

## Introduction

Connect: Inner West Community Transport Group Inc (Connect) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Inner West Council (IWC) draft *Healthy Ageing Strategy 2021 – 2025*.

Connect staff and clients were among the over 600 people who provided their input in developing this draft strategy.

Connect has ***italicised and bolded*** key points to align our submission to be read in line with the 'Healthy Ageing Strategy: Four Year Action Plan' document.

## About Connect

Connect has provided transport services since 1983. We were formerly known as Leichhardt Marrickville Community Transport Group.

We chose our new name '**Connect**' to emphasise our focus on supporting our predominantly older client's ability to **connect** to their local community.

We are a not-for-profit organisation providing accessible **transport** services to people, mostly **older people** living in Sydney's Inner West. Our Board is made up of civic minded and engaged inner west locals.

Community transport is a door to door transportation service. We help people who can't afford or have difficulty using private or public transport. We **connect** people to what they need to do and what they may wish to do. Our service enhances our generally **older** clients' **wellbeing** and **community connectedness**.

We provide transport either in groups or individually to medical appointments, shopping, and social activities. We also offer a comprehensive and highly popular organised social outings program which includes CALD specific and general outings, and weekends away.

Community transport is safe, reliable and cost effective. We help people live with confidence in their home, in their community, longer.

Community transport is at its essence all about **staying connected...**

## Government funding of community transport

Two different programs primarily fund our services:

Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP), and

NSW Community Transport Program (CTP)

CTP funding is generally to assist those **transport disadvantaged under 65 years of age** and will not be considered in this submission. Note in the limited CTP funding stream, **transport disadvantaged** groups are defined, and transport support to those eligible is not ongoing. CHSP support is ongoing, CTP support is time limited. Connect assesses eligibility for CTP services on request.

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Community transport operators in NSW provide their services to their local communities under contract to TfNSW. Community transport is not a general transport service, rather it provides transport to certain defined population groups only under contract to TfNSW, or on a commercial basis.

Connect is always open to expand its services. Created and run by inner west residents and activists to meet the needs of their local community, Connect is ideally placed to work with Council to maintain, revise or expand its transport services to residents on a funded basis.

TfNSW distributes and manages Commonwealth CHSP transport funding, and its own CTP funds under a single contract of service. Sub - contract holders like Connect deliver CHSP funded services in accordance with the Commonwealth's **Aged Care standards**.

### **Eligibility for community transport services ... it's complicated**

Initial access to community transport services for those eligible for CHSP funded services is through the **My Aged Care** on-line portal. Generally speaking, to be assessed for eligibility for the CHSP by a Regional Assessment Service Assessor, clients must be aged:

65 years or older (50 years or older for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people), or

50 years or older (45 years or older for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people) and on a low income, homeless, or at risk of being homeless.

The bulk of community transport clients have relatively low care needs. Entry level aged care support may include services such as transport, perhaps some light house cleaning help, Meals on Wheels, gardening and the like. With this type of low level of support, many older people can live happy, healthy and independent lives in their own home, in their local community.

Under Commonwealth guidelines, clients are required to make a modest financial contribution to access these services. These client charges may not meet the full cost of services provided. Clients wishing to use community transport services – for instance attend one of our popular social events – but who have chosen not to access Commonwealth funded aged care service can do so on a full fee basis.

Clients who come to require a higher level of care and support to remain at home may move from entry level CHSP into multi – level Home Care Packages (HCP) stream. A member of an Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) member will make a recommendation for higher - level support and determine funding.

HCP recipients are allocated an annual amount from which to purchase the services they need. These funds are managed by any number of HCP Providers in a commercial marketplace.

While community transport is provided to HCP recipients and the quality of our services provided to HCP recipients is high, the 'business' relationship between the provider of services and the individual receiving the service is at arms - length. Services to HCP

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recipients are **brokered** through their HCP Manager, rather than the older person **organising directly** with the service provider.

The aged care system and the funding of services is complex. As an older persons' care needs become higher, funding **transitions** away from block funded services (Connect is predominantly block funded) to an individually funded model where a HCP recipient **purchases** the services they require in a market. Connect's charges' for the same transport service will vary depending on the individual's funding circumstances.

Our collective experience is that many older people find navigating the aged care system complex, and the change from entry level CHSP services to the HCP market challenging and frustrating. Many clients have expressed their discomfort with RAS and/or ACAT assessors making in - home assessments.

Connect is also a registered NDIS provider. Connect became an NDIS Registered Provider to expand the range of services it can provide to the local inner west community. While the NDIS is for those under 65 years of age, being a NDIS Registered Provider in NDIS categories of 0108 Assist – Travel/Transport and 0125 Participate Community, **complements** our services to **older inner west residents** in terms of organisational **quality assurance, risk management and governance**.

Connect provides transport and staffing services to other organisations including IWC on a commercial basis.

As grant income does not cover the full cost of operations, particularly in the inner city, Connect like most other community based local organisations, works hard on developing alternative income streams and managing costs.

## 1.0 Staying active

Supported.

Comments:

Connect notes that community transport is all about '**connecting people**' and that such connections are integral to '**wellbeing**.' Connect is ideally placed to partner with IWC on this action providing transport, and provide opportunities to be **active** through its social outings program.

Connect social outings program can be found here:

<https://connectinnerwest.org.au/services/social-transport/>

Connect recognises the benefits of inter-generational interaction and has partnered with Addison Road Early Learning Centre to provide such opportunities as can be seen in our social calendar (above).

As an organisation that has a predominantly **older** client base, Connect has some insight into the challenges of communicating with older people. Our experience is that many older people face challenges communicating online and in particular conducting and completing essential business on-line. They are not digital natives and this has to be recognised in any communication strategy. CALD clients of course face additional challenges.

What many of our clients value is having 'someone to talk to,' a staff member that takes the time to assist them. While public policy has seen services previously offered face to face move online, many older people have been reluctant conscripts. Community based organisations like Connect often fill the gap by necessity in many cases, stepping into assist clients navigate the online maze that starts for many with My Aged Care. We also assist client **carers** with this process.

Connect acknowledges that over time some ICT challenges may reduce as the cohort of older people moving through changes. Connect does suggest that digital communication and administration and management will remain a communication challenge for IWC through the life of this strategy.

## 2.0 Getting around and staying connected

Supported.

Comments:

Connect strongly supports '**improved infrastructure**' ... a benefit not just to older people but to all people.

As a door to door transport provider for older people, mobility challenges can be as close as the older person's front gate. Simple things such as safely maintained infrastructure such as footpaths and verges are properly recognised as meaningful measures that increase the confidence of older people in moving about their community.

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Connect is ideally placed to work with IWC on **transport support**. Connect has for some time staffed and /or provided Council's transport services. Connect has a deep knowledge of the IWC area, Council's current transport services, vehicles and clients. Connect wishes to continue working with IWC to further develop complementary and commercial arrangements to provide **transport support for older people**.

Active **traffic management** and parking control will increase the reliability and efficiency of support services for people using both public transport and community transport. In particular, reserved and patrolled **parking** for community transport vehicles at key locations in the IWC area such as shopping centres, health care facilities and the like would be welcomed by Connect.

Connect offers to work with IWC to '**contribute to improving transport policy for seniors.**' Specifically, Connect offers IWC its expertise in community transport matters to assist IWC '**participate in policy development with TfNSW.**' Connect notes that community transport in NSW is provided under contract to TfNSW.

### 3.0 Housing, employment and financial security

Supported.

Comments:

[Older] people who are **financially or socially disadvantaged** are CHSP priority groups.

Connect recently initiated research in conjunction with the University of Sydney School of Education and Social Work to assess the transport needs of **public housing** residents in the IWC area. While **public and community housing** residents are of all ages, Connect shares some observations from the interviews conducted with residents which may be helpful in considering the needs of **older persons**.

Connect identified a significant digital divide in **public and community housing**. As mentioned above, Connect has observed that many of its older clients struggle with conducting and completing essential business on-line. Our research interviews identified few residents in **public and community housing** have a home based broadband plan. This presents a structural impediment to accessing information, services, and support online. While most residents had a mobile phone, not all had a smart phone, and where they did have a smart phone, access to the internet was often confined to areas where they could access public Wi-Fi.

Connect has concluded that older residents in **public and community housing** face digital barriers to accessing aged care services. While not funded to undertake such activities, Connect offers additional staff resources to assist older residents of **public and community housing** access community transport.

As mentioned above, community transport services offered under both CHSP and CTP funding streams require users to make a co-payment. Where individual circumstances make co-payment financially difficult, Connect has the discretion to reduce or waive charges. Connect uses this discretion to assist residents of **public and community housing** take up our services.

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Connect has previously partnered with a number of organisations to support the needs of **boarding house residents**. With the change from block funding to individual NDIS funding, Connect's partnered services ceased by mid-2018.

Connect is willing to partner with IWC and appropriately experienced organisations to assist in supporting the needs of **all** boarding house residents.

Connect notes that our clients can use our services to access **employment**. Clients can also use community transport **attend day programs** as well as **training and education**.

#### 4.0 Safety

Supported.

Comments:

Connect staff undertake professional development which includes elder abuse. They are trained to look out for, and act on any signs of **elder abuse**.

[Older] people who identify as lesbian, gay men, bisexual, transgender and intersex (including people who are perceived to be, or have in the past lived as such) **LGBTIQ** are CHSP priority groups. Connect is keen to collaborate with IWC to better address the needs of the **LGBTIQ** population cohort.

#### 5.0 Learning and sharing knowledge

Supported.

Comments:

Connect uses **images** of our own clients and staff in its marketing material. The response to such imagery with local backgrounds is invariably positive. This is what our community looks like...

Connect notes that our clients can use our services to access **volunteering** activities.

Connect also steps in to assist **carers** of older people make initial contact and get started on **navigating the aged care system**.

Connect has commented earlier on digital issues. In terms of **digital inclusion**, Connect would welcome further opportunities for older persons to **increase their skills in digital technology**.

One of the challenges Connect has noticed its clients may face, is what to do when their **technology** stops working, or **technology** stops working as it did previously. Challenges we know our clients have faced include issues with their mobile phones, using their home phone answering machine, accessing broadband; upgrading software; using Zoom or other online meeting platforms to **try and stay connected** ... it is a long list. While such problems may seem trivial or even amusing to a **digital** native, the cumulative effect of not being in control

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of the **technology** in one's own home can stress and dishearten older people. Facing such challenges during long periods of Covid lockdown will only aggravate feelings of isolation.

A place to refer clients for assistance with their **technology** issues would be most welcome.

## 6.0 Health and diversity

Supported.

Comments:

[Older] people from **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander** communities are CHSP priority groups. Connect is keen to collaborate with IWC to better address the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Connect has partnerships with two local indigenous run organisations assisting them with transport.

[Older] people who identify as lesbian, gay men, bisexual, transgender and intersex **LGBTIQ** (including people who are perceived to be, or have in the past lived as such) are CHSP priority groups. Connect is keen to collaborate with IWC to better address the needs of this population cohort. Connect collaborates with other community transport providers to promote community transport as part the annual Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras festival.

[Older] people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are CHSP priority groups. Connect runs a number of **CALD** social groups and collaborates with other local community groups on **CALD** activities.

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Connect notes that our clients can use our services to access **CALD** specific groups and activities.

Community transport provides assistance and support to **Carers**. As mentioned earlier, the aged care system is complex, and progression through as care needs change, presents challenges. Many older people have someone to assist them with this process, the CALD population will often be fortunate enough to have someone assist them with providing complex information in their own language. Collectively we know these support people as 'carers', looking out for older people.

Connect devotes considerable resources to working with **carers** to support older people living in the community. Older people may travel with their **carers** if wish or if they require when using community transport services.

Our relationship with **carers** helps older people live with confidence in their home, in their community, longer.

**END SUBMISSION**