



14 January 2025

The Hon. Dr Sarah Kaine MLC  
Chair Standing Committee on Social Issues  
Inquiry into the prevalence, causes and impacts of loneliness in New South Wales  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

**Re: Prevalence, causes and impacts of loneliness in New South Wales - Post-hearing responses CWA of NSW**

Dear Dr Kaine,

Thank you for providing the Country Women's Association (CWA) of NSW the opportunity to appear before the Inquiry into the Prevalence, Causes, and Impacts of Loneliness in New South Wales on 12 December 2024. We appreciated the chance to expand on the issues raised in our written submission and to contribute through our opening statement and responses to questions during the hearing.

The transcript accurately reflects the contributions of the CWA of NSW during the proceedings.

In response to the question on notice from Dr Amanda Cohn regarding government policies contributing to transport barriers for vulnerable community members, we provide further detail about the example shared during the hearing, which demonstrates how regulatory frameworks for Community Transport can inadvertently exclude some residents despite the program's intent to reduce social isolation.

In 2024, a 94-year-old gentleman confined to a wheelchair and residing in an aged care facility in Narrandera required specialised transport to attend his wife's funeral. However, as a permanent resident of an aged care facility, he was denied access to Community Transport because government funding for this service is restricted to individuals living independently in their own homes.

Community Transport funding is complex, involving contributions from the Commonwealth through the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP or HCP), the NSW Government, and, in some areas, local councils. In NSW, the program is regulated by Transport for NSW, with a priority to support senior citizens living within the community.

Correspondence with the electorate office of the Hon. Sussan Ley, MP, confirmed the Commonwealth funding structure, while the office of the Hon. Steph Cooke, MP, confirmed that Community Transport is not funded for residents of aged care facilities.

While some aged care facilities have their own specialised transport, this is financially unviable in smaller regional centres such as Narrandera. Additionally, taxis with wheelchair access are often unavailable in these areas.

This case highlights the unintended consequences of rigid regulations. When adherence to eligibility criteria prevents an elderly resident from attending a significant family life event, such as a spouse's funeral, it underscores the broader issue of limited transport options for aged care residents in rural areas.

Allowing residents of smaller regional aged care facilities without access to specialised vehicles to use Community Transport would help alleviate social isolation while upholding the program's core objectives.

Beyond Community Transport, the CWA of NSW emphasises the critical role of rural road infrastructure in enabling social connectivity. Many rural arterial roads in NSW are in poor condition, with local councils responsible for approximately 90% of the road network, including maintenance and safety. Councils have consistently reported that without substantial support from the State and Australian Governments, they cannot adequately meet this responsibility.

The situation has become critical, with councils struggling to carry out even temporary repairs to keep regional communities connected. For many rural residents, particularly those who cannot access public or community transport, these roads are essential for maintaining social connections and accessing larger centres for goods, health care, aged care, and disability support services.

The CWA of NSW has repeatedly called on successive State and Australian Governments to develop a collaborative policy approach to identify, prioritise, fund, and deliver an ongoing program of upgrades and renewal for these essential regional road networks.

Thank you again for including the CWA of NSW in this important Inquiry and for your engagement with these critical issues. We remain committed to working with governments and community to address social isolation and improve access to essential services for regional, rural, and remote communities.

Yours sincerely,

**Danica Leys**

CEO, Country Women's Association of NSW