

FAIRFIELD CONVERSATIONS

Latest news and bulletin updates

Social Planning and Advocacy Team

Fairfield Conversations Summit

The latest updates

This edition will update you on the Fairfield Conversations process as well as outline the findings. It is a resource to inform your participation in the summit as well as keep the conversation going.



Conversation with the Fairfield Domestic and Family Violence Committee, 3 May 2021.

Fairfield Conversationalists have been chatting

During May 2021 Council's Social Planning and Advocacy team held 13 consultations with service providers. A total of 164 workers across 80 organisations attended one of the 13 Conversations. A further 102 workers participated in polls and surveys.

Of the workers that attended Fairfield Conversations, 75% (60) were from the non-government sector and 25% (20) were from the government sector. A full list of organisations that participated is included on page 4.



A participant at the Fairfield Youth Workers Network (FYWN) held on 11 May 2021.

What did we hear?

In total there were 943 individual comments contributing to the findings.

The process undertaken enabled individuals to make as many comments as they liked in response to four questions:

1. What are the main issues (2 – 3) that your clients are presenting with?
2. What are the main challenges in providing support for these identified issues?
3. How has COVID-19 changed your perspective on how to provide services to your community?
4. Where and how would you like to see change to better support your clients?

We found that some questions had more input than others. For question one, which identified issues we had 374 comments to consider, and for question two that looked at challenges we had 223 comments. For question three on COVID-19, we had 140 comments and for question four that looked at ideas around change, we had 206 comments.

To put all this information together we categorised comments into common themes. We found the following themes were most prevalent across the conversations:

- Accessibility of services
- Finance/ and Funding
- Lack of services
- Mental health
- Impacts to families including isolation and domestic violence
- Lack of affordable housing
- Diversity of language

What are the main issues service providers see daily?
See page 2 for more details

374 issues identified

This will outline the main issues workers identified in their day to day work. Given the breadth of consultation it was interesting to see the commonality across the different fields.

What are the challenges in meeting these issues?
See page 3 for more details

223 challenges identified

Challenges, such as 'stigma', showed across all conversations. If we work collectively from our service points, can we address these challenges?

What can we do to make a difference?
See page 4 for outcomes

206 ideas offered

Collaboration was the most common suggestion to make a difference. From what we can see Fairfield services are already working from a collaborative model when possible.

Nothing new to see here

What are the main issues services see daily?

There were no surprises in this discussion. Fairfield continues to be a mixture of disadvantage on the one hand and a community full of resilience on the other.

COVID-19 challenged our community and exposed what living in disadvantage meant when there was no respite, and now in 2021 we need to continue working on these issues.

Common themes in what service providers see daily are:

- Accessibility of services – a broader definition than not being able to get into a service
- Domestic and family violence and its impact on the community
- Lack of housing options or affordable housing
- Financial stress and its impacts in a family's day to day life
- Social isolation – exacerbated by COVID-19
- Health issues
- Mental health

Exploring these themes requires us to dig deeper into the comments gathered.

Accessibility of services

We have coined this phrase to cover a myriad of issues identified by the sector. Reasons include a lack of service capacity, such as childcare or access to programs; lack of awareness of services and what they can provide; inability to access services due to concerns around stigma; digital exclusion; lack of transport; language barriers; cultural concerns around accessing services such as distrust; exclusions on visa conditions and understanding on how service systems work.

A common issue raised was the need for safe spaces for marginalised and at-risk communities however this then poses other difficulties related to being easily identifiable.

Domestic and Family Violence

This was an issue raised in most conversations. In particular the need for more affordable accommodation, education programs for perpetrators, supports for young people in families who are impacted, more community education on its prevalence, better supports for existing services, and access to specialist services

such as psychologists. The need for safe places was highlighted, however, they need to be non-identifiable for the protection of clients.

Housing

In most conversations the lack of affordable housing was raised and the impact that has on other aspects of people's lives. When the majority of an individual or family's income is being spent on housing costs, it leaves little for bills and food. This often increases the household stress contributing to other health issues including mental health.

The Job Keeper/Seeker payments initiated as a result of the pandemic provided some short-term relief for those who were eligible but it was reduced in December 2020 and ceased in March 2021.

Housing prices continue to increase across Sydney. According to the Rent Report March Quarter 2021, the weekly rent for a 3-bedroom house in the 2165 postcode was \$460 per week. In April 2021 Hume Housing identified that there were 3,478 people on the waiting list for a home in Fairfield.

A community of strength is being challenged

Financial stress and Social Isolation

The Social Planning and Advocacy team saw a thread weaving through the conversations that is worthy of a spotlight. As we all know Fairfield is often overrepresented by indicators that outline disadvantage.

Words that came up often on the post it notes were social isolation and loneliness. Long term, entrenched issues like domestic violence, unemployment, gambling, drug use, stress, trauma, language, mental health and poverty were common responses.

Social disadvantage and under-resourcing was evident with many comments prefaced by 'lack of' (e.g. income, money, food, housing, access, knowledge, early intervention etc).

Fairfield is a community of challenges that has been tested with the impact of COVID-19 and government decisions around visas and access to services. We should remember though that we are also a community of strengths, compassion and caring.

Financial stress impacts all parts of a person's life. We have a community that experiences high rates of gambling harm, no access to income due to visa status, low income earners, hours of employment that are only part time, people living on benefits

that barely cover rents, the impact of COVID-19, National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) requirement for expensive reports to gain funding, and people with disabilities who do not have NDIS having to pay for support from their income support payments.

Gambling has been identified as a significant issue by services and government. Statistics on poker machines show that people in Fairfield lose approximately \$1.6 million dollars per day. While this provides a significant income stream for pubs and clubs it is often at the expense of families. A pilot study across local services identified that 62% of people interviewed shared they had been impacted by gambling harm. A review of electronic gaming machines legislation in NSW resulted in the State Government amending legislation so Fairfield LGA is the only area in NSW that cannot have any increase in the number of poker machines. Illegal gambling is also an issue but is hard to quantify.

Isolation and the impacts on mental health was mentioned many times in conversations. It appears that COVID-19 has exacerbated social isolation and loneliness within our community and increased fear of interacting in public. Many workers mentioned that they saw the impact of isolation on their clients on a daily basis. Young people particularly feel isolated within families due to mental health issues.

Health

As identified by our service providers, chronic health issues are a major concern for the Fairfield population. Of all the SWSLHD LGAs, Fairfield LGA reports the highest proportion of the population known to have diabetes. As we know, diabetes leads to several life-threatening co-morbidities. Compared to the rest of NSW, Fairfield LGA residents are more likely to be hospitalised for heart failure and 66% more likely to be reported as same-day dialysis admissions.

Accessibility of health services and resources, especially for refugees and newly-arrived people, is also a major concern. Other identified issues include obesity, general health issues and men's health.

Mental Health

Service providers reported increasing prevalence in mental health. Anxiety, suicide, isolation and the impacts of unemployment and housing uncertainty on mental wellbeing were all key concerns.

Whilst this is consistent with data trends within the SWSLHD, Fairfield LGA-specific data is either not available or inconclusive. Further data collection and analysis is critical to ensuring these health issues are addressed promptly and effectively.

Funding our biggest challenge

There were clear themes in the challenges organisations faced in responding to the social needs of the community. Interestingly, they were similar to the issues identified. For example, ‘stigma’ came up as a daily issue as it impacted service provider’s work with clients and it also came up as a challenge as it is stigma that impacts the work services do.

Challenges identified were:

- Funding
- Language barriers
- Stigma
- Reluctance to seek assistance
- Technology
- Lack of suitable spaces to run activities

Funding

It is no surprise that funding is a major challenge in providing the services required to our community. Many times, we heard that funding bodies do not understand the unique nature of Fairfield. Insufficient funding is provided to meet our diverse cultural and often complex needs.

Short term funded projects end before outcomes have time to be achieved, we have a fragmented and poorly resourced sector, there are service restrictions due to funding constraints, uncertainty around current and future funding hinders good planning, funding based on visa criteria mean people are excluded from services and a lack of funding for people with disabilities who don’t qualify for the NDIS are some of the identified issues.

Stigma

Stigma was mentioned across all conversations impacting most services provided. It is a significant barrier to people accessing the services they need. Service providers reported that it is a fear of being identified as needing help, or being someone who is LGBTQI+ or having a mental health issue or dealing with an addiction or seeking financial aid and others knowing. This stigma makes it more challenging for organisations to provide services for those in need.

Reluctance to seek assistance

To some extent this issue relates to stigma. It was identified that people with mental health issues, sexual health issues or clients who are LGBTQI+ or victims of domestic abuse or families struggling financially are not seeking assistance due to how their community may view them or because of stigma. Some do not seek assistance because they lack trust in services or the system, or sometimes others in their community tell them they will not get any help so there is no point.

Language barriers are another factor causing people to be reluctant to seek assistance as they may not feel confident in communicating in English and the service does not have anyone who can speak their language.

Others may be wary of wait lists, not be aware of what services are accessible to them or not have the financial means to pay for particular services.

Language barriers

In a community as diverse as Fairfield it is expected that language is a challenge for people accessing services. COVID-19 has shown that translated information is not enough to inform the community. Information needs to be translated and culturally appropriate.

Working with community leaders is also important so that the community hears the information from their own community. Organisations have responded well with bilingual staff but given the diversity of language in Fairfield there are still challenges ahead. The 2016 Census showed that 71% of our community speaks a language other than English at home, with 78 languages identified. When we look at Greater Sydney statistics it is the reverse with 35% speaking a language other than English at home. For services this presents challenges relating to the equitable prioritisation of languages for translated materials and preferences for bilingual staff.

Services also identified that access to interpreters and translated information was difficult.

Technological challenges

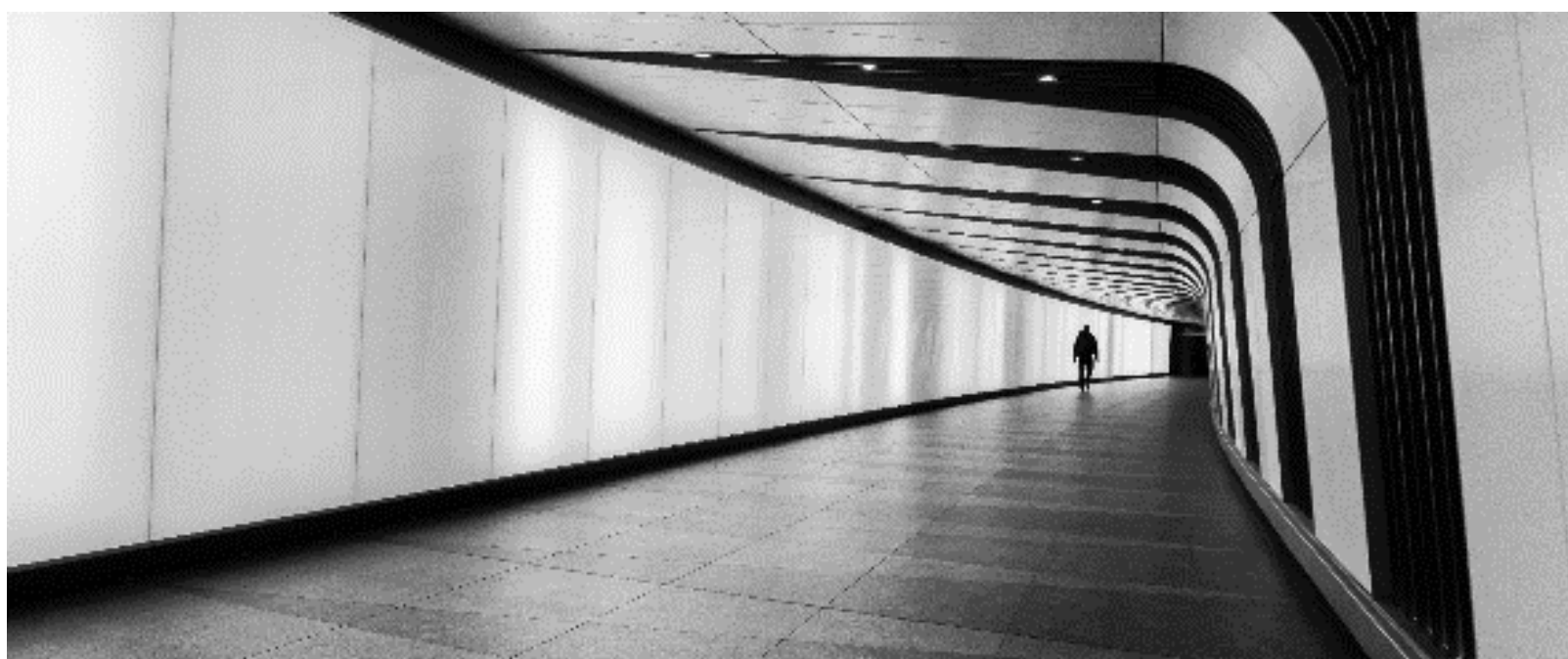
The sudden move to online services brought Fairfield’s digital divide to the forefront. With 18% of households (Census 2016) having no internet connection, providing services online proved to be a challenge.

Technological challenges are also created when government support services require people to use online platforms, such as *MyAgedCare*. Further challenges identified included not enough devices in families to support requirements, lack of knowledge on how to use devices, working with older community members with lower tech literacy and teaching people about how to use smart phone apps and web features.

With a move toward telehealth, video conferencing and the ongoing threat of COVID-19 outbreaks, there is a need to raise and maintain our community’s digital literacy as well as making internet and devices more readily accessible.

Facilities for programs and safe spaces

Safe spaces are needed for programs for LGBTQI+, domestic and family violence programs, as well as more places for organisations to run programs. Discussions held with service providers noted the safety concerns and stigma associated with accessing services.



How can we make changes?

In identifying how to bring about change, funding and resourcing were the most common response. Digging deeper it was obvious that organisations need more funding to provide programs to meet the needs of our disadvantaged community but they also need more transparency and certainty in funding, longer time periods for programs to run, a better understanding from funding bodies about what Fairfield needs and the challenges organisations are facing in providing programs to a unique area such as Fairfield. Every conversation raised the need for more funding to provide much needed services to the community. Translations across all service types was raised as well as additional funds to work with hard to engage clients.

As one participant said:

“What we need are funding bodies who truly understand the needs of the Fairfield LGA - culturally diverse, new settlement area, many refugees...and be adaptable, flexible, sensitive and responsive to the needs of the local services.”

There is a need to work more collaboratively across the sector - increasing coordination, networking, partnerships and strengthening of relationships to build better referral pathways and increase knowledge on services. Workers need opportunities for ongoing professional development and have well-supported and resourced services.

“More available resources to deal with social issues, not timed by government grants, strategies and attitudes and political powers.”

Based on responses we have developed these 5 action outcomes:

1. **Strengthening Collaboration** - workers and organisations feel connected, complement and create synergies, for the benefit of the community.
2. **Attracting Funding** - Services can articulate the needs of the community and funding bodies are responsive to these needs.

3. **Enhancing Service Provision** - Organisations have increased capacity to provide appropriate services to the community.
4. **Inclusive and Accessible** - Spaces are accessible, well utilised and the need for new spaces is articulated.
5. **Flexible** - Services have the flexibility and skills to adjust to challenges faced by the community, across a range of issues or place based scenarios.



A compilation of post-it notes gathered from conversations.

Thank you to all the organisations that have participated in Fairfield Conversations 2021

Australian Bureau of Statistics
Arab Council of Australia
Assyrian Resource Centre
atWork Australia

Autism Advisory and Support Service
Bonnyrigg High School

Canterbury Bankstown Council
Catholic Care
Chamber of Commerce

Children and Family Services
Chris Hayes MP's office
Co.As.It. Italian Association of Assistance

Community First Step
CORE Community Services
Croatian School
CuriousWorks
Daystar Foundation
EACH

Fairfield City Council
Fairfield City Museum & Gallery
Fairfield Community Corrections
Fairfield Hospital
Fairfield Women's Health Centre
Goodstart Early Learning - Fairfield Heights
Headspace Liverpool

Hume Community Housing Association
Karitane Linking Families
Lebanese Muslim Association
Liverpool City Council

Lost in Books
Macarthur Disability Services

Mental Health Commission NSW
Migration Employment Legal Service
Multicultural Problem Gambling Service for NSW
Multicultural Network
Nakango Vision
Navitas

Neami International
Neighbourhood Watch
NSW Legal Aid
NSW Police - Fairfield PAC
NSW SLASA
Odyssey House
OneDoor Mental Health
Prairiewood High School
Parramatta Mission
Scouts NSW
Service NSW
Services Australia - Centrelink

Settlement Services International

South West Community Transport
South Western Sydney Legal Centre
South Western Sydney Local Health District
South Western Sydney Primary Health Network

St Vincent De Paul
Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors
Supported Playgroups
TAFE NSW
The Parks Community Network Inc

The Salvation Army
The Smith Family
Uniting

Verona School
Vietnamese Community Association
Warakirri College
Wesley Mission
Western Migrant Resource Centre
Westfields Sports High School
Woodville Alliance
Youth Off The Streets