment).

These factors mean that employment services providers are not adequately resourced to provide the tailored, individualised wraparound support that job-seekers in a place like Mt Druitt – with its higher levels of disadvantage and more limited job opportunities – need.

'Had hope with new workforce system that things would change, but I haven't really seen that 'AMES comes here and they're really great with people, but the system is still really compliance driven' – Local community worker

'[Resident asked employment services worker] 'What is your role?' and the response was 'To make sure you're compliant' so is more about ticking boxes than actually supporting people to get a job' – The Hive

What does this mean for Mount Druitt residents?

Residents noted that some providers genuinely care about the job-seekers they are supporting, and work to provide the best support they can. But the structural issues with employment services can mean residents:

- Don't feel properly supported – especially if they require complex support or time-intensive support
- Are required to attend regular in-person meetings in inaccessible locations
- May be pressured to undertake training or study options that do not suit their personal or financial circumstances because this is seen as the easiest 'fix' for unemployment
- Are not empowered to get the most out of employment services (i.e. may not understand the types of support they may be eligible for, or how to change provider)
- Fear having their payments cut off, given this is used as a compliance measure
- Are unaware that they can change employment service providers to better suit their needs
- Receive advice that is not contextually appropriate for Mount Druitt (e.g. suggesting jobs that are too far away, or not reflective of family circumstances).

What impact does it have?

If employment services aren't providing the necessary support to people to overcome the barriers to engaging in employment, people will continue to slip through the cracks due to the lack of support.

'There are some really great job providers. Get them ready, support them, driving lessons, clothes for an interview... but good ones are generally all filled up and then can get passed onto ones that are less supportive' - Mount Druitt resident




'They get a client with high needs or who is struggling a lot, and instead of helping the client where they are at, they put them 'in the too hard basket' and refer them onto a social worker who is already overcapacity and doesn't have the capacity to support all the people getting pushed onto them' - Mount Druitt resident

What needs to change

What needs to change?

We're proposing a staged approach that starts by addressing the necessary conditions for change, before addressing other changes that can make a difference within the existing system. We acknowledge that this change process won't always be linear; and in some cases, changes should be pursued simultaneously.

Conditions for change in employment

	Increasing investment for a thriving Mt Druitt Page 14
	Improving transport options Page 15
	Out of school hours care and early childhood education and care Page 16

Other changes within the existing system

	Building employer engagement with community to build local capability Page 17
	Increased support for wraparound place- based services Page 18
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Increasing investment for key suburbs

Greater investment in local infrastructure will support local job growth and connectivity within key suburbs. Local employers are an essential stakeholder in improving employment opportunities for residents in key suburbs.

The problem

Long term underinvestment in key suburbs has resulted in limited local businesses and employment opportunities.

Additionally, when there has been investment in the region, local community has not been adequately consulted. This has limited the effectiveness of infrastructure projects, or Mt Druiitt has been left out from receiving benefits.

"[It is] no accident that some of the suburbs have really bad infrastructure. [As there has been] disinvestment." - local community worker

The 2770 postcode falls between two local government areas (LGAs) (Blacktown and Penrith).

Being on the fringes of both LGAs has resulted in long term underinvestment as funding is focused on the economic hubs of both LGAs.

Greater government investment

About this solution

State government can create a more permissive economic environment for local businesses through incentives for businesses to operate in key suburbs, or permissive regulations that allow business centres to develop.

"We know what it takes to make a more liveable suburb, develop more economic opportunities in these suburbs" - local community worker

Having local businesses and local employers will provide more opportunities for local residents.

"It's genuinely been beneficial for me [working in the local community]...I wasn't as scared to go into the workforce as my friends as I knew my area and was confident in that" - local resident

Who needs to act

Both state and local governments are essential to improving the economic environment to create employment hubs in key suburbs.

Engage residents in planned investments

About this solution

Planned investment projects, like Westlink, have the potential to benefit communities in key suburbs. However, there is often a lack of effective consultation with community which may limit the effectiveness of major projects in responding to local concerns.

We heard from residents that current improvements to the transport system and early learning services in key suburbs have not met resident needs.

Consultation must be in places where residents can easily get to i.e. in residential areas where people are located rather than town centres that can be hard to get to.

"It's going to be 30 years until the bus stop has their shelters - 1 shelter per year" - local resident

Who needs to act

State governments should commit to genuine consultation with community and factor community considerations into decision making.

Sydney Metro West case study

Introduction

The Sydney Metro West project is a new underground railway which will connect Greater Parramatta and the Sydney CBD by 2030. As currently planned, metro stops do not extend beyond Westmead into areas like Mount Druiitt.

Possible extensions to the Sydney Metro project that might improve connectivity in key suburbs are listed as long-term priorities by the NSW Government, but there is a need for greater clarity around delivery timeframes.

How to make major infrastructure projects like Sydney Metro West work for communities like Mount Druiitt

There are opportunities to maximise the impact on communities including:

- Ensure meaningful consultation happens in places that are accessible to community members who will be impacted
- Connecting 2770 suburbs with each other as well as to the CBD
- Ensuring transport investments create local employment opportunities
- Improve accessibility around planned infrastructure investments (e.g. safe and appropriate walkways, and lighting)



Improving transport options

Transport throughout key suburbs is inadequate to meet resident needs, including their ability to get to and from work. Providing improved public transport options and expanding current community initiatives can address this issue.

The problem

The current public transport options are poorly located and irregular. This limits the option and reliability of public transport to get to and from work.

"To get a distance that is 10 mins by car can take 1hr 30 mins by public transport" – Local resident

We heard that the alternative option of driving to and from work is expensive and residents often face additional barriers getting the required driving experience to obtain a licence or affording the purchase and upkeep of a car.

To address this, many residents use rideshares to get to and from work, which is expensive.

"My partner Ubers to [work outside Mt Druitt] because he finishes at 11pm so there's no other option. It costs \$40 to get there and back, so \$80 per day" – Local resident

Improved transport options

About this solution

Review and update transport connectivity in key suburbs to ensure schools and key locations (Marsden Park, Glendenning, St Marys Station, St Marys industrial, and Minchinbury) are well connected.

"There's jobs in Marsden Park but it takes nearly two hours to get there on the bus. If I had a car, I could get there in 15 minutes." – Local resident

Transport schedules must also meet industry needs to ensure people can get to and from work, as acknowledged in the *NSW Future Transport Strategy 2056*, which articulates the benefits of living in a '30-minute city'.¹

"If [my friend] were to catch public transport to get there it would take 2 hours 30 minutes each way, but he starts at 6am so no buses run that early from Willmot." – Local resident

Who needs to act

State government must consult with local community to provide service times and frequencies that work for residents.

Expand community transport initiatives

About this solution

Expanding access to community transport can ensure more residents can get to and from work.

The Salvation Army's 'Wheels to Work' program has been a successful pilot of this in Mt Druitt. The program provides shuttle transport for Mt Druitt residents to access employment at nominated sites in Erskine Park. The cost of the service is \$20 per day, though Workforce Australia support is available to participants in the early stages of employment.

Continuing to provide drivers licence support to residents will also help residents access a reliable transport option. This includes helping residents to obtain identification documents to apply, apply for a licence, and address outstanding fines.

Another way to expand access to community transport is to expand community transport program (CTP) criteria to include people facing transport disadvantage (especially those who require it to access work, education, or training).

Who needs to act

State and local governments should improve community transport initiatives, including funding existing community organisations to provide shuttle services. Employers may also be incentivised to provide this service.

Ensure transport investment works

About this solution

With current Sydney metro extensions occurring around the key suburbs area, ensuring there are appropriate stops that are accessible for local residents is essential. This is especially true for residents of Willmot and Lethbridge Park which currently have poor transport connectivity.

"There are pockets in the Sydney Greater West Employment Region with limited access to public transportation services and experience extended travel times to adjacent regions with employment opportunities."

Improvements to transport infrastructure such as building bus shelters and improving lighting and walkways is also essential in making sure transport works for residents.

Who needs to act

State government must engage in genuine consultation with local residents to understand and incorporate user-led design in future investment.

¹ NSW Government, Future Transport Strategy 2056, p127

Early childhood education and care

Ensuring carers can find and retain employment by accessing affordable and accessible early childhood education and care (ECEC). Providing flexible work arrangements and leave entitlements to meet the needs of care providers.

The problem

Jobseekers with caring responsibilities struggle to find and retain employment if they have no support or resources to manage this care. This often disproportionately impacts women with young children who do not have access to affordable ECEC options when they need them.

“Childcare is a lynchpin for maternal employment” – University of Melbourne sociologist

A recent report mapping ECEC blackspots across Australia identified the 2770 area as an ECEC desert with scarce options available for families.

“Childcare is one of the biggest barriers, there are significant shortages of childcare educators” – Local community worker

Affordable and accessible ECEC

About this solution

State and Federal governments collaborate to ensure there are affordable and accessible ECEC options available. It is clear that, in Mt Druitt, more ECEC (including OOSHC) places are required to meet community demand. ECEC places must be priced for local residents to be able to afford using these services.

“[There are] issues around childcare and accessibility – two or three hundred bond before childcare. A lot of families don’t have that.” – Local community worker

ECEC should also be provided outside of standard work hours to allow care givers to take on weekend or evening work. Currently ECEC is challenging to manage with casual work, as carers are required to book ECEC in advance, services are generally inflexible, and if work shifts change carers must still cover the cost of the service.

Aboriginal community members emphasised that access to ECEC is a significant barrier to Aboriginal women finding employment, due to long waitlists, costs and lack of transport to ECEC centres. The local Aboriginal Child and Family centre has waitlists over a year long.

Who needs to act

State and Federal governments must work to ensure residents in all areas have access to affordable ECEC options.

For further analysis on early childhood education and care, see Hive Insights Paper 1.

Flexible work and leave arrangements

About this solution

Flexibility in the workplace supports those who work shifts, have inflexible work hours, are single parents, or who have partners who work shifts. People with young or school age children need flexible work arrangements and leave entitlements to enable them to fulfil their caring responsibilities.

“I have had conversations with potential employers to explain the flexible work arrangements and networks of supports needed. What a young person needs might not have been considered.” – Local community worker

Work flexibility should be extended to all employees to enable them to manage caring responsibilities in relation to children, older family members, and family members with a disability.

Who needs to act

Employers must work with employment service providers or community organisations to consider what additional flexibility could be provided to allow for caring responsibilities.

The Hive Insights Paper 1

Insights Paper 1 ‘*An early learning system that makes a difference for Mount Druitt’s children and families*’ considered some solutions to address ECEC needs in Mt Druitt and surrounds.

Major cross-cutting solutions include:

- Sustain and scale the use of Linkers to meet levels of need in target communities
- Resource and equip early learning services to engage with families

Other ‘quick wins’ that would remove or reduced specific barriers include:

- Adopt a flexible approach to birth certificate requirements
- Make subsidies easier to understand and access
- Establish equitable bond and enrolment fee policies
- Develop sensitive and flexible arrears policies and practices
- Design an effective community transport solution

Building employer engagement with community to build local capability

Reduce the stigma in local businesses around hiring local residents and provide support to employers to better understand and connect with community.

The problem

We heard from residents that there is a perception that local businesses prefer to hire employees who are from outside of key suburbs.

“Some employers only like employing people from outside the area, becomes a conflict of interest and they know less people in the store” – Local community worker

As well as this, there are limited types of jobs available in key suburbs – typically casual work that favours younger workers.

“If you do go into those jobs, then once you hit a certain age, they want you to push part-time and do training on the side” – Local resident and community worker

Community members also said that criminal records can be a barrier to employment. Employer requirements to have a clean record for nine years before applying for can make it difficult for many to secure work.

Co-designed work placement programs

About this solution

Local businesses and local community organisations / employment service providers can work together to develop placement programs that connect local residents to employers and provide support to both employers and residents.

“[We can build on] relationships that people have with employers – can vouch for community members if we think they’re ready” – Local community worker

Ensuring there is a holistic approach to recruiting program applicants and supporting them throughout the employment process – including through the provision of place-based training, or even transport – will give them the best chance for success.

“[We’re] not an employment agency / organisation – we try to work with people holistically” – Local community worker

Who needs to act

Local community organisations and employment services providers can work with local employers to develop these programs.

Employer support and awareness

About this solution

To engage local businesses to hire local residents requires active promotion and demonstration of the business case for hiring local people.

“Give them a different lens to look at complexity that people experience that they might not have considered before when employing – have a bit more flexibility when thinking about what they want in a staff member” – Local community worker

Examples of employer support can include providing post-employment support for employees with additional needs e.g., mental ill health. This would ensure employees are appropriately supported in a way that doesn’t overburden employers. Another example may be providing employers additional training to work with residents facing personal difficulties.

Who needs to act

Community organisations can develop business cases for why employing local community members is beneficial. Funding for additional employer support is essential from local or state governments.

Employer incentives to employ locally

About this solution

Financial incentives can be provided to local employers. This would help develop relationships between employers and local community which can lead to long term local employment.

“It’s pretty hard connecting with employers, I’ve tried and I’m not getting anywhere” – Local community worker

Local employers could also be incentivised to provide work experience opportunities for young people in school or alternative education to offer a range of different options.

“[Young people] don’t know what they want to do. But [they] need to look at work experience options in multiple areas, not just hospitality.”

Who needs to act

State and Federal government can provide additional funding targeted towards incentivising local businesses to employ local residents.



Increased support for wraparound place-based initiatives

Continued support and funding to organisations offering successful programs and / or wraparound supports for job-seekers.

The problem

Due to systemic, structural barriers to employment in key suburbs, local organisations often fill need gaps for the community and support with local initiatives.

Although this has benefitted small groups of people, due to limited funding and capability, these initiatives are unable to scale to meet the needs of all residents.

The Hive is a part of a community ecosystem of local organisations that work to support the community in a place-based way.

“Place-based approaches can assist with developing targeted strategies that are right for local communities. Strong local leadership and coordination of resources can address the local drivers of disadvantage that help achieve inclusive full employment.” – Australian Government White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities

Expand employment linker programs

About this solution

Current employment linker programs provide wraparound support for community looking to get into employment. Under these programs, support workers can be flexible and adaptive depending on what the resident needs, rather than being driven by strict time limits on how long they are able to work with clients. Their support can include driving residents to licencing centres, buying clothes for job interviews, or linking residents to the right services to address barriers to employment.

“I waited with someone last week for 2 hours [to go to Services NSW], otherwise you’re looking at a 6 hour event (without a work car)” – Local community worker

They can also work with local employers to better understand their needs and link residents into roles that work for them, or partner with employers on the provision of place-based training.

“Lightbulb moment has been working with employers on industry work experience” – Community worker

Who needs to act

More funding needs to be provided to community organisations to expand their linker programs. Local employers should be engaged to build stronger employment relationships with community. Other services can adopt the employment pathways model of working alongside families

Reorienting toward a place-based approach

About this solution

In recent years, there has been an increased acceptance from governments, not-for-profit organisations, and businesses of the need to embed place-based approaches to tackling disadvantage.¹ Moving toward a place-based approach can involve change at multiple levels:

- Reorienting the service system to focus more on place, away from the current fragmented system
- Ensuring service providers consider the need for place-based services (for example, employment services, identification services, Centrelink)
- Supporting place-based services, programs for job-seekers, and place-based spaces (e.g. physical spaces where individuals can access resources they need to apply for jobs, like printers and WIFI)

“We need Centrelink services to be easier to access face-to-face. When it’s all online it’s very stressful for our elders” – Aboriginal community member

Who needs to act

Responsibility for reorienting toward a place-based approach falls on both governments (to fund the change, and to invest in reorienting the service system to a more place-based approach) and to local service providers to lead and advocate for this approach.

Case Study: Employment Pathways program

The Employment Pathways program was established in 2020 by HopeStreet to work alongside the Hive. The program’s objective is to partner with residents and local services to support families to develop economic resilience in Willmot and Lethbridge Park.

This program uses a place-based casework approach developed by HopeStreet. It focuses on building trust and relationships with residents and community and works at a slow pace to address wider community concerns in the suburb.

The employment pathways program includes pre- and post- employment support, business engagement and partnership for direct employment opportunities, and place-based training in partnership with registered training organisations.

As of 2024, 75% of clients accessing the Employment Pathways program are Aboriginal. This indicates that this model has the potential to work for Aboriginal communities. In particular, having a local Aboriginal woman as the trusted face of the program has meant more Aboriginal people feel safe to access this support.

¹ Paul Ramsay Foundation, ‘Where are we? Place-based approaches to tackling community challenges in Australia’, June 2023

Reorienting existing Commonwealth employment services

Improving current service delivery provided by employment service providers, as well as redefining what employment service providers require of community members, can strengthen their ability to support jobseekers.

The problem

The current government support model, administrated through employment service providers, uses a compliance-based approach to supporting jobseekers.

The compliance-based model limits the ability of employment services to provide holistic, wraparound support to job seekers due to a lack of in-built flexibility and perverse incentives to focus on serving high numbers of job-seekers.

Employment services are also hard to access, with offices in city centres far from where people live.

The Federal Government has acknowledged the need for reform in its White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities.¹ In 2023, a federal Parliamentary Committee also issued recommendations on how to rebuild employment services.²

"It is time to rethink employment services as part of our vision for a stronger and more inclusive economy." – Australian Government

Improve service delivery within the system

About this solution

Jobseekers need wraparound, holistic supports to navigate entry into employment. This looks different for each person and the journey can be long and fluctuate over time. Services must be place-based so that job-seekers can access them easily.

Residents told us that even within the existing system, some providers are better than others. AMES was noted as a local employment services provider that has taken a more place-based, relational approach. This approach has included building connections with wraparound services so jobseekers can count activities toward their monthly points – enabling them to complete activities aligning with meaningful outcomes without distracting from job search efforts. Being place-based, AMES can also offer warm referrals to caseworkers or counsellors with whom community members are familiar. This shows there is potential for providers to strengthen their offerings even within the current, compliance-based system.

"AMES comes here [Mt Druitt] and they're really great with people, but the system is still really compliance driven."

When offering training options for jobseekers, employment service providers should ensure that training is targeted, meaningful, and accessible. Training should have a clear industry link and include supports that learners need.

"Some of our young people bounce from course to course, have completed all of them. Some haven't progressed to employment. Some have raised debts doing these courses."

Who needs to act

Employment service providers should review and improve their services to better meet the needs of key suburbs jobseekers. They should engage with local community organisations to better understand what services are available, and who to connect with residents.

Redefine employment service provider approach

About this solution

The Federal Government's recently announced reform principles for employment services emphasise the need to help individuals meet their employment and personal development goals, and to design services through collaboration with individuals, employers, and communities.¹

The Commonwealth should also explore whether in areas of concentrated disadvantage, such as in the key suburbs in Mt Druitt, there should be a different approach to the employment services system. This could include increasing resourcing to employment services providers in recognition of higher levels of disadvantage; or increasing the flexibility of mutual obligations arrangements in light of lower availability of jobs. A differentiated approach is already taken in rural areas, to reflect the difference in circumstances.

"Would be amazing to work with people in a way that's not compliance based, to give them what they need."

Moving away from a compliance-based model to one that is tailored in recognition of the greater levels of disadvantage in particular geographic locations would allow for services to change their approach to proactively offering services and opportunities to jobseekers in a way that is better suited to their needs.

Who needs to act

The Federal Government should continue pursuing reforms to the employment services system to move away from a compliance-based approach and adequately resource a system to provide holistic support to jobseekers.

¹ Australian Government, 'White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities', p224

² House of Representatives, Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services, Final Report, November 2023

Thank you



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