



MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday 27th July, 2021

TIME TO ADDRESS OUR TRANSPORT ISSUES SAYS MALLEE FAMILY CARE

In Mallee Family Care's ongoing commitment to ensuring Government is well-briefed on the specific needs of, and challenges facing, Mallee communities, Chief Executive Officer, Ms. Teresa Jayet, appeared before the *Inquiry into the Use of School Buses in Rural and Regional Victoria* this morning.

Ms. Jayet gave a far-reaching submission, calling for the Government to undertake community consultation, through the lens of place-based policy development, and to also instigate a trial of an 'on-demand' public transport service, with a focus on small towns.

Ms. Jayet said that the circumstances of people living in regional and rural areas have been largely overlooked during the formulation of policy and as a consequence, they live with a greater sense of isolation.

"We know that public transport servicing regional and rural areas hasn't been examined in any meaningful way in decades. In the Mallee, it consists of a local and school bus service and taxis, which become less frequent less accessible and more expensive, the further you move from the main towns.

"Mildura itself has undergone significant expansion over recent years, with major growth corridors to the south and east. We have seen a surge in new housing estates, primarily targeting young families, and public transport has not kept pace. In places such as Mildura and Swan Hill and in the outer areas, public transport doesn't cater for the needs of community and rather than enabling connectivity and inclusion, it leaves people vulnerable.

"We don't want 'band-aid' solutions and replicas of city services. We want a system that will work for our people, for how they live and for where they live."

Mallee Family Care rejected, out-right, the proposal to broaden the scope of rural and regional school bus services, for use by the general public during school runs.

"This recommendation is flawed on every level. Safety is a major concern, particularly for bus routes servicing rural areas where students may be picked up and dropped off in isolated settings. For parents, having strangers not only share a bus with their children but also being privy to where they live and their movements whilst in isolated environments, would be out of the question."

Mallee Family Care's position is mirrored by that of a recent Infrastructure Victoria Report – *Infrastructure Priorities for Regions, Enable viable transport options across the regions, 2020*, which identified that while there had been a number of reviews conducted on transport in the Mallee over the last twenty years, none of them had been backed by any meaningful investment or improvement.

"The Infrastructure Victoria Report clearly articulates the transport disadvantage experienced in the Mallee and the impact that has on the economic, medical and social wellbeing of residents. We see this, in real terms,



For all media enquiries:

Kirsten Lloyd | Communications & Marketing Co-ordinator

T: 03 5023 5966 **M:** 0459 020 665

E: klloyd@malleefamilycare.com.au



every day. We know in towns like Manangatang, where there is no supermarket, and no petrol station, children are missing out on early years education and critical health checks and young mothers have no access to pre and post-natal health care – families are doing without – because they can't access public transport and the nearest larger town is a 50 minute drive away.

"Mallee Family Care is fully committed to the State Government's investment into achieving better outcomes for our community. However, accessibility to services remains a key barrier for many people living in rural and regional Victoria," Ms. Jayet said.

In response to what Ms. Jayet described as an ever-increasing disparity between metropolitan and regional-rural connectivity, Mallee Family Care is calling for a pilot program of an on-demand bus service, similar to one that runs effectively in the New South Wales Moree region, to be initiated in areas that are particularly lacking in connections, such as Manangatang.

"The on-demand model has merit. It could reduce the need to run more expensive fixed route services and would give our outlying communities access to transport when and where they need it."

In her closing submission, Ms. Jayet commended the Committee for its interest in regional Victoria's public transport needs and said that it was her hope that it wouldn't result in 'just another Report to be shelved.' She called for place-based consultation, where Mallee people are heard and for action based on the community's needs.

"This Inquiry coupled with the Infrastructure Victoria draft Strategy presents a timely opportunity for the Victorian Government to acknowledge the importance of accessibility in breaking cycles of disadvantage."

ENDS



For all media enquiries:

Kirsten Lloyd | Communications & Marketing Co-ordinator

T: 03 5023 5966 **M:** 0459 020 665

E: klloyd@malleefamilycare.com.au