

# Work and Development Order

## Annual Report

### 2019/20



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# 01 About this report

This Work and Development Order (WDO) annual report provides an overview of the WDO scheme for interested parties.

The WDO scheme was implemented as a trial in 2009 and made permanent in 2011 after a positive evaluation. It is an example of co-design and collaboration between government, community, health and private sectors to deliver real community benefit to the people of NSW.

Under the WDO scheme, vulnerable people who have fines can clear their debts by undertaking activities which benefit them and the community. The scheme is limited to people who have medical, mental health or addiction problems; who have a cognitive impairment or intellectual disability; who are homeless; or who are in financial hardship (including under 18s).

WDOs are supervised by sponsors in the community, including government agencies; non-government organisations (such as charities); or health practitioners (doctors, psychologists, nurses). For-profit organisations may be approved on a case-by-case basis.

The activities that can be included are very broad and are intended to benefit both the participant and the community. These include: unpaid work; education, vocational or life skills courses; financial and other types of counselling (including case management); medical or mental health treatment; drug or alcohol treatment; or mentoring (if the person is under 25). A WDO can reduce fines debt by up to \$1,000 per month.



*(Most of) the Legal Aid NSW WDO team*

This annual report covers the WDO scheme as at 30 June 2020. Departments and statutory bodies involved with the WDO scheme may be required to submit annual reports under the Annual Reports (Departments) Act 1985 or Annual Reports (Statutory Bodies) Act 1984. Those departments and statutory bodies are defined in the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983.

*“This is an amazing relief. It has lifted such a burden from me. I didn’t think it would be possible.”*

*WDO participant*

This report is provided for information only and does not meet or replace any other requirement to produce or submit an annual report.

The annual reports of the key departments and the statutory body responsible for overseeing governance of the WDO scheme can be viewed at:

**Department of Communities and Justice**  
[www.justice.nsw.gov.au](http://www.justice.nsw.gov.au)

**Department of Customer Service**  
[www.customerservice.nsw.gov.au](http://www.customerservice.nsw.gov.au)

**Legal Aid NSW**  
[www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au](http://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au)

## 02 Year on a page

### Winner

#### NSW Premier's Award 2019

in the category 'Tackling Longstanding Social Challenges'

### Education

**463**

Participants in webinars focused on fines and WDOs during COVID-19

**271**

Community Legal Education events delivered by Legal Aid NSW

### WDO Sponsors

**46%**

of sponsors located outside of Sydney

**46%**

WDOs supported by non-government organisations

**52,530**

calls answered by the Revenue NSW WDO Hotline in 2019/20

**292**

New sponsors approved in 2019/20

### WDO Customers

**26%**

of WDO applicants were under 25

**56%**

WDOs involved treatment programs

**64%**

Applicants who were male

**41**

Applicants identified with a non-specific gender

### WDOs Approved and Debt Resolved

**32,149**

WDOs approved in 2019/20 (164,589 in total)

**60%**

of WDOs closed with no remaining debt

**\$34.5m**

debt resolved in 2019/20 (\$217m in total)

### Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander People

More likely to attend educational or life skills courses under a WDO

**21%**

Applicants who were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

### Culturally & Linguistically Diverse People

Applicants were more likely to complete unpaid work as their WDO activity

**16%**

Applicants who were CALD

## 03 Message from the WDO Governance Group

Welcome to the fourth WDO annual report. I am pleased to share with you some of our achievements, as well as highlight some further resources which will be available in 2021 as we continue to support vulnerable people and our sponsors.

The past 12 months have been very challenging for our communities. We saw the impact of the devastating bushfires, floods across regional NSW and the effect of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the challenges, the WDO scheme has continued with strong commitment and investment from all those involved.

*“We receive so many good news stories which confirm that WDOs can have a positive impact in a person’s life.”*

*Revenue NSW staff member (WDO Hotline)*

The WDO Governance Group has maintained a focus on implementing key recommendations from the WDO compliance audit, completed by the former Department of Justice in 2019/20. This has included reviewing the current WDO Guidelines, the development of a Risk and Compliance Framework, upgrades to the Self-Service Portal as well as a review of all WDO communications material.

### COVID-19

We saw from March this year many services needing to close their doors and move to telephone and online support due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This had a considerable impact on vulnerable people trying to access WDO activities including mental health treatment, drug and alcohol and other counselling, mentoring and voluntary work in community.

We would like to thank all WDO Sponsors who provided valuable feedback in the recent survey on the COVID-19 impacts being experienced. This feedback is being used to understand the challenges you are facing and how we can assist you by making the upgrades to our systems and the availability of resources.

We appreciate those sponsors who were able to continue to deliver activities and services. The scheme was also able to support clients engaged with sponsors who were forced to suspend their support and activities. This included a temporary stay in enforcement action from March 30.

Legal Aid NSW hosted a number of webinars in partnership with Revenue NSW and the Department of Communities and Justice in relation to the pandemic, current health orders, fines and enforcement and their impact on sponsors and clients. You can visit the Legal Aid website for more information: <https://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/what-we-do/workshops>

Some sponsors have indicated they would like more training on reporting via the self-service portal and their obligations under the Guidelines. Legal Aid NSW will be reaching out to those sponsors over the coming months.

### Sponsor compliance and audit

In 2018/2019 the former Department of Justice led a compliance audit of approved WDO Sponsors participating in the scheme. Managing risk and maintaining compliance is a vital process as the WDO scheme continues to grow. In 2019/2020 we developed the Compliance and Risk Management Frameworks as a result of the audit. The frameworks outline our commitment to audit and quality assurance to help sponsors meet their obligations under the scheme. This work will continue into the 2020/21 financial year and will include a suite of new WDO resources including an online space for sponsors.

## Guidelines

The WDO Governance Group is committed to the ongoing review of the WDO Guidelines. A Working Group has been established to review the Guidelines. The review will clarify the role and responsibilities of WDO sponsors, it will make it easier for sponsors to enrol into the scheme and help sponsors understand their responsibilities.

Sponsors will have an opportunity to engage with scheme partners. The Working Group will provide operational oversight of any future Guidelines reviews and sponsors will have an opportunity to provide feedback. This process will help to ensure that sponsors better understand their obligations, manage their risks and ultimately the WDO scheme continues to respond to community needs and expectations.

## Regional consultation

Revenue NSW, in partnership with WDO partner agencies, led a three month consultation across regional NSW and Western Sydney with a focus on improving access to WDOs for two particular cohorts: young people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Revenue NSW worked closely with Police and Community Youth Club, local Aboriginal elders, community groups and services in various locations across regional NSW and Sydney to deliver information and engage in community consultation with a view to improving the uptake of WDOs and reducing the impact of the fine enforcement system on those groups of people.

*“We have a lot of clients who had expressed that WDO has been a life saver for them ... It’s also empowering to hear them say with WDO they have their life restored and they can breathe again.”*

*WDO sponsor*

## Premier’s Award Winner



*Proud winners of the Premier’s Award*

Finally, I am pleased to share and celebrate the scheme’s achievement in winning the 2019 Premier’s Award in the category of ‘tackling longstanding social challenges’. This award recognises people and programs that deliver better social outcomes for the most vulnerable people and delivers equality of opportunity for people across NSW.

On behalf of the WDO Governance Group, I would like to extend my most heart-felt appreciation to all WDO sponsors. Without your continued support this win would not be possible. We recognise your ongoing contribution to the scheme and demonstrated commitment to improving the lives of WDO participants.

### **Natasha Mann**

Executive Director,  
Justice Strategy and Programs  
Department of Communities and Justice

# 04 Governance & support

In this section of the report, we have provided information about how the Work and Development Order (WDO) scheme is governed, the role of partnering agencies in the administration of the scheme and the vision for the scheme in the coming year. In this section of the report, scheme partners include the Department of Communities and Justice, Revenue NSW, Legal Aid NSW and the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT).

## About the WDO Governance Group

The WDO Governance Group oversees the WDO scheme to make sure it is administered responsibly and in line with government and community expectations.

It is made up of representatives from the Department of Communities and Justice, Revenue NSW, Legal Aid NSW and the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT). The Group meets regularly and the meetings are chaired by the Department of Communities and Justice.

## Responsibilities

The WDO Governance Group is responsible for:

- Setting strategic priorities for program development and expansion; for the review and modification of WDO Guidelines and for WDO sponsor and client participation
- Amendment, review and approval of program guidelines and core program documents
- Guiding WDO sponsor and client education and training
- Oversight of program audits and evaluations
- Identifying and managing program risk and program compliance
- Providing information, guidance and advice to departmental Executives, Ministers and any sub-groups, committees and working groups
- Reviewing, investigating and resolving complex program issues and sponsor or client non-compliance

## 2021 vision

The WDO Governance Group has a clear vision for how the scheme will evolve into 2021 and beyond. Some focus areas include:

- The publication and implementation of the new 2020 WDO Guidelines. The WDO Guidelines are under review and set to be implemented in the New Year. The updated Guidelines include recommendations from the recent audit of the WDO scheme and proposals from partnering agencies and scheme sponsors.
- Distribution of resources for clients and sponsors to assist access to the scheme, clarity of the new Guidelines updates and to help sponsors understand and comply with their obligations.
- The establishment of the Operational Advisory Group which will convene stakeholders including operational staff and sponsors to provide evaluation and advice on the operations of the scheme. This group will feed advice to the Governance Group to inform or propose amendments to the Guidelines and administration of the scheme.

- Ongoing support for any barriers or impediments to the scheme due to COVID-19 restrictions for both sponsors and clients. Information and resources were provided to sponsors surrounding:
  - recontracting when the terms of service delivery have changed
  - how to continue home visits under tighter government restrictions
  - digital service provision.

## Department of Communities and Justice

The Department of Communities and Justice governs the WDO scheme by:

- chairing the WDO Governance Group
- reviewing and monitoring the WDO Guidelines
- approving WDO sponsors and ensuring compliance in partnership with Governance Group agencies
- reviewing the risk management framework and issue resolution in partnership with Revenue NSW, Legal Aid NSW and the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT).
- administration and engagement of program audit and review of the sponsor compliance protocol
- supporting the investigation of sponsor issues of non-compliance
- evaluating the WDO scheme

The Department of Communities and Justice helps to expand the scheme by working together with Legal Aid NSW to recruit sponsors at a high level, particularly within government.

The Diversity Services Unit within the Department of Communities and Justice also works to promote the scheme to culturally and linguistically diverse community members, people with a disability, support workers and sponsors.

## Diversity Services Unit

Community Information Events 2019/20



Local Court  
Events  
**419** People



TAFE NSW  
Events  
**670** People



Law  
Information  
**555** People



COVID-19  
Information  
**252** People



Community  
Information  
**877** People

participated in our

**33** education events supporting  
**2773** Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Community Members

## Revenue NSW

Revenue NSW supports WDO sponsors and customers through the WDO Hotline.

Customers call the Hotline to find out about WDOs and for help finding a sponsor. WDO sponsors call the hotline to enquire about signing up, to clarify the WDO Guidelines and for help with the WDO Self Service Portal.

The WDO Hotline is a team of specialist staff who are passionate about the scheme. Sponsors often give positive feedback about the personalised service provided on the WDO Hotline.

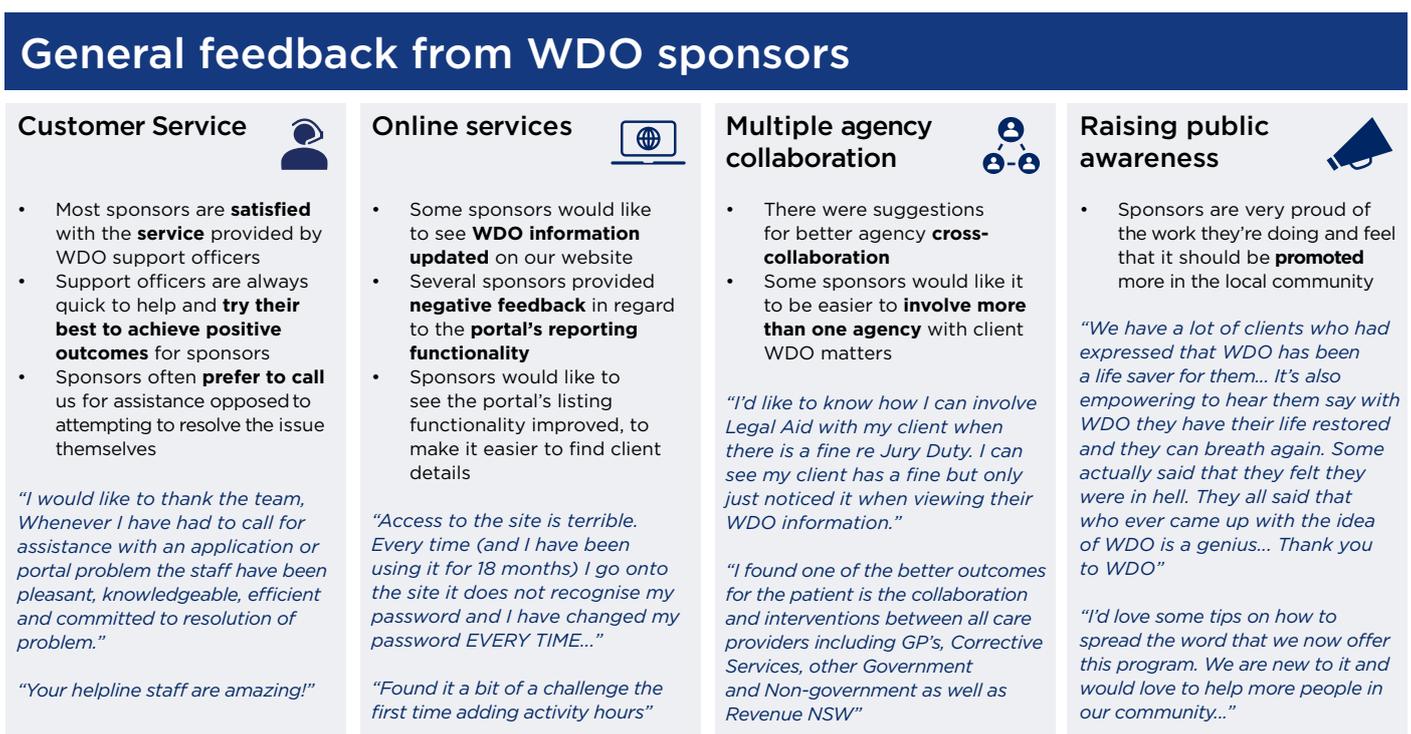
It may surprise you to know how busy the WDO Hotline is. In 2019/20, Revenue NSW answered 52,530 calls on the WDO Hotline.

Revenue NSW is also responsible for:

- sponsor administration and systems, including online application, sponsor register, Hotline and self-service portal functionality
- state-wide WDO sponsor and potential sponsor engagement
- quality assurance and regular testing of sponsor and client records in line with agreed outcomes of the Risk Management framework
- working with partner agencies to ensure program compliance and timely escalation of fraudulent matters. Communication of information to sponsors and provision of training with regard to the Self-Service Portal
- debt resolution decisions
- reporting, analysis of WDO data

In 2020, we surveyed our WDO sponsors to see how we are doing and find out what we can do better. We were happy to receive some great feedback, but there is still work to do. Some of the feedback is included in the figure below.

Figure 4.1 – Feedback from WDO sponsors



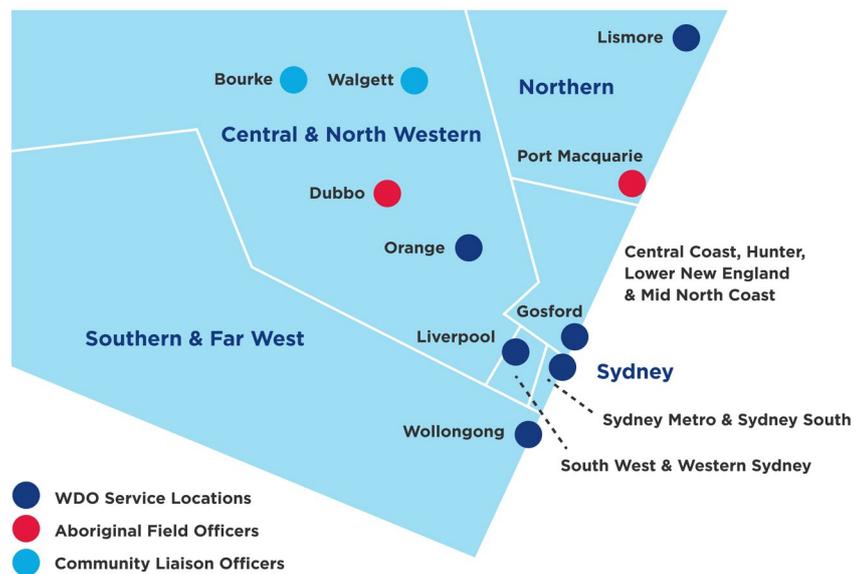
## Legal Aid NSW

The Work and Development Order Service (WDO Service) at Legal Aid NSW was established in 2012. Staff in six locations across NSW provide fines advice, facilitate WDO placements for vulnerable clients and support the implementation and expansion of the WDO scheme across NSW, including areas of high fines debt and social disadvantage.

The WDO Service recruits and trains sponsors, delivers an extensive community legal education program including outreach events, face to face training and webinars. Lawyers also provide fines advice and assistance services at fines clinics, outreach events and by phone.

Legal Aid NSW is responsible for:

- sponsor expansion and local engagement
- education training and promotion of the WDO scheme
- publications and communication material
- complying with actions assigned in the risk management framework and issue resolution in partnership with Revenue NSW and the Department of Communities and Justice
- supporting the investigation of sponsor issues of non-compliance



**Figure 4.2 - Locations of Legal Aid NSW WDO Service**

In addition to WDOs, fines are a high priority area for Legal Aid NSW across the Civil Law Division. Legal Aid NSW assists customers to resolve their debts in a number of ways, such as setting up payment plans, asking for debts to be written off, and applying for reviews. Some of the results for 2019/20 include:

- assisted clients to manage over \$5m of fines debt
- were successful in 50% of our applications on behalf of clients applying for internal review of their fines
- assisted vulnerable clients to clear over \$1.75 million of fines debt through write off applications (93% success rate)
- advocated with Revenue NSW to have clients' licence restrictions lifted (97% success rate)
- drafted and updated factsheets about the changing status of Public Health Orders, COVID fines, and quarantine fees.

Some more results are shared on the next page.

# Legal Aid NSW 2019/20

Fines and WDO work continues to be one of the highest categories of work done across the Legal Aid NSW civil law division. There were almost 5,000 instances of fines and WDO assistance provided to individual clients during the year



## Penalty notice and court fines

732 advices  
599 minor assistance



## Enforcement orders and victims restitution debts

630 advices  
749 minor assistance



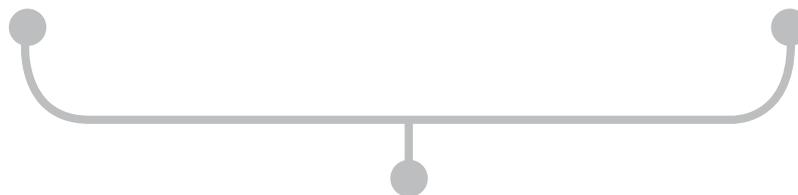
## WDO matters

859 advices  
1,276 minor assistance



## Public Health Order and COVID fines

62 advices  
23 minor assistance



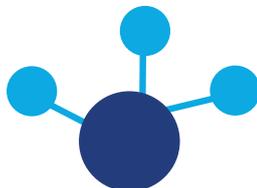
## Legal Aid NSW WDO Service



**271**

## Community education sessions

Including outreach events, training and webinars.



**COVID**

## Keeping the community informed

The team transitioned to remote delivery during COVID. They also developed factsheets about the Public Health Orders, fines and quarantine fees.



**8**

## Webinars reaching 500+ people

Topics included:  
- WDOs  
- General fines law  
- Fines and WDOs during COVID.



**WDO News**

## Regular updates and special alerts

Including alerts about the Premier's Award win in 2019 and a COVID/disaster update in 2020.

## Legal Aid NSW (continued)

In 2019, Legal Aid NSW began a process of integration with Law Access. While the merger didn't officially happen until July 2020, it is important to highlight the support that Law Access has provided to people with fines-related legal issues.

Table 4.1 shows the number of services that Law Access provided to customers in 2019/20, for fines and victims restitution debt matters.

**Table 4.1 - Law Access - Fines and victims restitution matters 2019/20**

Matter type	Information	Advice
Penalty notices and court fines	1,778	197
Public Health Orders	57	13
State debts and victims restitution orders	46	9
Work and Development Orders	42	2

In the above table, 'information' refers to legal information provided over the telephone. 'Advice' refers to legal advice provided to priority customers over the telephone. Read more about Law Access's services at:

<https://www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au/Pages/about-us/how-we-work.aspx>

## Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT)

In 2019/20 the Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS) continued to provide advice and support to the WDO Governance Group. The scheme has maintained a strong connection with Indigenous communities across NSW. Over the past 5 years 21% of WDO clients have identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. The ALS continues to support the scheme by:

- Providing advice on the scheme ensuring access and equity for Aboriginal people
- Promoting the WDO scheme to Aboriginal specific services
- Expansion and local engagement particularly across Regional NSW
- Supporting the recruitment, education and training of sponsors.

## Let us know your thoughts!

Any ideas, compliments, complaints, good news stories, or other feedback can be shared with the WDO Governance Group by completing a feedback form at:

[https://www.apps08.osr.nsw.gov.au/customer\\_service/forms/wdo/feedback](https://www.apps08.osr.nsw.gov.au/customer_service/forms/wdo/feedback)

## 05 WDO sponsors

### Sponsor spotlight: Parramatta Mission Meals Plus Service

#### Always helping, even through COVID-19

Meals Plus Service provides meals, case work support and emergency food parcels for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Meals Plus is Parramatta Mission's version of a 'soup kitchen' providing over 150 meals daily, from Monday to Friday, to people in the local community who are homeless, at risk of homelessness or otherwise acutely disadvantaged. Showers, toilets, laundry facilities, case work support, housing assistance, medical referrals, on-site financial counsellors and chiropractors, pro-bono legal services and Centrelink outreach are also available to this target group through Meals Plus. They also provide weekly recovery groups, social activities programs and discussion groups.

Meals Plus assists between 150-200 people each day, many of whom have come to know Meals Plus through referrals from allied health and social services.

They can only provide these services due to their large volunteer workforce. Many of these volunteers also have fines debt. One recent volunteer had \$13,000 of fines debt and was homeless. They joined Parramatta Mission and over 15 months cleared their entire fines debt. During this time Parramatta Mission also helped them to get their driver licence, somewhere to live and a paid job as a result of the confidence that has come from their volunteering.

Parramatta Mission volunteering opportunities are helping many people every day to pay off their fines debt including many people from diverse backgrounds. They really appreciate the certificate they get when all of their fines are paid off by a WDO and feel a sense of achievement about what they have accomplished. This is especially true with asylum seekers and people on bridging visas.

## Introduction

All data in this section of the report is based on data as at 30 June 2020. It does not include sponsor applications that were submitted but not approved on 30 June 2020.

## WDO sponsor approvals in 2019/20

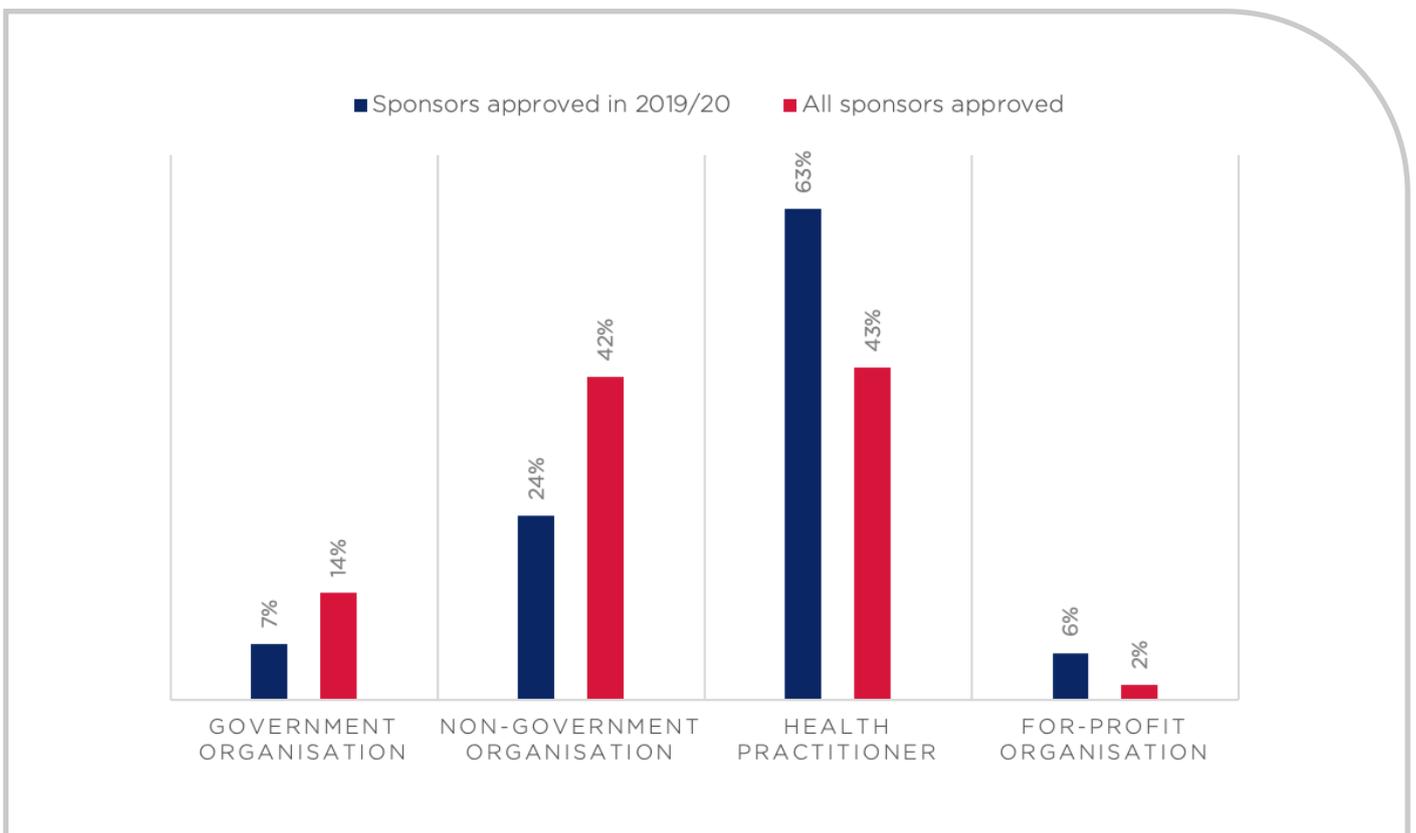
In 2019/20, 363 new WDO sponsors were approved. In total, there were 2,327 approved sponsors as at 30 June 2019.

**Table 5.1 – Approved WDO sponsors by type**

Sponsor type	Sponsors approved in 2019/20	All sponsors approved
Health practitioner	229	984
Non-government organisation	86	956
Government organisation	26	318
For-profit organisation	22	44
<b>Total</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>2,302</b>

Figure 5.1 compares the types of WDO sponsors approved and shows that in 2019/20 a higher percentage of health practitioners were approved compared with other types.

**Figure 5.1 – Comparison of sponsor approvals in 2019/20**



## Location of WDO sponsors in NSW

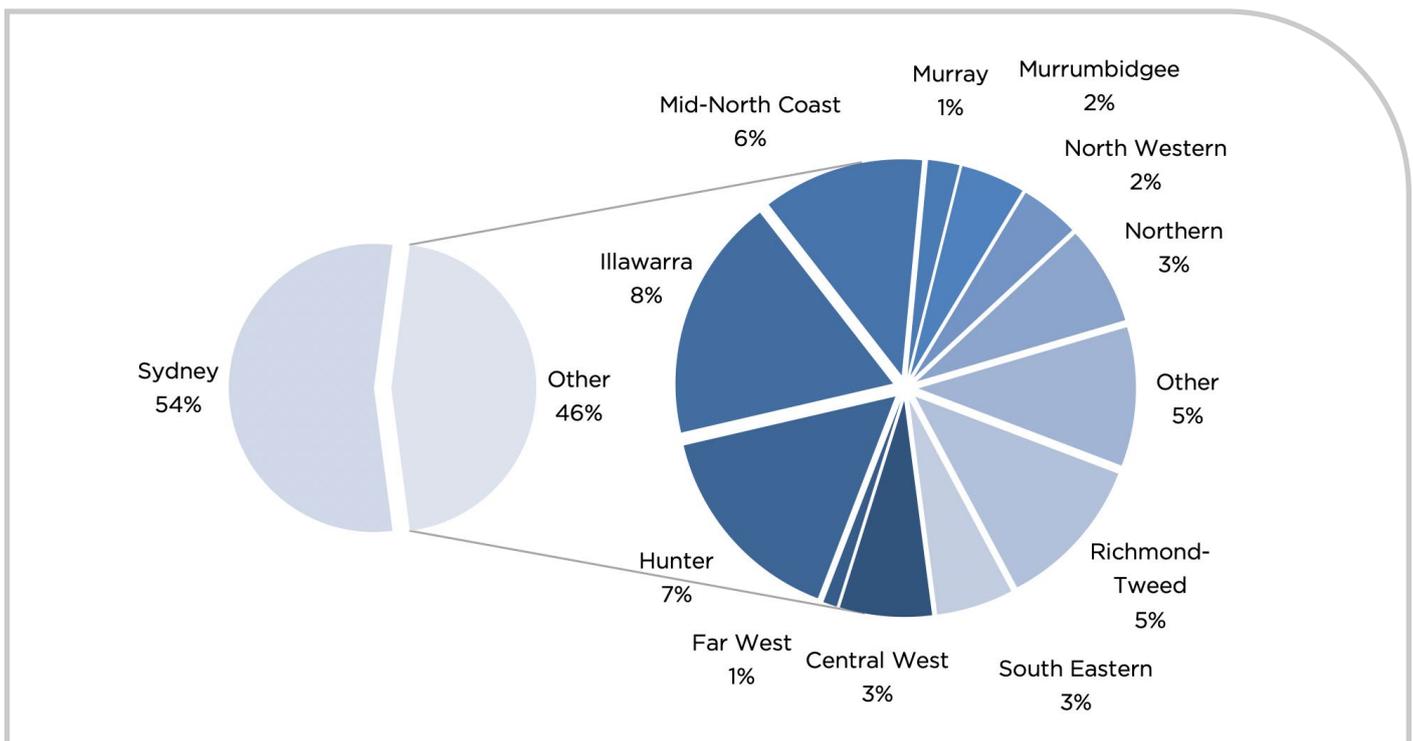
Table 5.2 shows the number of approved WDO sponsors by NSW statistical division.

**Table 5.2 - Approved WDO sponsors by statistical division**

Statistical division	Sponsors approved - 2019/20	Approved sponsors - total
Sydney	224	1,259
Hunter	35	166
Illawarra	27	194
Mid-North Coast	15	128
Richmond-Tweed	11	122
Central West	8	73
Northern	7	79
North Western	5	47
South Eastern	4	61
Murray	2	25
Far West	1	11
Murrumbidgee	1	51
Other	23	111
<b>Total</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>2,327</b>

Table 5.2 and Figure 5.3 show the geographic dispersion of all approved WDO sponsors in NSW as at 2019/20. The statistical division or area is determined by the WDO sponsor’s postcode; however, we acknowledge that many WDO sponsors support WDOs for customers outside of their own area.

**Figure 5.2 - Geographic dispersion of all approved WDO sponsors in NSW**



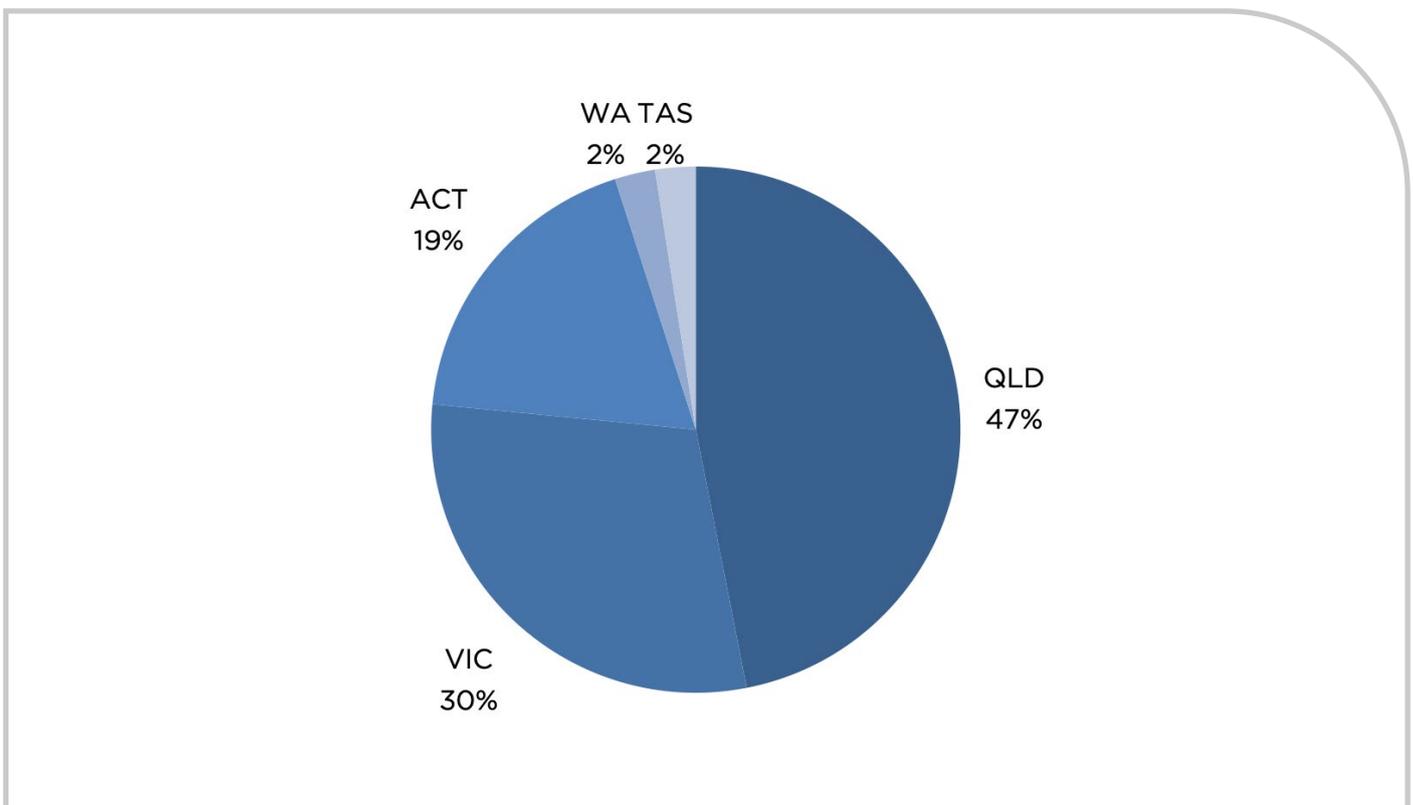
## WDO sponsors outside of NSW

In 2019/20, WDO sponsors located outside of NSW continued to join the WDO scheme to support people who have NSW fines debt. Table 5.3 shows the number of WDO sponsors approved outside of NSW in 2019/20, compared with all WDO sponsors approved outside of NSW as at 30 June 2019. Figure 5.3 shows the dispersion of all WDO sponsors approved outside of NSW as at 30 June 2019.

**Table 5.3 - Number of WDO sponsors approved outside of NSW**

State or Territory	Sponsors approved in 2019/20	Approved sponsors - total
QLD	7	38
VIC	7	24
ACT	1	15
WA	-	2
TAS	-	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>81</b>

**Figure 5.3 - Dispersion of WDO sponsors approved outside of NSW**



## Spotlight on Social Workers

In April 2020, the WDO Governance Group decided that for-profit social workers and allied health professionals can enrol as a WDO sponsor. Examples of these practitioners include:

- social workers running mentoring programs
- Victims Services approved counsellors
- accredited mental health social workers or
- occupational therapists providing NDIS approved activities.

Below, we shine a spotlight on three of our social worker champions who support people in the community to resolve their fines through WDOs. Thank you, Olimpia, Ruth, Anna, and all other social workers who support the WDO scheme!

### **Social worker spotlight: Olimpia Timis, Mental Health Social Worker from Thrive Counselling in Muswellbrook on the Central Coast of NSW**



Olimpia Timis is an Accredited Mental Health Social Worker practicing in the Hunter Valley.

Accredited Mental Health Social Workers help clients who are experiencing mental health conditions using evidence-based interventions such as cognitive behavioural therapy, cognitive interventions, anger management, social skills, and parenting skills.

Olimpia has been a WDO sponsor since 2017 and sponsored 70 WDOs clearing \$20,000 of fines debt.

Olimpia was a strong advocate for the recent change to the WDO Scheme which now recognises Mental Health Social Workers as Allied Health Professionals who deliver mental health treatment.

*‘The majority of my clients who enter into WDO agreements have mild to severe mental health issues and/or learning difficulties, and they experience financial hardship. They have parking fines, fines due to driving with an unregistered or faulty car, fines for exceeding the speed limit in school zones, and court fines. I also had a young client with learning difficulties and mental health issues who was fined because of failing to vote.’*

During COVID-19 Olimpia, like many health practitioners, has had to change her practice to online or remote counselling. Olimpia says it is a valuable way of delivering psychological support and WDOs to vulnerable clients in regional areas.

*‘While telehealth has its challenges and may not be appropriate for every client, I believe that in a post-COVID world, for some clients remote therapy will remain the preferred way of accessing help because of a variety of reasons including health issues, lack of transport, and remoteness.’*

**Social worker spotlight: Ruth Powis, a proud Bundjalung woman and Social Worker who lives in the Northern Rivers area of NSW. A WDO champion!**



For more than five years, Ruth worked for Jali Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) at their Ballina office as the Coordinator-Specialist Homelessness Services. After learning about WDOs from Legal Aid NSW, Ruth advocated strongly for Jali LALC to register as a sponsor organisation, and in January 2017 they were finally approved.

Ruth was the sole WDO contact person for Jali LALC, and in the three years from 2017-2019 she assisted her clients to reduce their fines debts by more than \$212,000.

In early 2020 Ruth's business Social Work Services obtained the Rural Doctors' Network contract for counselling and case management services with a local Aboriginal Medical Service in Casino. This service also covers isolated communities in Tabulam, Coraki and Muli, and anyone else who is a patient with the medical service.

Ruth left her job at Jali LALC to focus on this new work. Ruth does counselling and case management work with clients, many of whom are homeless or at risk of homelessness, experiencing domestic and family violence, or requiring assistance to access the NDIS, My Aged Care, or Centrelink. Referrals come from the medical staff, Aboriginal Community Health and other NGOs that service Aboriginal clients.

The Aboriginal Medical Service is not yet registered to sponsor WDOs but, in a case of perfect timing, sole trader Social Workers became eligible to apply to sponsor WDOs from April 2020. Ruth applied, and was approved in May 2020.

Ruth has an elderly client in a remote community who was hospitalised multiple times due to her medical conditions. She had many trips to the hospital by ambulance due to her chronic illnesses and forgot to give the ambulance her pension card. This raised a large debt for her and was causing her unnecessary stress and anxiety. Ruth was able to assist this client by calling the WDO hotline, explaining her situation and giving them her pension card number, which then completely cleared the debt.

Ruth had another client from a remote community who had speeding fines, and it had got to the stage where his licence had been suspended due to non-payment of the fines. This man needed his licence to drive to town for his medical appointments, which were often more than once a week. He is now on a WDO and has his licence back. He is also benefitting from the case management from Ruth for his homelessness issues, and he hopes to find some stable accommodation in town in the near future.

Ruth always asks patients whether they have any fines and is actively promoting WDOs amongst her colleagues and in the local communities. She believes that over time she will be referred more AMS patients and community members who are eligible for WDOs.

**Social worker spotlight: Anna Fainuu, Social Work Team Leader for the Women and Children’s Health Social Work Team, Western Sydney Local Health District (Blacktown)**



*“I’ve had vulnerable women decline the need for social work support...until I mention WDOs and what they can offer - it’s like magic!”*

The benefits I see with Work and Development Orders are “the impact on our client’s emotional and mental health - of not worrying about thousands of dollars in fines. And having more money to spend on preparing for their baby.”

*“Offering WDOs helps our team engage clients who are often reluctant to engage with our service - due to negative previous experiences with services and systems such as the Department of Communities and Justice and the criminal justice system.”*

We have been a WDO sponsor since 2018. Before that we weren’t aware of too many other hospital social work services who were WDO sponsors. We wanted to get a sense of what activities we could offer and the administration time involved. A new colleague came on board who had experience with WDOs which was perfect to get our team up and running.

We work with mothers with psychosocial vulnerabilities. This is all things which impact on the wellbeing of both mum and her unborn baby during a pregnancy. Our priority is to encourage the mums to attend antenatal care regularly as this gives us an opportunity to introduce ourselves and explain the type of support we can provide.

Blacktown LGA has specific populations with vulnerabilities and risks due to the effects of high socio-economic disadvantage, exposure to torture and trauma and intergenerational trauma. We see many of these women. When they book into Blacktown Hospital for antenatal care they are offered a referral to social work if they’ve reported psychosocial stressors which can impact on the emotional, psychological and physical health for both mum and their unborn baby during a pregnancy.

We’ve incorporated identifying fine debt into our psychosocial assessment process. The duration of a pregnancy doesn’t always give us much time to work on fine debt. Having good antenatal care is often a challenge for the mums we see due to the multiple stressors they are dealing with in their lives and they may book in late. So we’ve made the reporting activities straightforward to have as much impact as possible on their fine debt in a relatively short period of time.

During COVID-19 restrictions it has also been more challenging for our team to try to engage people via telehealth rather than face to face. But being able to offer practical assistance in the form of reducing or eliminating fine debt has been a way to engage mums and families in a conversation. It has also helped us to build rapport and offer other types of therapeutic interventions. Keeping clients updated about their fine reduction every time they attend antenatal care is a great motivator for them.

# 06 Scheme overview

## Growth in WDOs approved

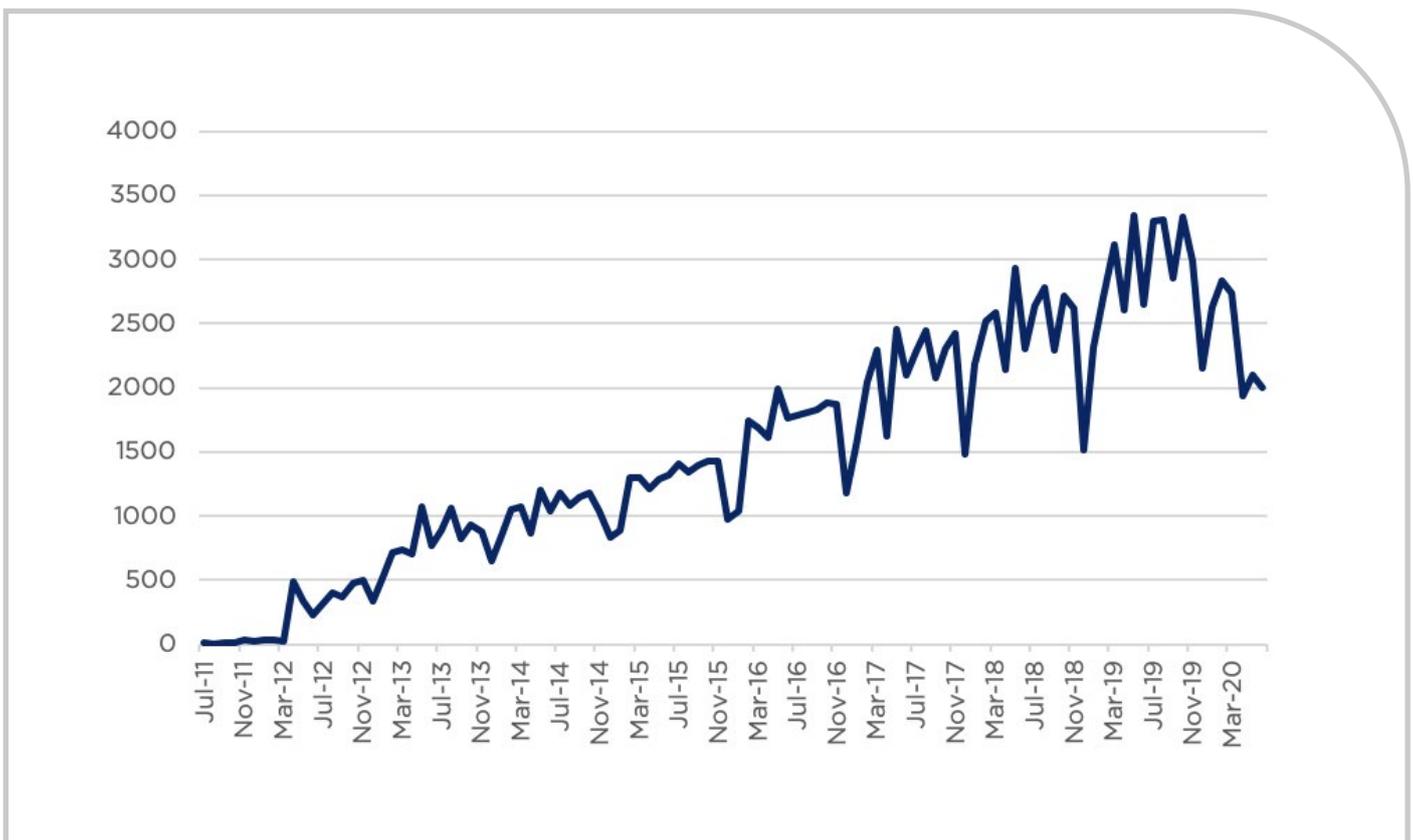
The WDO scheme continued to grow in 2019/20. As at 30 June 2019, a total of 164,589 WDOs have been approved. Figure 6.1 shows the increase in number of WDOs approved per year since the scheme commenced.

**Table 6.1 – WDOs approved per year since 2012**

Financial year	Number of WDOs approved	Increase on previous year
2019/20	32,149	3%
2018/19	31,286	13%
2017/18	27,676	23%
2016/17	22,413	26%
2015/16	17,804	29%
2014/15	13,774	22%
2013/14	11,310	63%
2012/13	6,931	456%
2011/12	1,246	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>164,589</b>	-

Table 6.1 shows the number of WDOs approved per financial year and the rate at which the scheme has grown since it commenced. The rate of growth in 2019/20 has slowed to a 3% increase on the previous year, and we believe this is due to the impact of COVID-19.

**Figure 6.1 – WDOs approved by financial year**



The number of WDOs approved each month continued to increase in 2019/20.

Table 6.2 shows the number of WDOs approved for each month in 2019/20 and the value of debt attached to those WDOs at the time they were approved.

**Table 6.2 - WDOs approved in 2019/20**

Approval month	Number of WDOs	Value of debt (at time of approval)
Jul	3297	\$6,095,580
Aug	3305	\$6,616,775
Sep	2851	\$8,825,217
Oct	3326	\$11,077,309
Nov	2980	\$8,597,883
Dec	2149	\$6,406,623
Jan	2633	\$8,927,869
Feb	2832	\$9,410,804
Mar	2734	\$9,854,027
Apr	1939	\$10,609,305
May	2098	\$7,979,992
Jun	2005	\$6,942,200
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>32149</b>	<b>\$101,343,583</b>

## Debt cleared through WDOs

In total, \$217m of debt has been cleared through WDOs since the scheme commenced.

Please note, the figures provided in this section of the report are as at 30 June 2020. The value of debt cleared through WDO activity in 2019/20 will continue to increase as WDO sponsors submit their reports of WDO activity. We expect the total value of debt cleared will be higher than the amount of debt cleared in 2018/19.

**Table 6.3 - Debt cleared through WDOs**

Financial year	Value of debt cleared
2019/20	\$34,527,368
2018/19	\$42,952,909
2017/18	\$38,795,455
2016/17	\$29,650,655
2015/16	\$24,519,382
2014/15	\$18,676,598
2013/14	\$15,575,086
2012/13	\$10,567,384
2011/12	\$1,651,733
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$216,916,570</b>

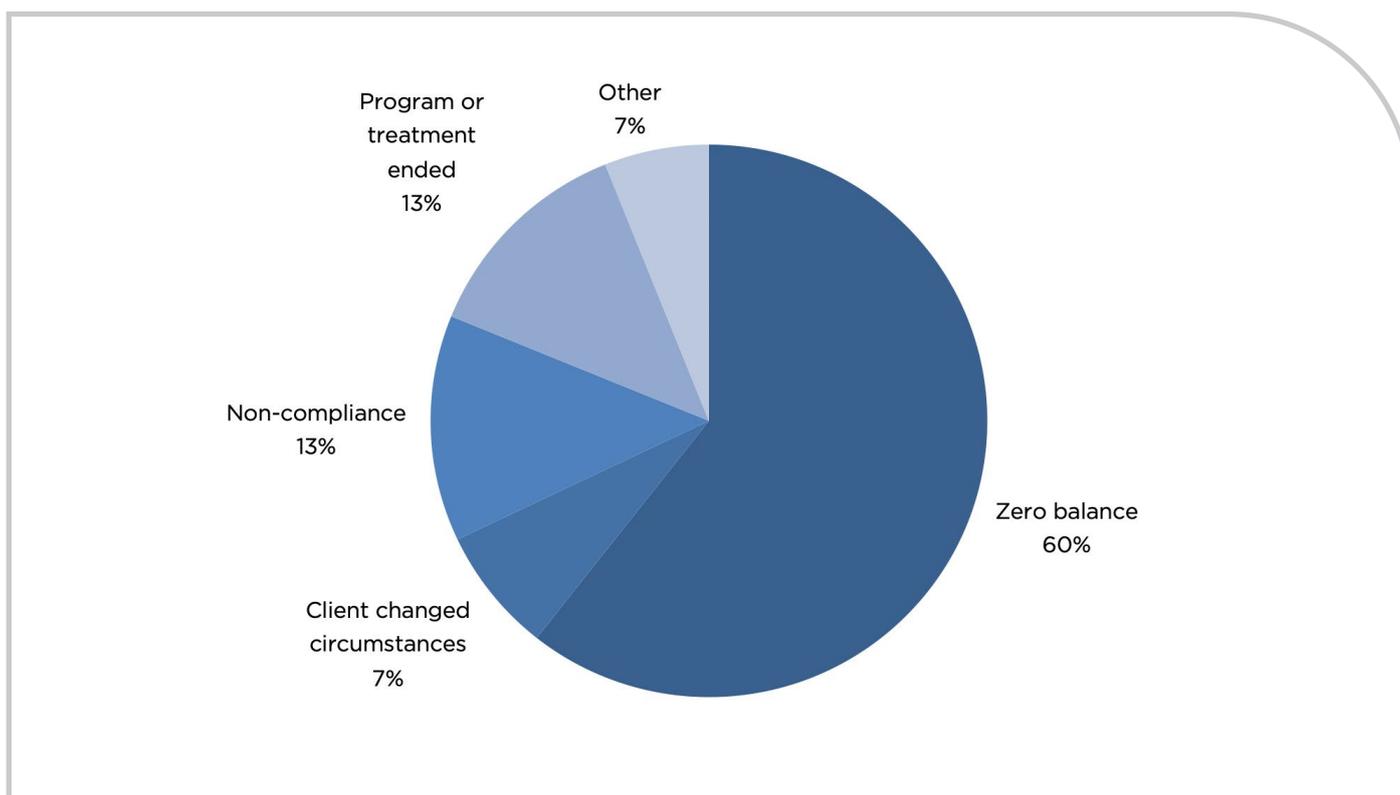
**Table 6.4 - Debt cleared through WDOs in 2019/20**

Month	Value of debt cleared
Jul	\$3,425,802
Aug	\$1,556,850
Sep	\$2,272,048
Oct	\$2,591,540
Nov	\$3,128,341
Dec	\$2,826,559
Jan	\$2,746,451
Feb	\$3,231,539
Mar	\$3,347,782
Apr	\$3,280,973
May	\$2,983,081
Jun	\$3,136,402
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$34,527,368</b>

## Closed WDOs

WDOs can be closed for a number of reasons. One of the most positive outcomes is that a WDO is closed because all debt attached to the WDO has been cleared and there is a zero balance. In 2019/20, 60% of WDOs were closed because of a zero balance, which is an increase of 5% on the previous year.

**Figure 6.2 - WDOs closed in 2019/20 by reasons**



## 07 WDO participants

### Client story

#### Mental health and drug addiction issues

The Legal Aid NSW WDO Service develops and maintains strong relationships with WDO sponsors in their regions. This results in many client referrals when additional assistance is required for their fines, like write-offs of balances after doing a WDO for a long period.

A client was referred to the WDO Service when he was an inpatient in a mental health facility. This facility had assisted the client with multiple WDOs which had reduced his fines by \$15,000 through engagement in mental health treatment and rehabilitation for drug addiction. The client had a remaining fines balance of \$25,856.47.

The WDO team prepared a successful write off application to Revenue NSW for the fines balance. This was of great relief to the client who had experienced multiple disadvantages including homelessness and health issues. And, by this stage had been admitted to another mental health facility due to a rapid decline in their mental health.

## Age

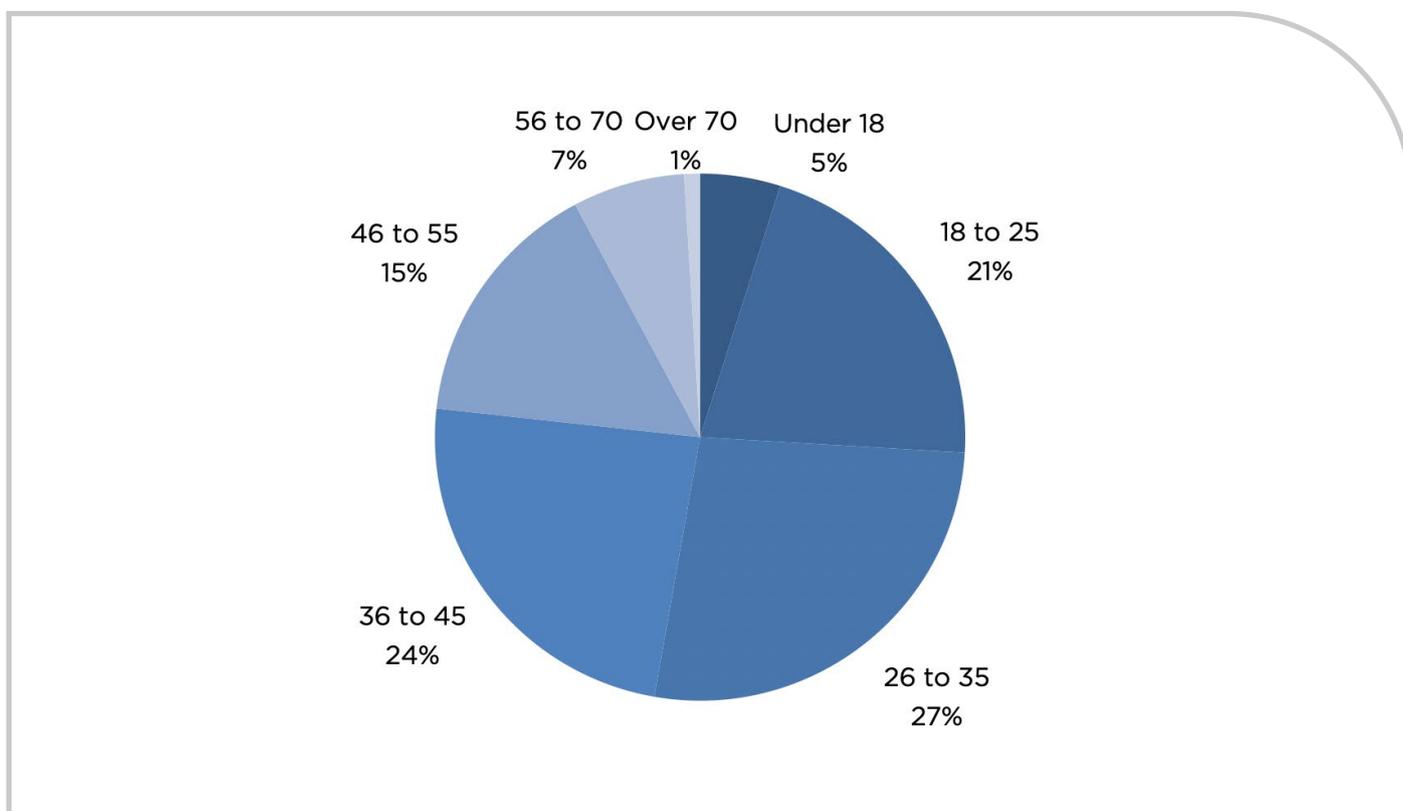
People aged between 26 and 45 accounted for 51% of WDOs approved in 2019/20. Participation by young people remained strong with 1,573 under 18s and 6,766 people aged between 18 and 25 approved for a WDO in 2019/20.

**Table 7.1 – WDOs approved in 2019/20 by participant age**

Age	WDOs approved in 2019/20
Under 18	1573
18 to 25	6,766
26 to 35	8,623
36 to 45	7,708
46 to 55	4,969
56 to 70	2,199
Over 70	311
<b>Total</b>	<b>32,149</b>

The age distribution of WDO participants remained similar to the previous financial year.

**Figure 7.1 – Distribution of approved WDOs in 2019/20 by age**



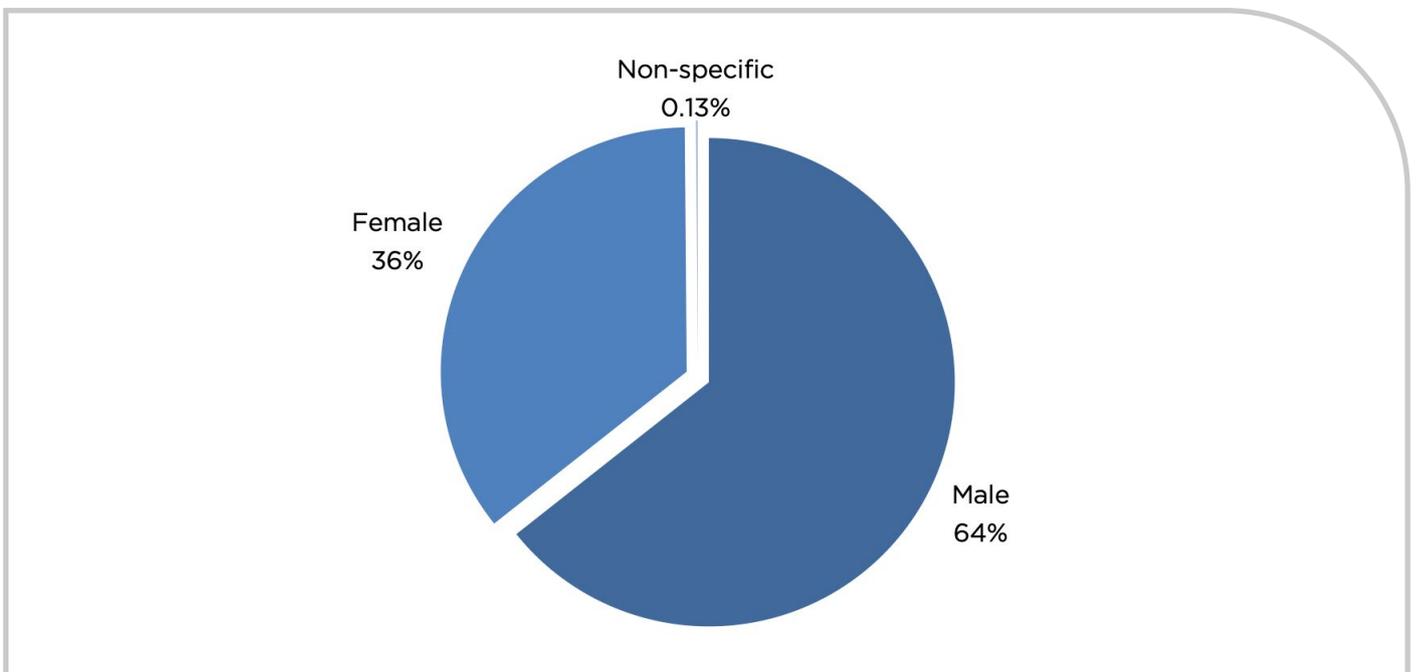
## Gender

In 2019/20, more than 64% of WDOs were for males. There were 41 participants who identified with a non-specific gender.

**Table 7.2 - WDOs approved in 2019/20 by participant gender**

Gender	WDOs approved in 2019/20
Male	20,676
Female	11,432
Non-specific	41
<b>Total</b>	<b>32,149</b>

**Figure 7.2 - Gender of WDO applicants in 2019/20**



## Centrelink status

Sixty per cent of WDO applicants in 2019/20 indicated that they receive a Centrelink benefit. This is consistent with a small downward trend over recent years.

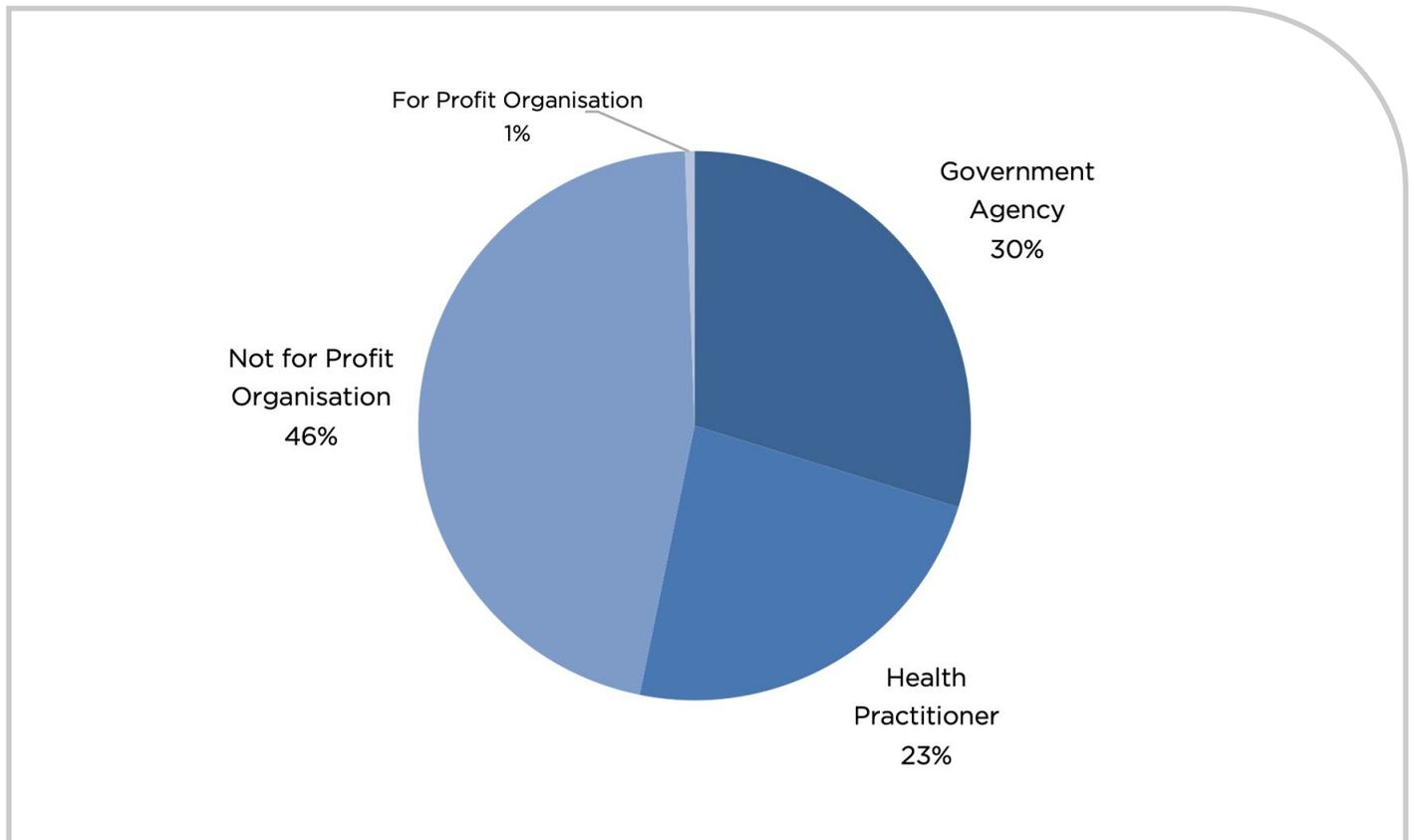
**Table 7.3 - Centrelink status**

Financial year	% of applicants receiving Centrelink
2019/20	60%
2018/19	60%
2017/18	62%
2016/17	65%
2015/16	66%
2014/15	69%

## WDO sponsors

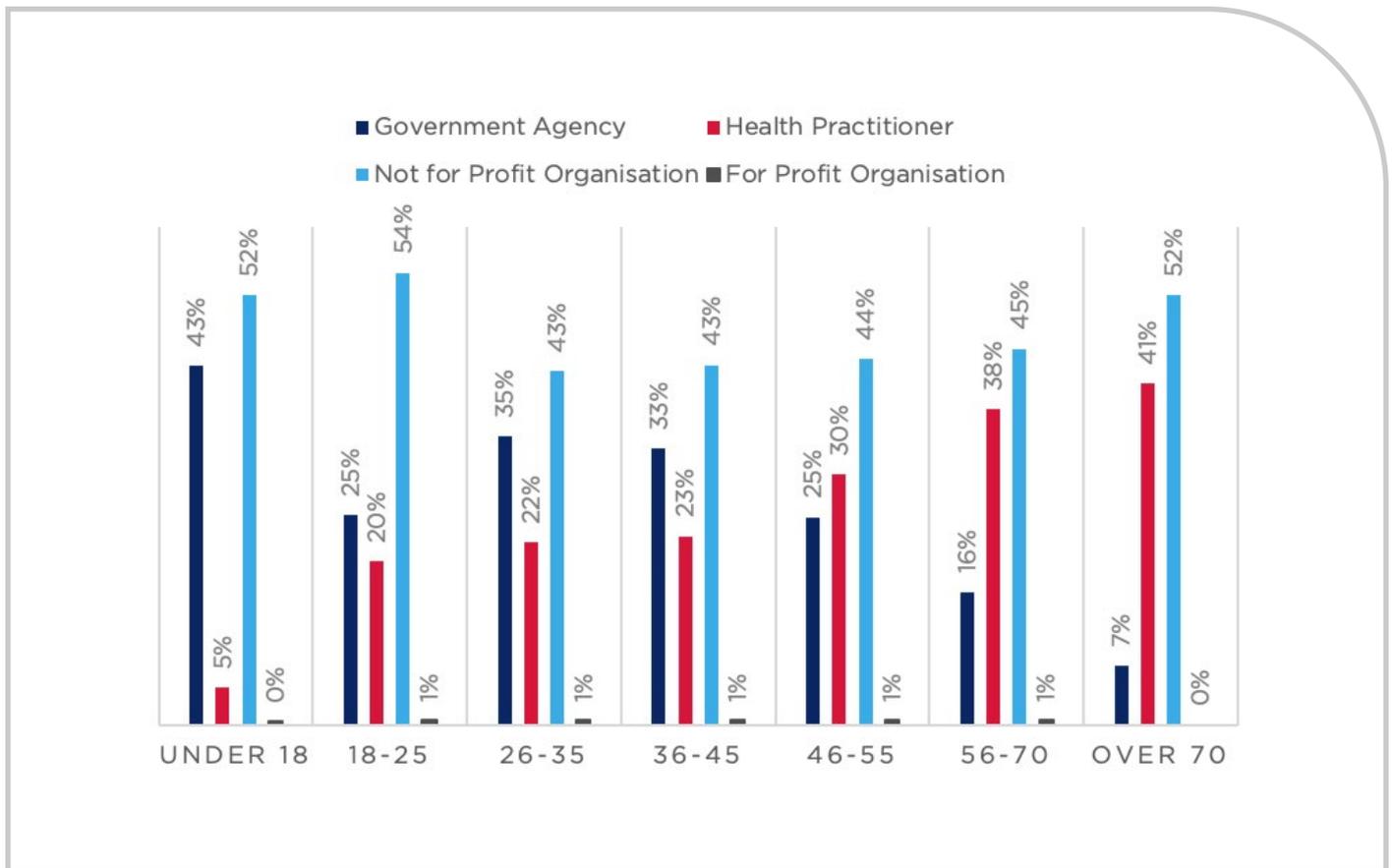
In 2019/20, not for profit organisations were again the biggest supporter of WDOs, helping 14,868 people to participate in the scheme. Health practitioners supported 23% of WDOs approved in 2019/20, representing a 3% increase on the previous year.

**Figure 7.3 - WDOs approved in 2019/20 by sponsor type**



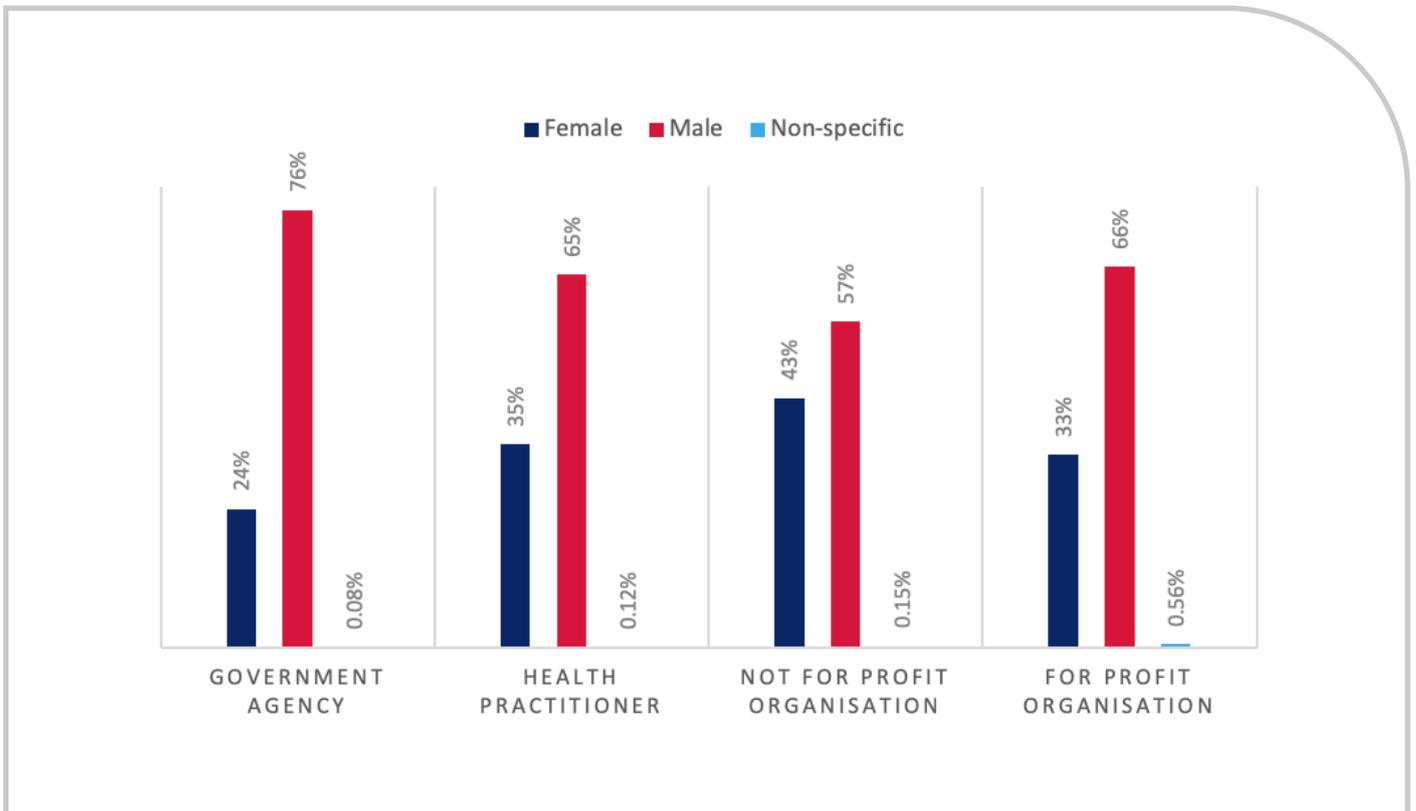
We compared sponsor types by the age groups of WDO participants they supported in 2019/20. Government agencies tended to support younger applicants, whereas health practitioners tended to support older applicants. Applicant age was more evenly distributed for WDO participants supported by not for profit organisations.

**Figure 7.4 - Sponsor type by age range in 2019/20**



We also compared sponsor type by gender of WDO applicants in 2019/20. Males were more likely to be supported by a government agency, whereas females were more likely to seek the assistance of a not-for profit organisation.

**Figure 7.5 - Sponsor type by gender in 2019/20**



## 08 Eligibility & activities

### Sponsor spotlight: Twenty Ten Incorporated

#### Helping young people understand legal problems and where to get help with fines

Twenty-Ten is a WDO sponsor organisation providing a range of services for young people who identify as LGBTQIAP+.

The staff wanted to know more about legal problems so asked the Legal Aid NSW WDO Sydney Metro team to deliver Law Check-Up training to their team. The team found the training very useful to help them understand the range of issues that are legal problems and how Legal Aid NSW can assist with these, particularly clients with fines.

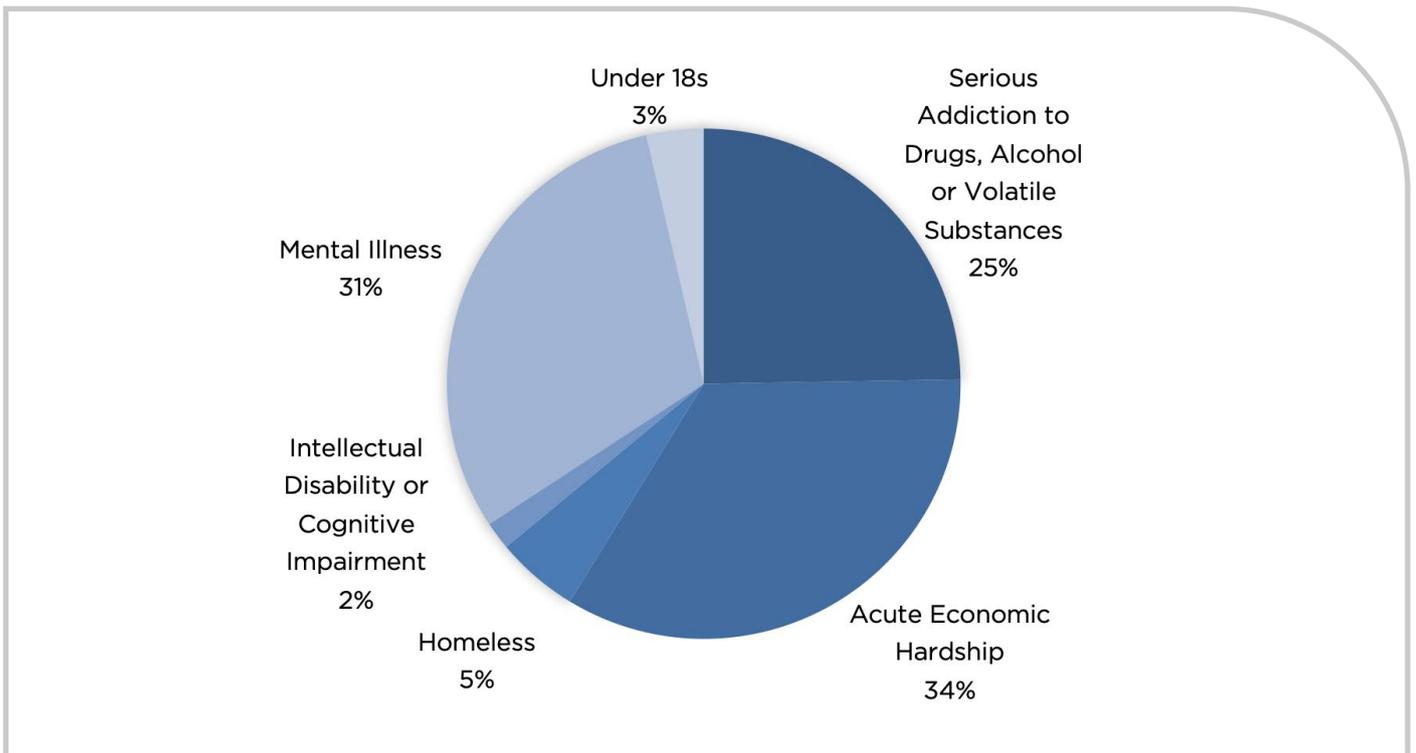
Since that training, they have referred a young client who needed help with an outstanding fine.

## Eligibility

The most common eligibility type in 2019/20 was acute economic hardship, followed closely by mental illness and serious addiction to drugs, alcohol or volatile substances.

Figure 8.1 shows the split between eligibility types. Table 8.1 shows the number of WDOs approved for each eligibility type.

**Figure 8.1 - Eligibility types for WDOs approved in 2019/20**



**Table 8.1 - WDOs approved in 2019/20 by eligibility type**

Applicants can choose multiple eligibility types. Therefore, some WDOs will be counted in multiple categories.

Eligibility type	Number of WDOs approved
Acute Economic Hardship	12,410
Mental Illness	11,195
Serious Addiction to Drugs, Alcohol or Volatile Substances	9,023
Homeless	1,908
Under 18s	1,315
Intellectual Disability or Cognitive Impairment	646

We also compared eligibility types in 2019/20 by participants' gender. Figure 8.2 compares the eligibility types for female and male participants. Female applicants were more likely to apply because of acute economic hardship and less likely to apply because of serious addiction to drugs, alcohol or volatile substances.

**Figure 8.2 - Eligibility types for female and male applicants in 2019/20**

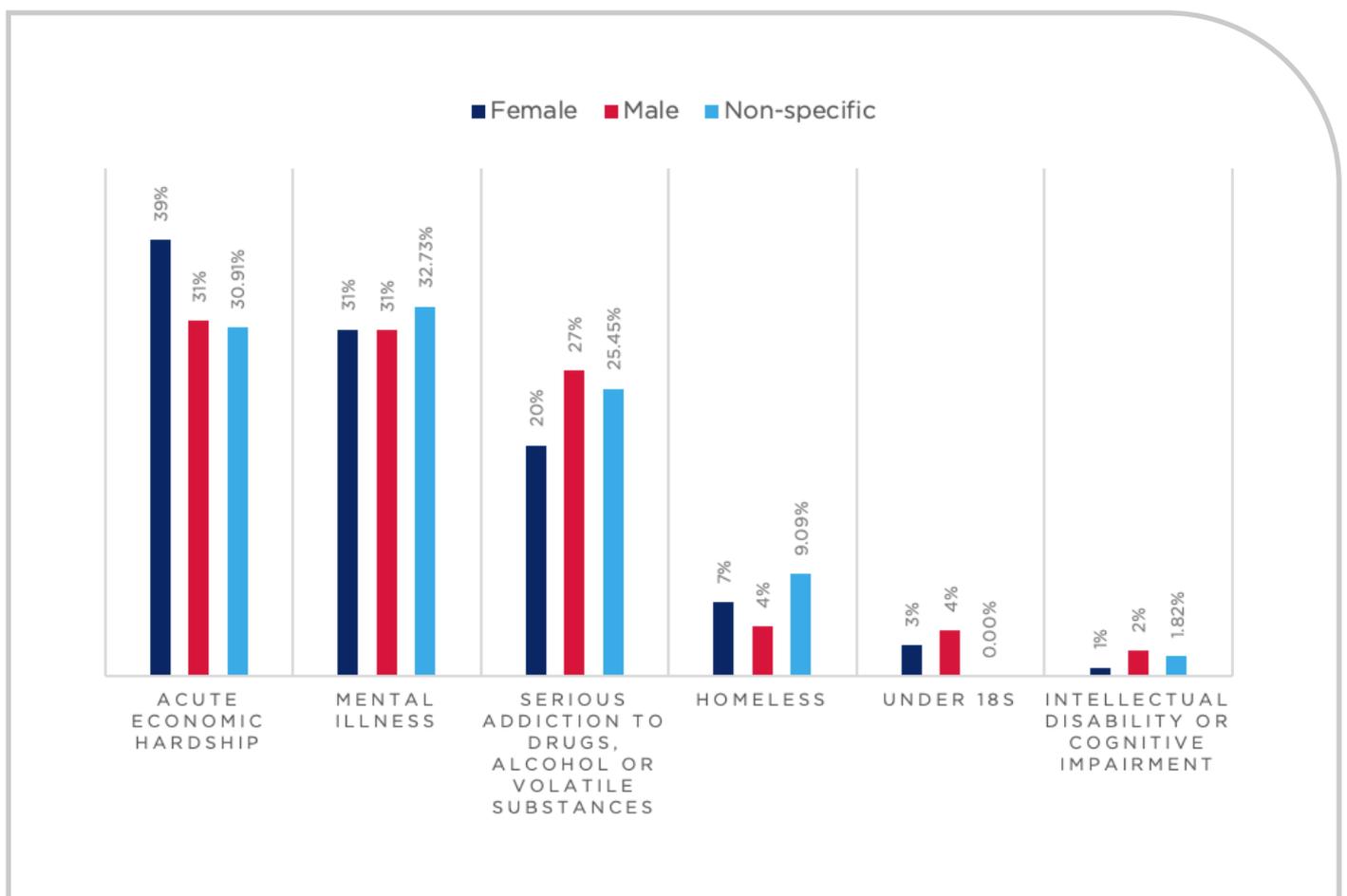
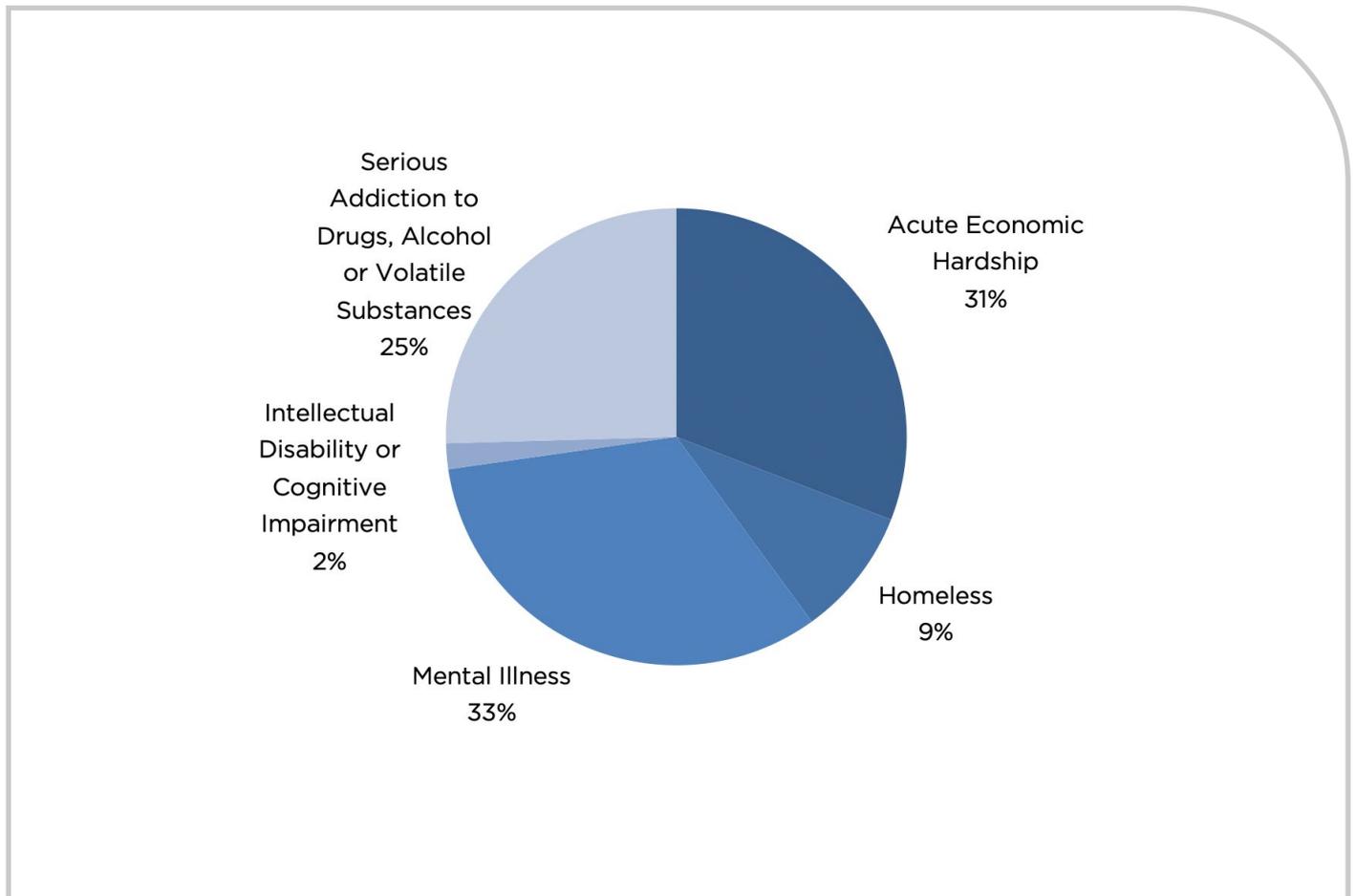


Figure 8.3 shows the eligibility types chosen by people who identify with a non-specific gender. Mental illness was more common amongst this group of applicants.

**Figure 8.3 - Eligibility types in 2019/20 for applicants identifying with a non-specific gender**

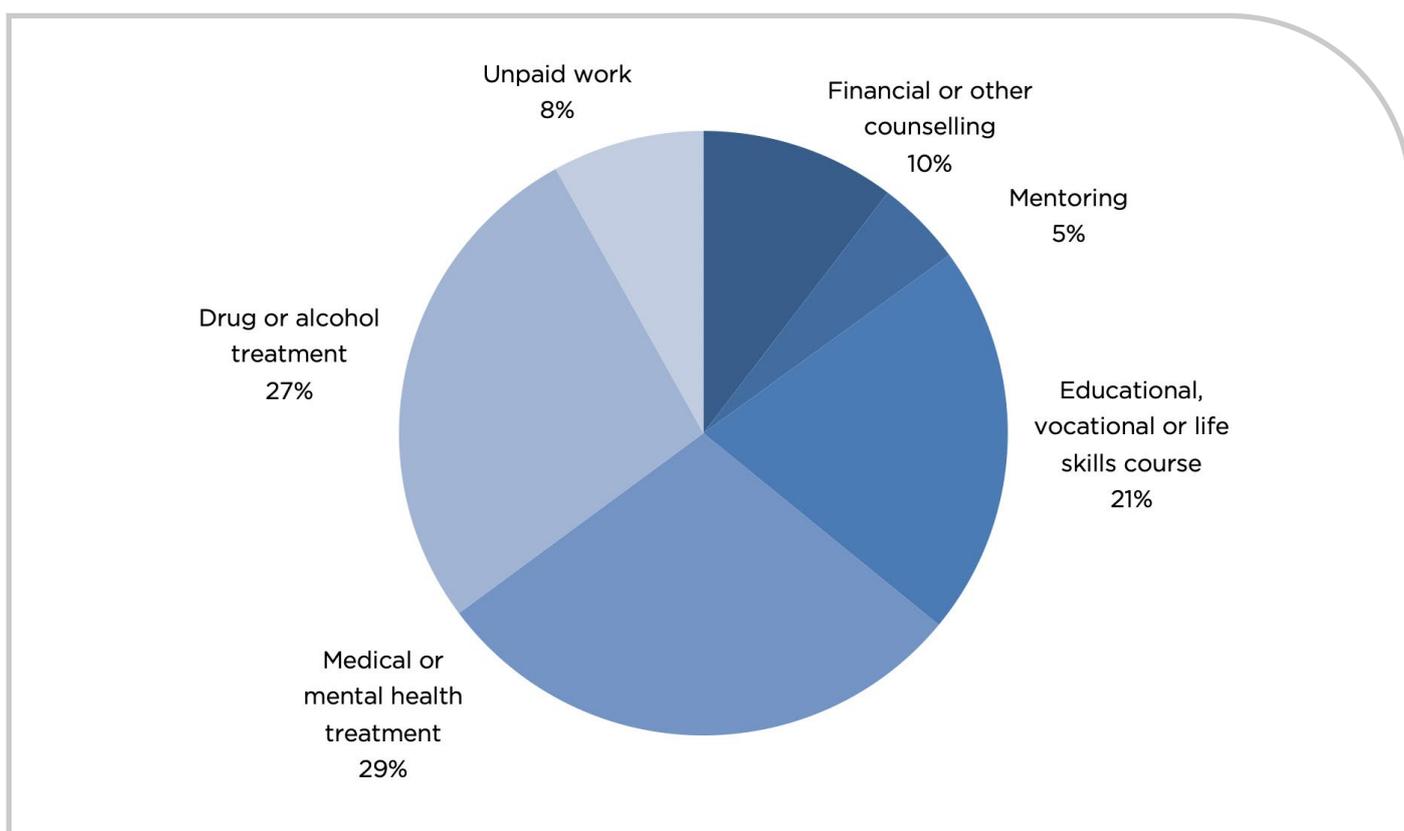


## Activities

The most common activity in 2019/20 was medical or mental health treatment, whereas the most common activity in the previous year was drug or alcohol treatment.

Figure 8.4 shows the split between activity types. Table 8.2 shows the number of WDOs approved for each activity type.

**Figure 8.4 - Activity types in 2019/20**



**Table 8.2 - WDOs approved in 2019/20 by activity type**

Activity type	Number of WDOs approved
Medical or mental health treatment	9,800
Drug or alcohol treatment	9,182
Educational, vocational or life skills course	7,105
Financial or other counselling	3,510
Unpaid work	2,734
Mentoring	1,564

We also compared WDO activity types in 2019/20 by participants' gender. Figure 8.5 compares the activity types for each gender. Female applicants were more likely than males to undertake financial or other counselling and less likely than males to undertake drug or alcohol treatment or education as their nominated WDO activity.

**Figure 8.5 - Activity types undertaken by female and male applicants in 2019/20**

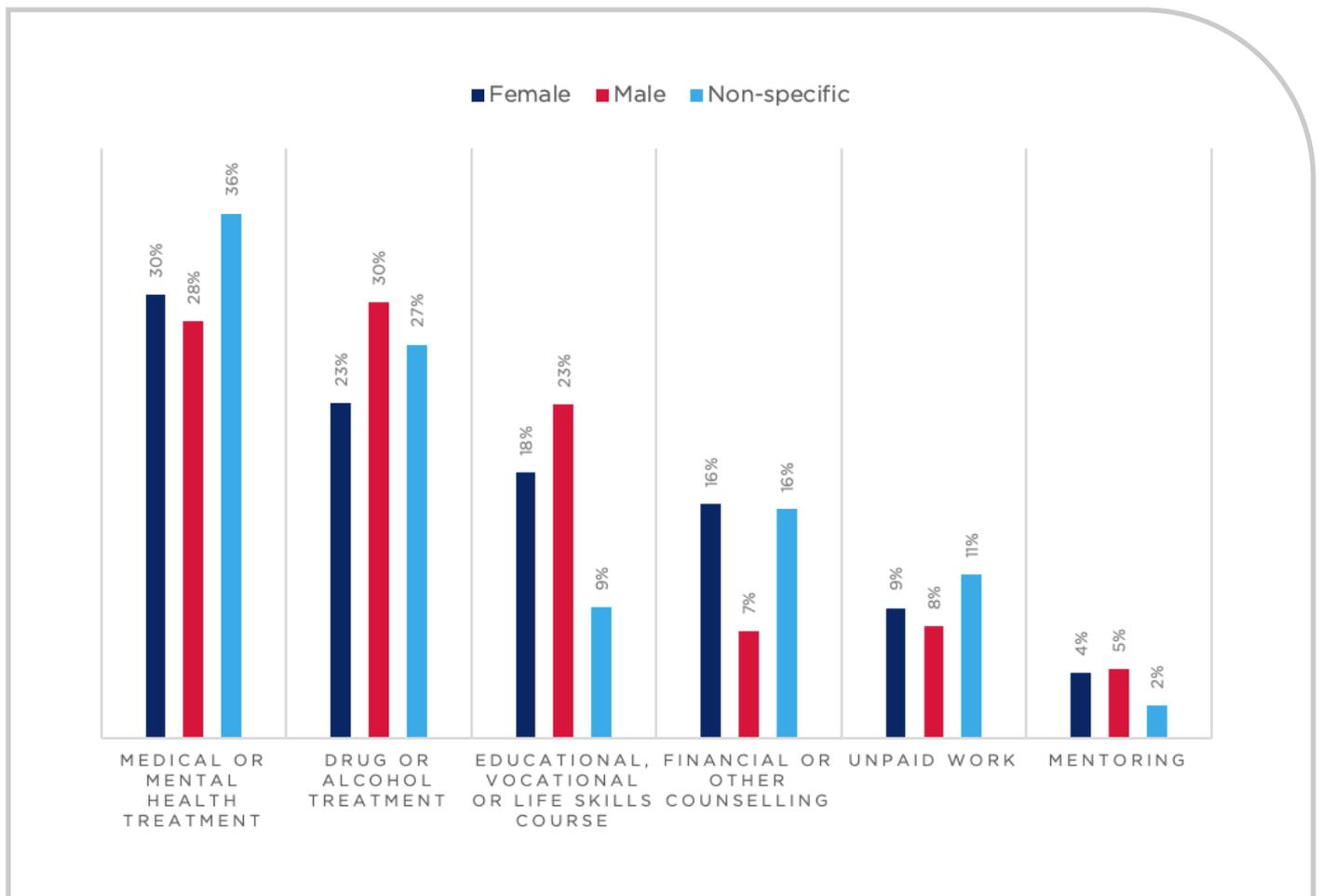
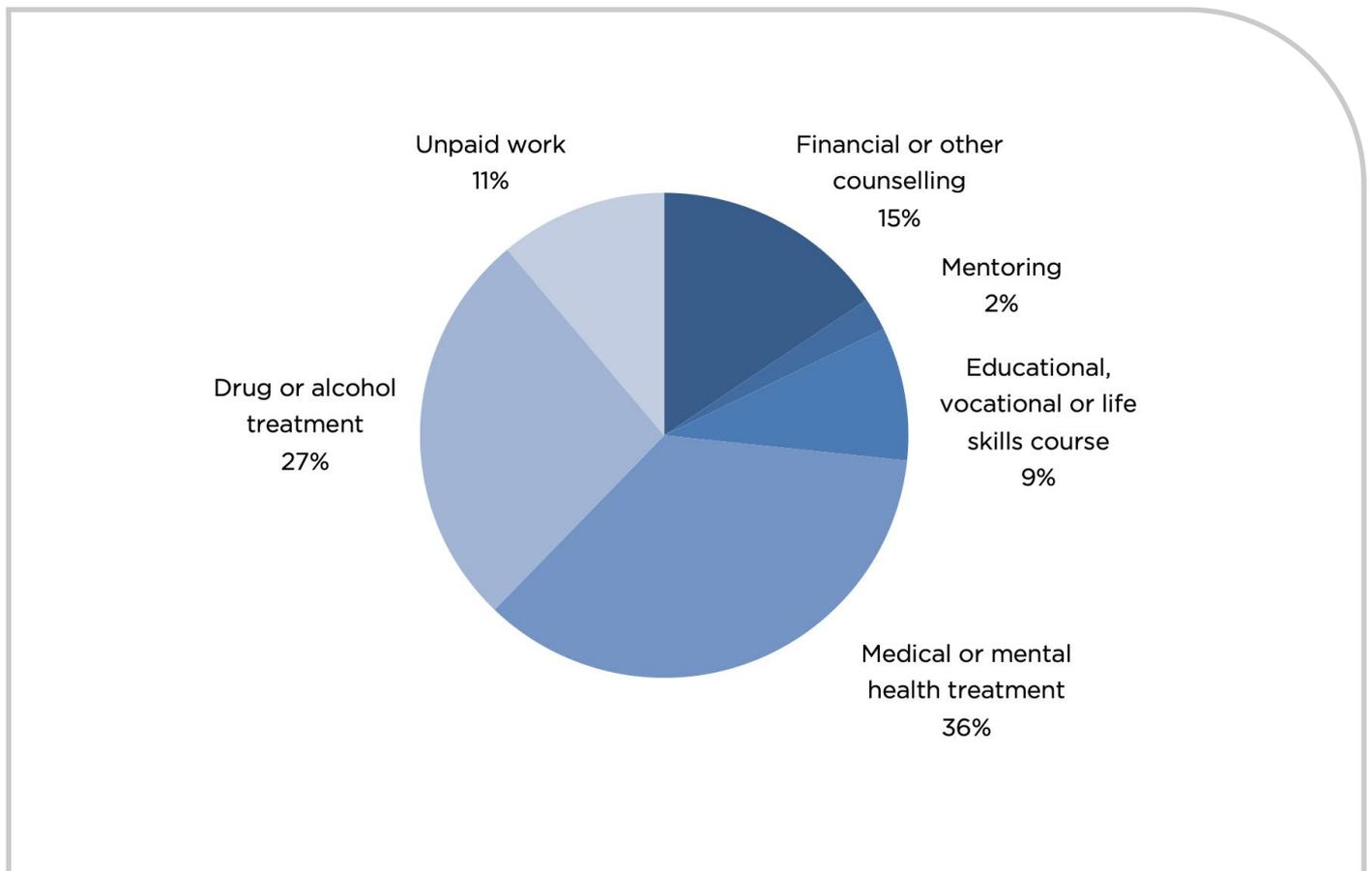


Figure 8.6 shows the activity types undertaken by people who identify with a non-specific gender. Medical or mental health treatment and counselling was more common amongst this group of applicants.

**Figure 8.6 - Activities in 2019/20 for applicants identifying with a non-specific gender**



## 09 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

In this section of the report, we look at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's experience with the WDO scheme.

We are proud that the last financial year continued a trend of strong participation in WDOs by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### Client story

#### **Aboriginal man in remote NSW combining drug and alcohol treatment and volunteering his trade skills**

The Legal Aid NSW WDO team has a strong relationship with the Civil Law Service for Aboriginal communities that provides free legal services in remote areas and Aboriginal communities in North West NSW.

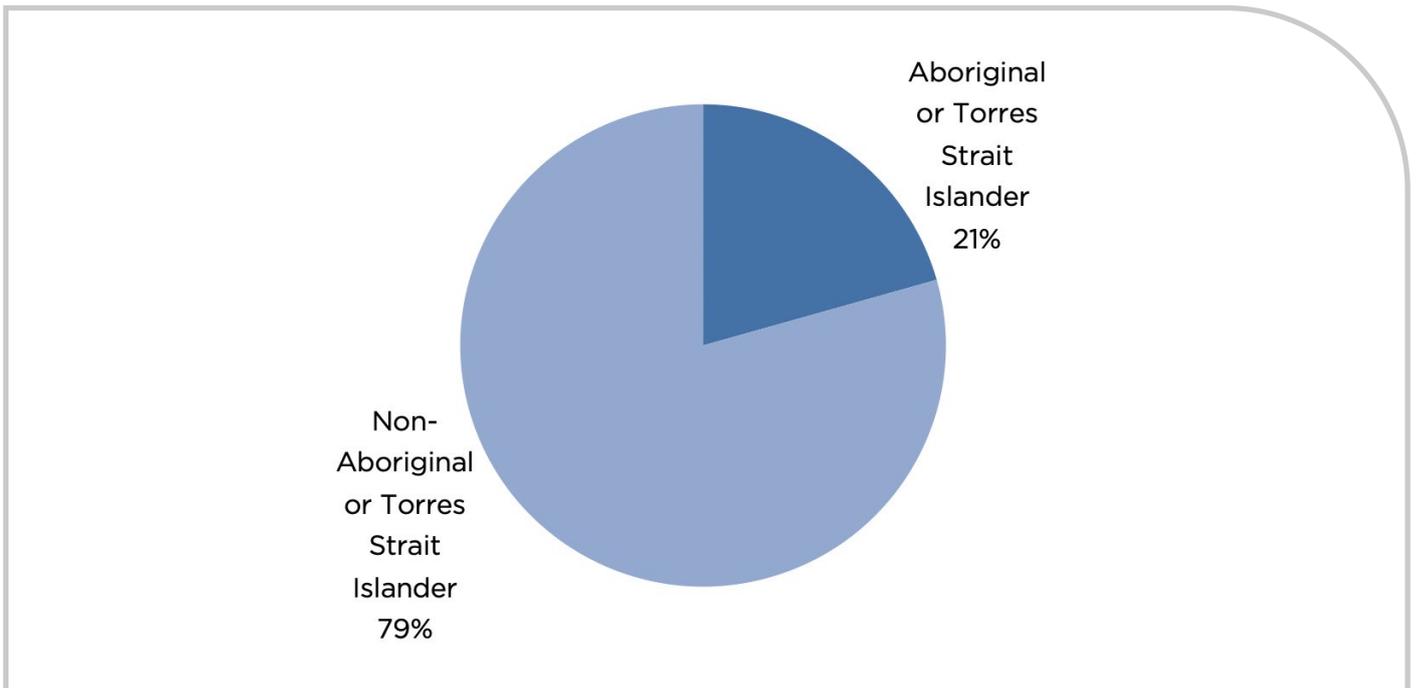
They referred an Aboriginal client with fines from a remote small border town in northern NSW to our service. This client had suffered a serious physical assault that required ongoing physiotherapy for their injuries and help with the depression and anxiety that also followed the event. This client was linked with a WDO sponsor which provided the client with drug and alcohol treatment and volunteer hours. The client's trade skills were put to good use and they did 30 hours volunteering to renovate the kitchen at the facility as well as participating in their treatment.

The WDO team helped the WDO sponsor during this time with training staff to ensure all their WDO systems and records were kept up-to-date for the client. The client has now cleared all of their fines through the WDO scheme and plans to move to the NSW North Coast to make a fresh start.

## Participation

In total, 6,626 WDOs were approved in 2019/20, representing 21% of all WDOs. The average debt of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants was higher than the average debt of non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. In 2019/20, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants cleared \$7.2m of debt through WDOs.

**Figure 9.1 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in WDOs in 2019/20**



**Table 9.1 - Number of WDOs approved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in 2019/20**

Month	Number of WDOs approved	Value of debt attached to WDOs at time of approval
Jul	655	\$1,344,394.42
Aug	694	\$1,395,688.99
Sep	562	\$1,982,331.94
Oct	738	\$2,609,872.86
Nov	645	\$2,238,774.72
Dec	422	\$1,529,439.90
Jan	543	\$1,893,922.27
Feb	601	\$2,006,654.65
Mar	626	\$2,284,783.43
Apr	334	\$1,466,815.49
May	385	\$1,784,255.84
Jun	421	\$1,764,383.59
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,626</b>	<b>\$22,301,318.10</b>

## Demographics

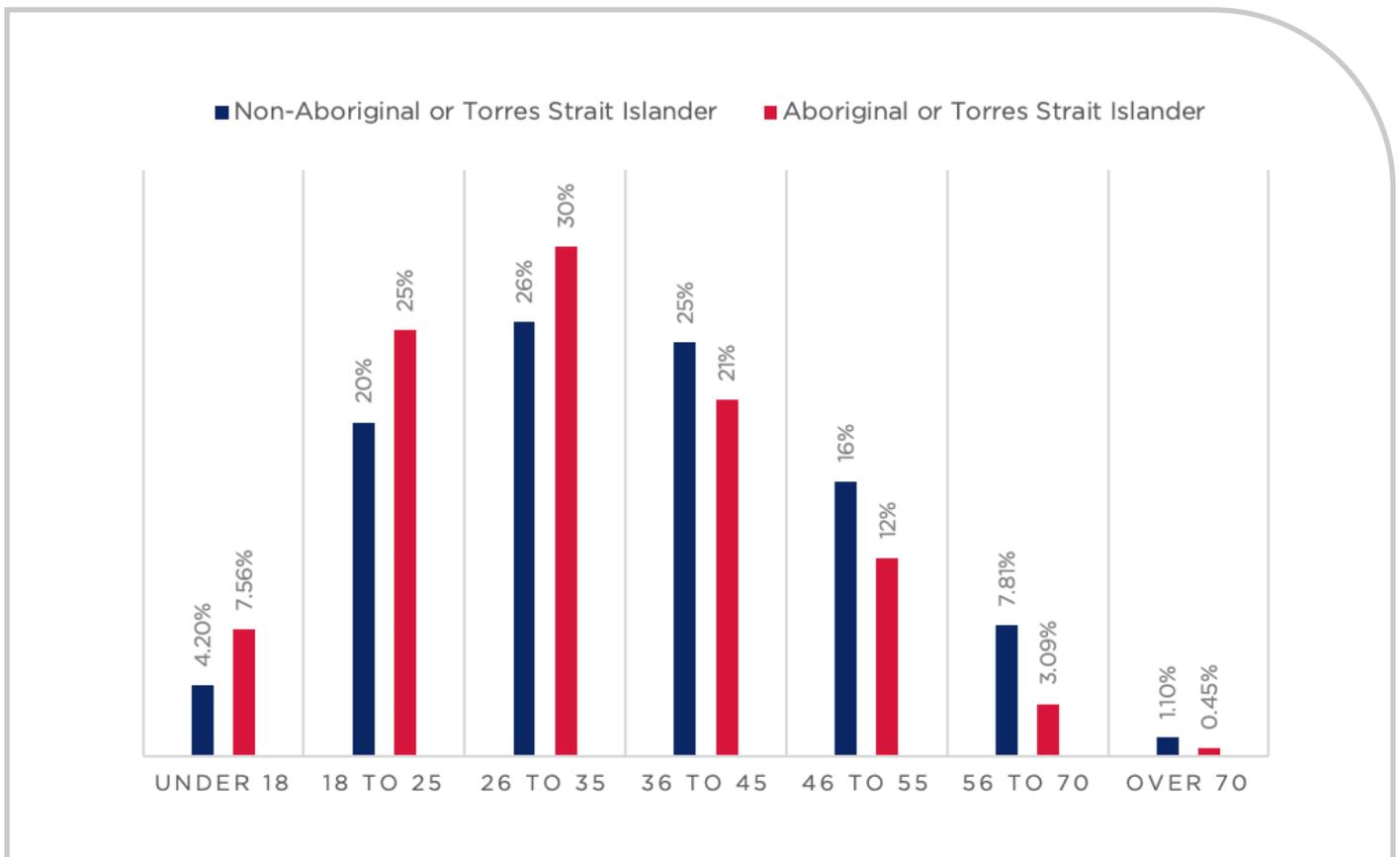
The gender distribution of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander WDO participants in 2019/20 was similar to non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander WDO participants. Table 9.2 shows the number of WDOs approved for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people in 2019/20 by their gender.

**Table 9.2 - Number of WDOs approved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in 2019/20 by gender**

Gender	Number of WDOs approved
Male	4,068
Female	2,549
Non-specific	9

In 2019/20, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander WDO participants tended to be younger than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants; 62% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander WDO participants were under 35, compared with 50% of non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander WDO participants.

**Figure 9.2 - Age of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants in 2019/20**



## Eligibility types

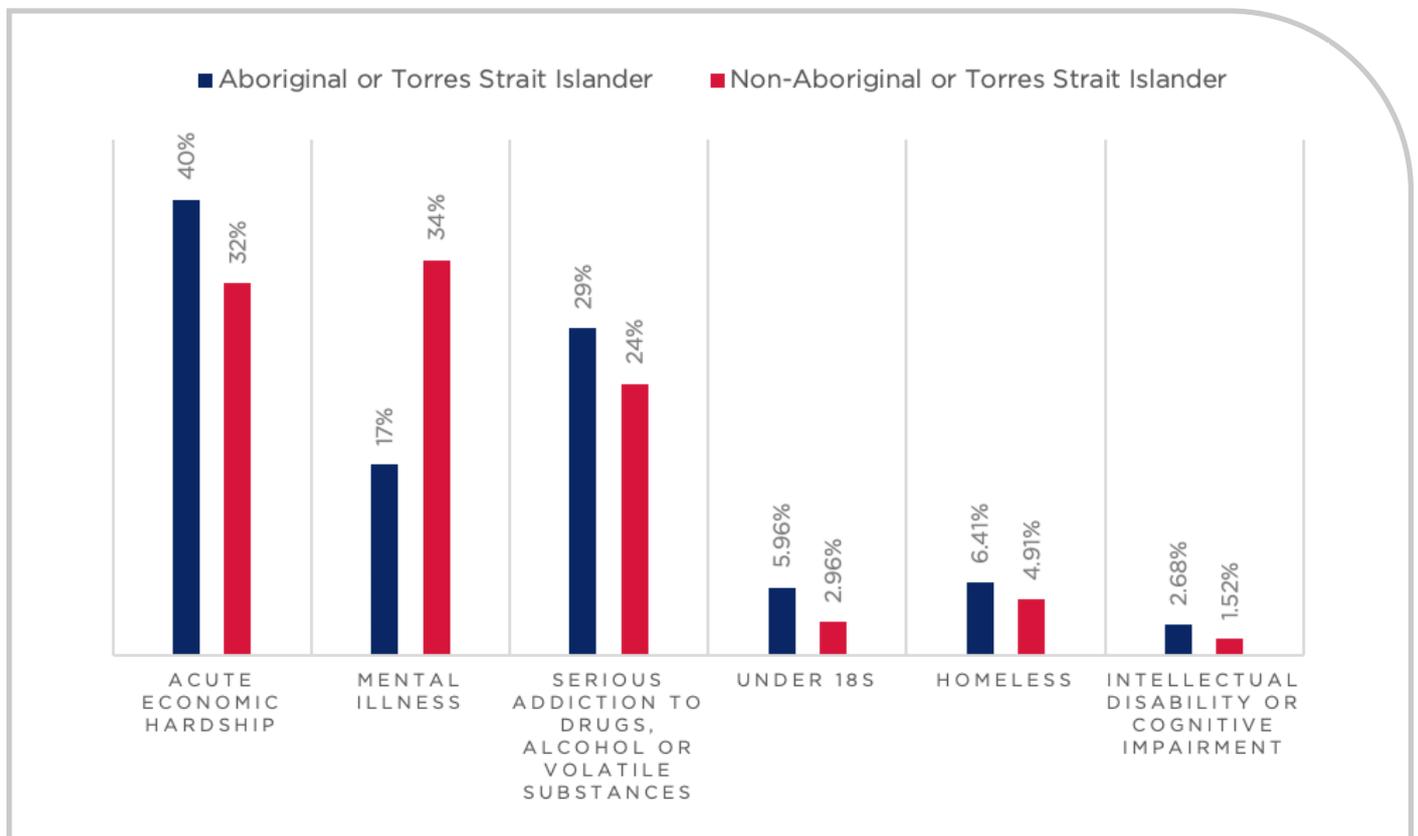
The most common eligibility type for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander WDO participants in 2019/20 was acute economic hardship, followed by serious addiction to drugs, alcohol or volatile substances. WDO participants can choose multiple eligibility types, so WDOs may be counted in multiple categories.

**Table 9.3 - Eligibility types for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in 2019/20**

Eligibility types	Number of WDOs approved
Acute Economic Hardship	3,100
Serious Addiction to Drugs, Alcohol or Volatile Substances	2,227
Mental Illness	1,297
Homeless	500
Under 18s	465
Intellectual Disability or Cognitive Impairment	209

We compared eligibility types for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander WDO participants in 2019/20 with non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants were significantly less likely to apply on the basis of mental illness.

**Figure 9.3 - Comparison of eligibility types for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants in 2019/20**



## Activities

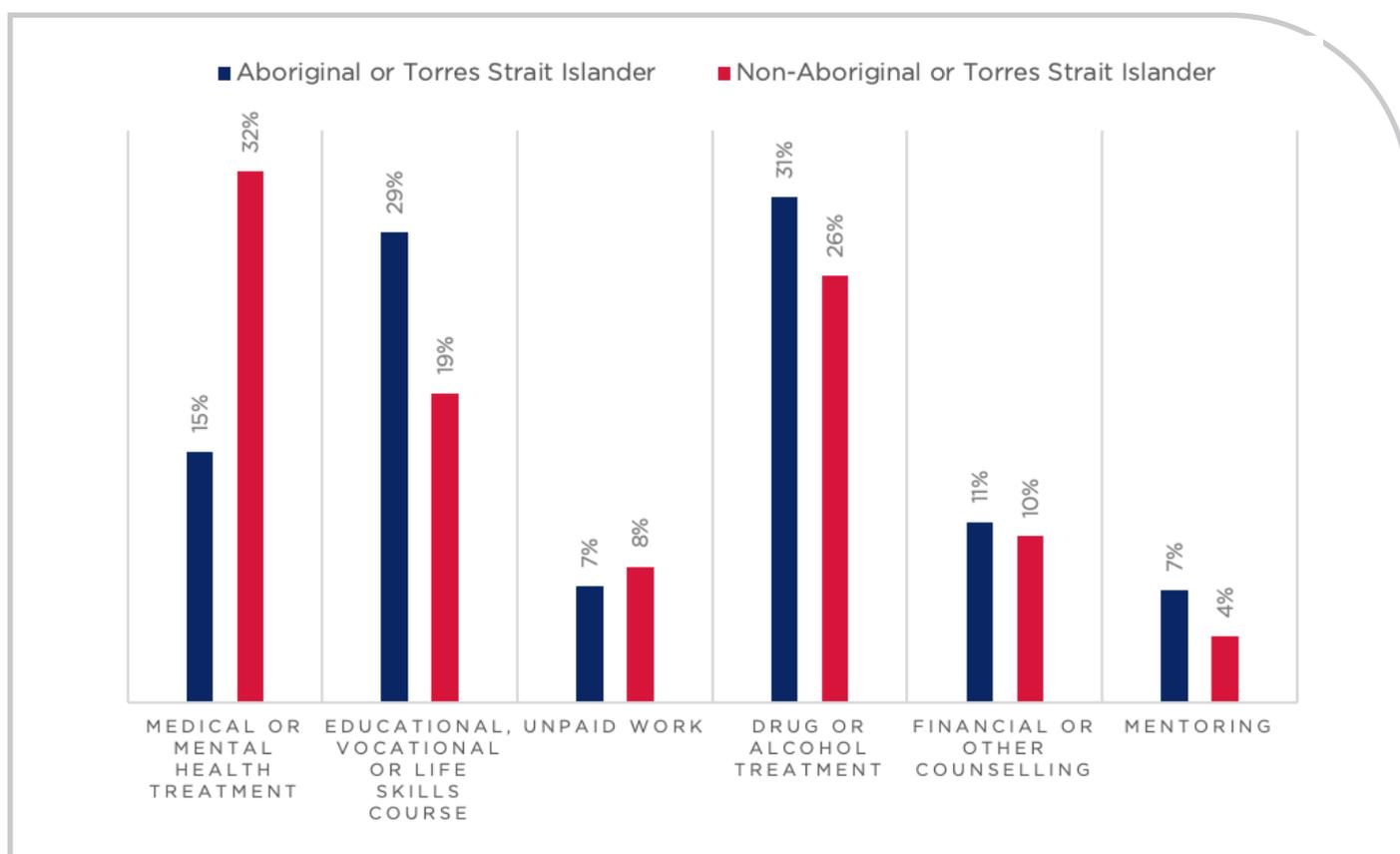
The most common activity types for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander WDO participants in 2019/20 were drug or alcohol treatment and educational, vocational or life skills courses. WDO participants can undertake multiple activity types on a WDO. Therefore, WDOs may be counted in multiple categories.

**Table 9.4 – Activity types for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in 2019/20**

Activity type	Number of WDOs approved
Drug or alcohol treatment	2,181
Educational, vocational or life skills course	2,031
Medical or mental health treatment	1,085
Financial or other counselling	780
Unpaid work	504
Mentoring	484

We compared activity types undertaken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander WDO participants in 2019/20 with non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants were significantly less likely to undertake medical or mental health treatment and more likely to undertake education, vocational or life skills courses.

**Figure 9.4 – Comparison of activity types for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants in 2019/20**



## 10 Culturally and Linguistically Diverse People



In this section of the report, we look at Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people's experience with the WDO scheme.

In the last financial year, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people continued a trend of strong participation in the WDO scheme.

## Sponsor spotlight

### Sydney Multicultural Resource Centre Incorporated (SMRCI)

#### *Helping young and newly arrived people reduce their fines*

The Legal Aid NSW Sydney Metro team has had a long relationship with the SMRCI, firstly as a referring agency, then in 2020 they became a WDO sponsor organisation.

This move was prompted when SMRCI referred a young client under the age of 18 who was newly arrived and had received multiple fines for not having a valid train ticket. The WDO team suggested the organisation's relationship with the young person, which consisted of good rapport and trust, would mean a successful WDO. SMRCI agreed, as they had noticed that newly arrived people were getting fines due to their lack of knowledge of the laws and rules within their new home country and there were minimal services targeted at newly arrived persons who were WDO sponsors.

Our relationship with SMRCI has been strengthened through providing training about the WDO scheme and exploring how best to incorporate WDO activities into their regular operations with clients.



## WDO postcard in community languages

Our WDO postcard is available in 6 community languages:

- Arabic
- Assyrian
- Chinese (simplified)
- Dari/Farsi
- English
- Vietnamese

You can order these resources online through the Legal Aid NSW publications page:

[www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/publications/order-a-publication](http://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/publications/order-a-publication)

These resources were developed by Legal Aid NSW, together with the Diversity Services Unit at the Department of Communities and Justice.



Assyrian



Arabic



Simplified Chinese



Dari/Farsi

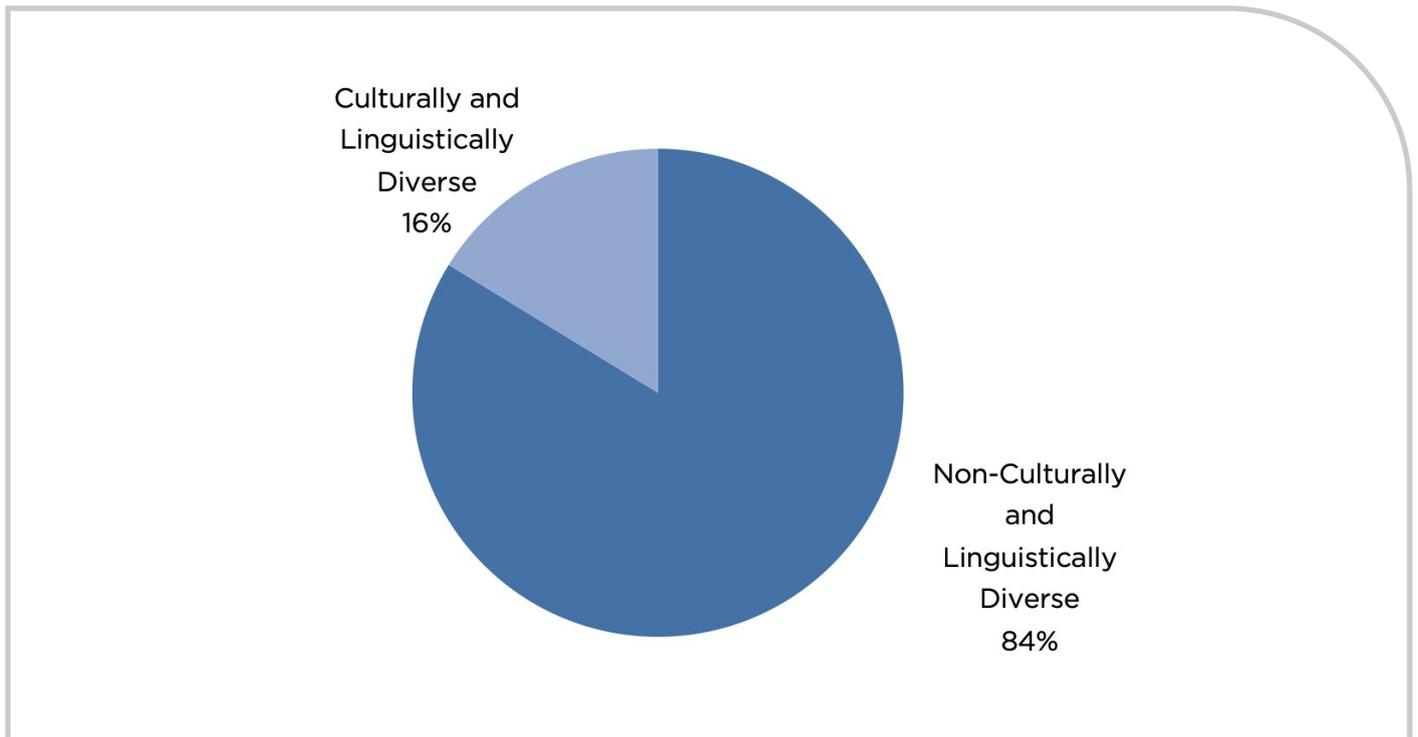


Vietnamese

## Participation

In 2019/20, 16% of WDOs approved were for people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities. This represents a slight increase from the previous year (15%). The average debt per CALD participant was less than non-CALD participants. In total, CALD people cleared \$4.5m in debt through participation in WDOs in 2019/20.

**Figure 10.1 – Rate of participation in WDOs by CALD people in 2019/20**



**Table 10.1 – WDOs approved in 2019/20 for CALD people**

Month	Number of WDOs approved	Value of debt attached to WDOs at time of approval
Jul	552	\$683,054.60
Aug	521	\$699,522.16
Sep	436	\$821,191.26
Oct	491	\$969,289.38
Nov	435	\$968,732.66
Dec	343	\$626,693.69
Jan	427	\$872,956.57
Feb	467	\$1,084,953.19
Mar	453	\$878,946.25
Apr	339	\$803,891.71
May	391	\$867,166.09
Jun	360	\$621,264.76
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,215</b>	<b>\$9,897,662.32</b>

## Demographics

In 2019/20, 63% of CALD WDO participants were male and 37% were female. This distribution is similar to non-CALD participants. Seven CALD participants identified with a non-specific gender.

The age distribution was also similar between CALD and non-CALD participants in 2019/20.

The most notable difference in demographics between CALD and non-CALD people was location, where known, with 67% of CALD participants located in Sydney, compared with 34% of non-CALD participants.

## Eligibility

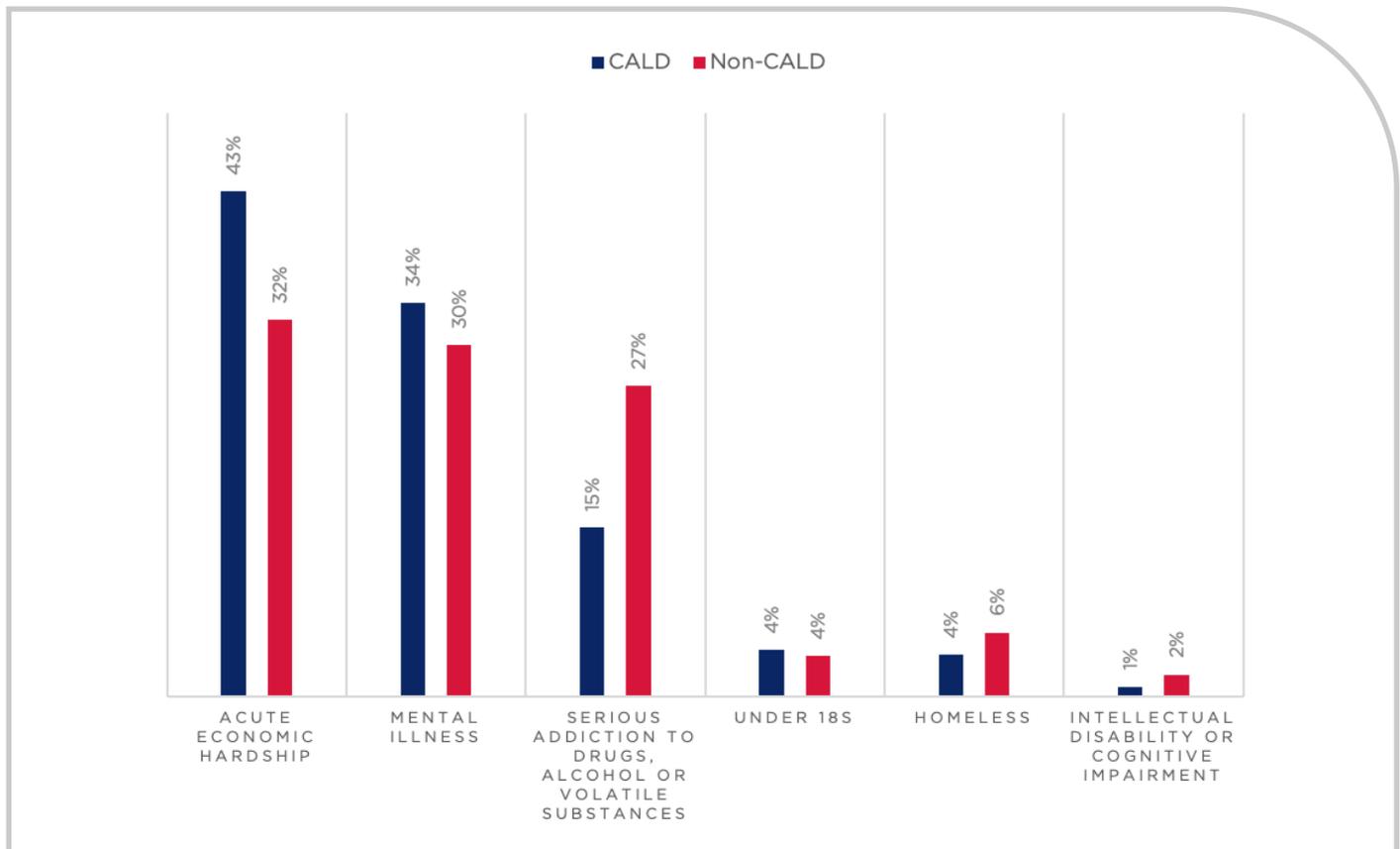
The most common eligibility type for CALD participants in 2019/20 was acute economic hardship. WDO participants may choose multiple eligibility types. Therefore, WDOs may be counted in multiple categories.

**Table 10.2 - Eligibility types for CALD people in 2019/20**

Eligibility types	Number of WDOs approved
Acute Economic Hardship	2,512
Mental Illness	1,959
Serious Addiction to Drugs, Alcohol or Volatile Substances	843
Under 18s	233
Homeless	209
Intellectual Disability or Cognitive Impairment	53

CALD people were much more likely than non-CALD people to apply because of acute economic hardship, and less likely to apply because of serious addiction to drugs, alcohol or volatile substances.

**Figure 10.2 - Comparison of eligibility types between CALD and non-CALD people in 2019/20**



## Activities

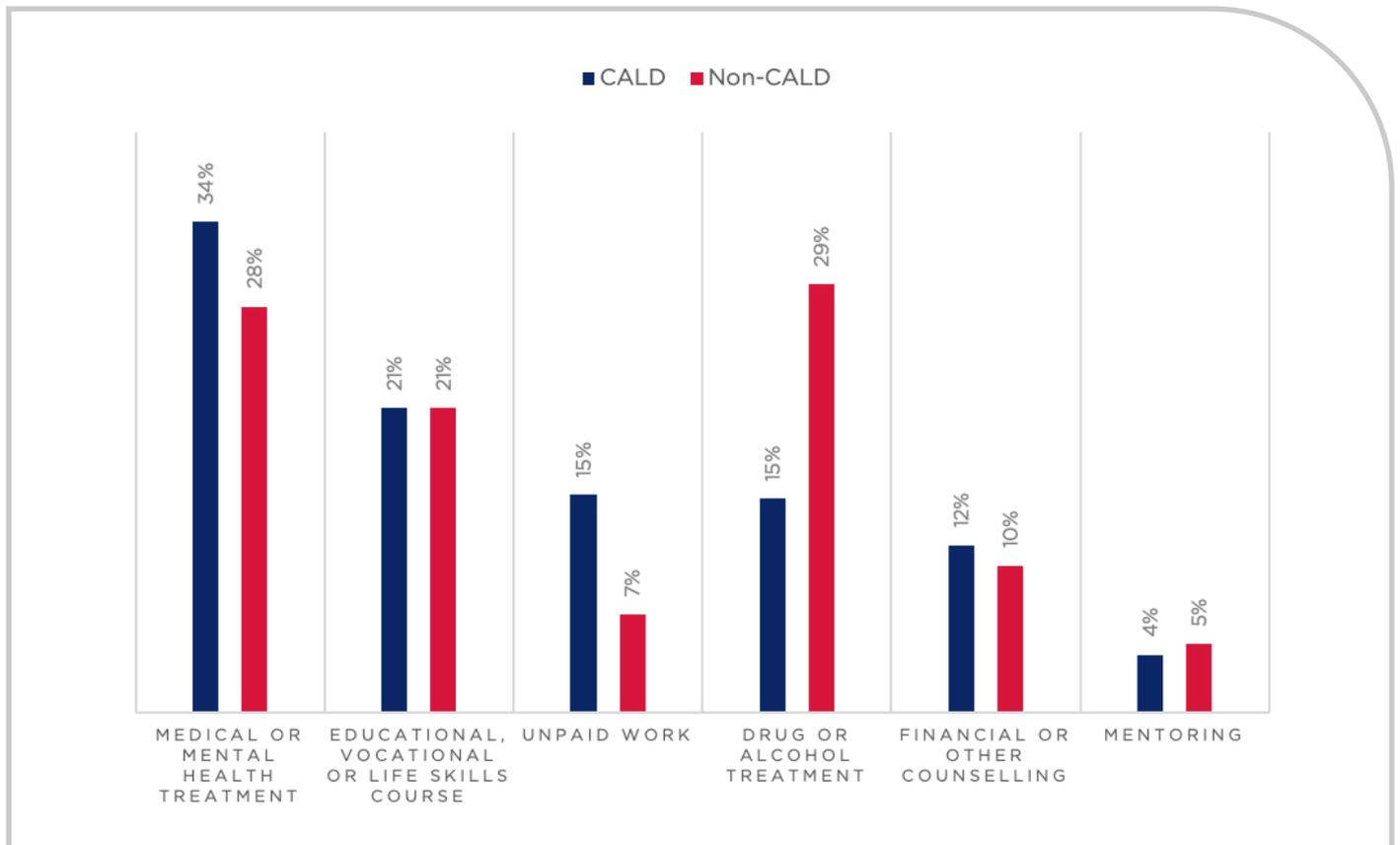
The most common activity types for CALD WDO participants in 2019/20 were medical or mental health treatment and educational, vocational or life skills courses. WDO participants can undertake multiple activity types on a WDO. Therefore, WDOs may be counted in multiple categories.

**Table 10.3 - Activity types for CALD people in 2019/20**

Activity type	Number of WDOs approved
Medical or mental health treatment	1,863
Educational, vocational or life skills course	1,155
Unpaid work	827
Drug or alcohol treatment	811
Financial or other counselling	636
Mentoring	219

We compared activity types undertaken by CALD WDO participants in 2019/20 with non-CALD participants. CALD participants were significantly less likely to undertake drug or alcohol treatment and more likely to undertake unpaid work.

**Figure 10.3 - Comparison of activity types for CALD and non-CALD participants in 2019/20**



# 11 Young people



## Client story

### Young people paying off their fines to get back on track

The Legal Aid NSW WDO team has been building up relationships with youth services in their regions to increase referrals. One young client came to us with over \$15,000 in overdue fines debt. Revenue NSW had imposed a customer business restriction with the Roads and Maritime Service, which meant the client was unable to apply to get their driver licence.

This young client has an intellectual disability and Oppositional Defiant Disorder. They live in a regional area with limited public transport and only had their bicycle to get around.

From 2015 (when they were 16 years old) to 2019, the client received 70 fines for bicycle related offences. On many occasions the police officer who stopped the client issued a range of bike-related fines at the same time. So, the fines debt quickly grew.

In late 2018, the client started counselling and was signed up on a WDO. For approximately nine months they worked with their counsellor to understand and control emotions when in circumstances that triggered anger. While learning these life skills, they reduced their fines debt by \$4,500 but still had significant debt outstanding with Revenue NSW.

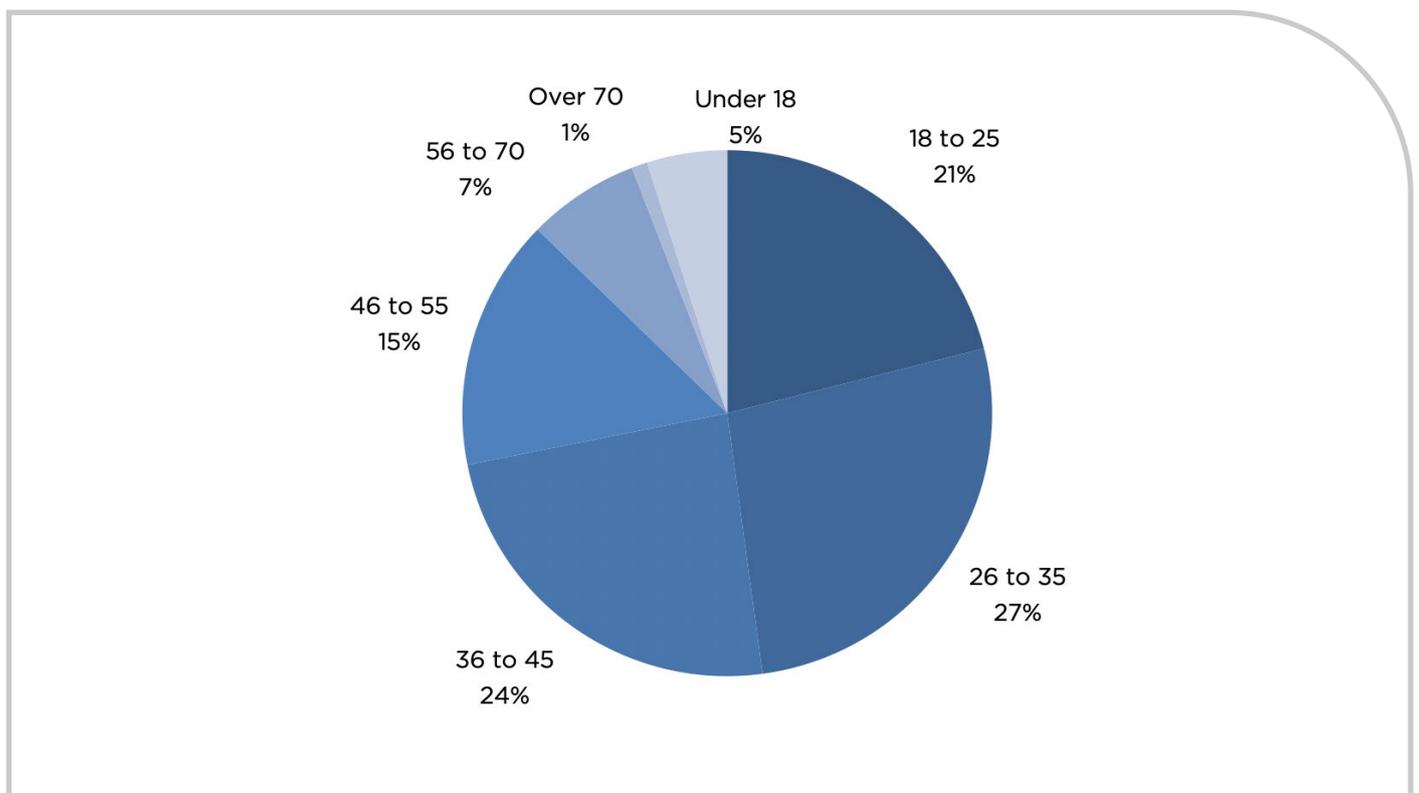
The WDO team submitted a write off application for the balance of the debt on the basis of the client's circumstances and committed engagement with the WDO sponsor. The write off application was successful, and the client is now fines-debt free.

The *Fines Act 1996* and the WDO Guidelines provide specific concessions for young people under 18 and young people under 25. This report provides information about both groups.

## Participation

In 2019/20, 26% of approved WDOs were for people under 25 years of age. This is a similar distribution to the previous financial year.

**Figure 11.1 - Age distribution of WDO participants in 2019/20**



In 2019/20, 1,573 young people under 18 and 8,339 young people under 25 were approved for a WDO.

**Table 11.1 - Number and value of WDOs approved in 2019/20 for young people**

Month	Number of WDOs approved		Debt attached to WDOs at time of approval	
	Under 18	Under 25	Under 18	Under 25
Jul	153	866	\$55,788	\$1,028,860
Aug	160	852	\$64,371	\$1,219,144
Sep	118	760	\$71,350	\$1,754,989
Oct	155	874	\$169,721	\$1,910,504
Nov	132	762	\$76,429	\$1,534,148
Dec	98	532	\$48,609	\$1,227,772
Jan	105	646	\$89,000	\$1,578,754
Feb	181	785	\$198,491	\$,673,054
Mar	137	700	\$117,311	\$1,562,413
Apr	86	482	\$66,202	\$1,181,626
May	116	537	\$92,190	\$1,338,225
Jun	132	543	\$100,285	\$1,257,927
<b>Total</b>	<b>1573</b>	<b>8339</b>	<b>\$1,149,747</b>	<b>\$17,267,417</b>

*Note: Under 25 refers to all participants under 25, including those under 18.*

## Debt cleared

In 2019/20, young people under 18 cleared \$797,478 through participation in WDOs, while young people under 25 (including under 18s) cleared \$7.7m.

## Demographics

In 2019/20, young people under 18 were more likely to be male (70%) compared with people over 18 (63%). The gender distribution of WDO applicants in 2019/20 was similar amongst young people under 25 and over 25. There were 15 participants under 25, including 1 person under 18, who identified with a non-specific gender.

There were 501 WDO participants under 18 and 2,186 participants under 25 in 2019/20 who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. This represents a participation rate of 32% for under 18s and 26% for under 25s. This is much higher than the overall participation rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of 21%.

There were 302 WDO participants under 18 and 1,396 participants under 25 in 2019/20 who were from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities. This represents a participation rate of 19% of under 18s and 17% of under 25s, which is slightly higher than the overall CALD participation rate of 16%.

Young people participating in WDOs were less likely to receive a Centrelink benefit in 2019/20. 15.5% of young people under 18 and 49.5% of young people under 25 received a Centrelink benefit, compared with 63.5% of WDO participants over 25.

## Eligibility types

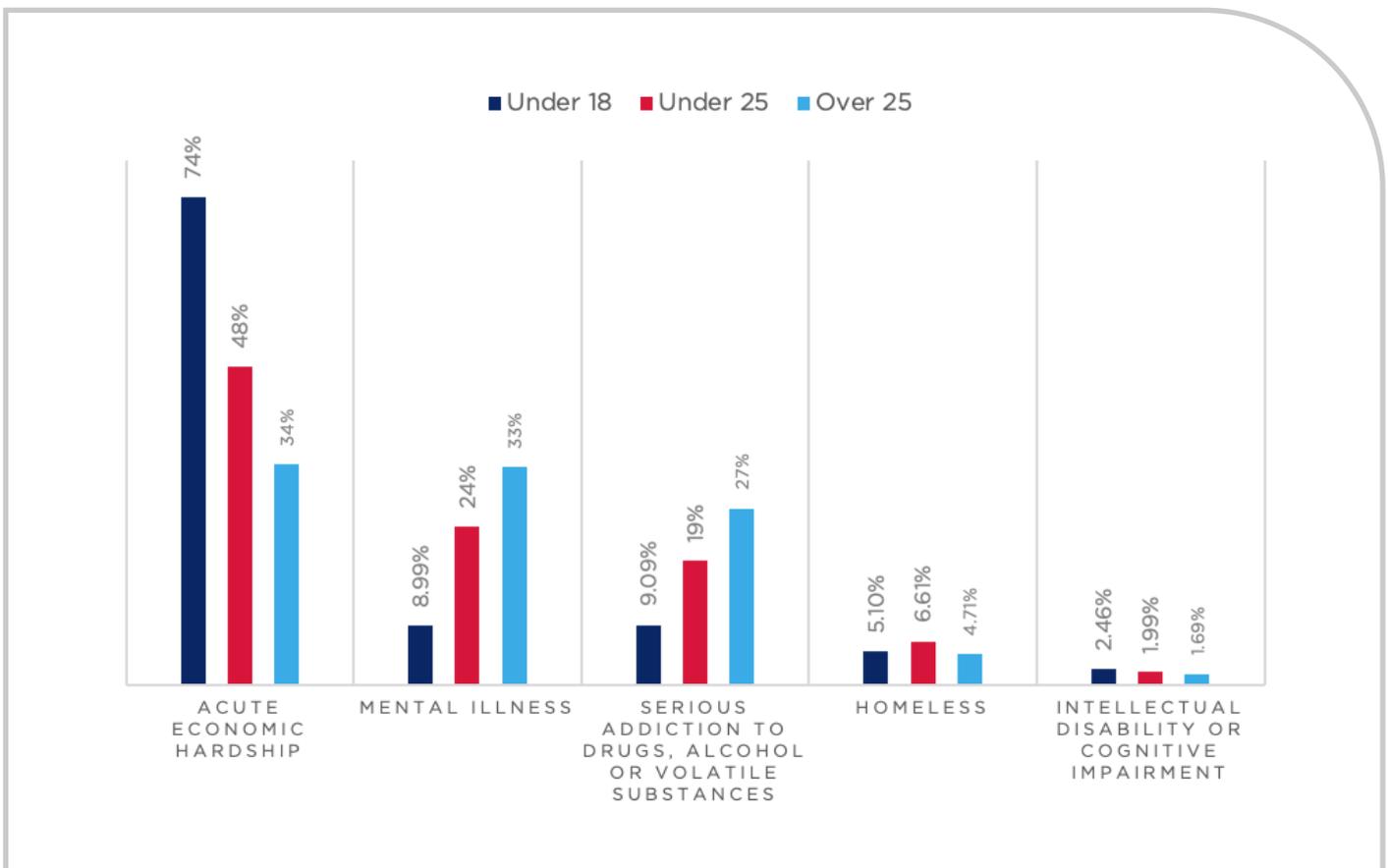
The most common eligibility type for young people, in both the under 18 and under 25 categories, was acute economic hardship, followed by mental illness and serious addiction to drugs, alcohol or volatile substances.

**Table 11.2 – WDO eligibility types for young people in 2019/20**

Eligibility type	Number of WDOs approved	
	Under 18	Under 25
Acute Economic Hardship	1,604	4,783
Mental Illness	194	2,374
Serious Addiction to Drugs, Alcohol or Volatile Substances	196	1,871
Homeless	110	653
Intellectual Disability or Cognitive Impairment	53	197

Young people under 18 were more likely than people over 18 to apply on the basis of acute economic hardship. This is unsurprising, given changes to the WDO Guidelines in 2017 to deem all under 18s as being in acute economic hardship. Under 25s were also more likely than over 25s to apply on the basis of acute economic hardship.

**Figure 11.2 – Eligibility types for WDO participants in 2019/20 by age range**



## Activities

In 2019/20, the most common activity for under 18s was mentoring, followed by educational, vocational or life skills courses. The most common activity for under 25s was medical or mental health treatment, followed closely by drug or alcohol treatment and educational, vocational or life skills courses.

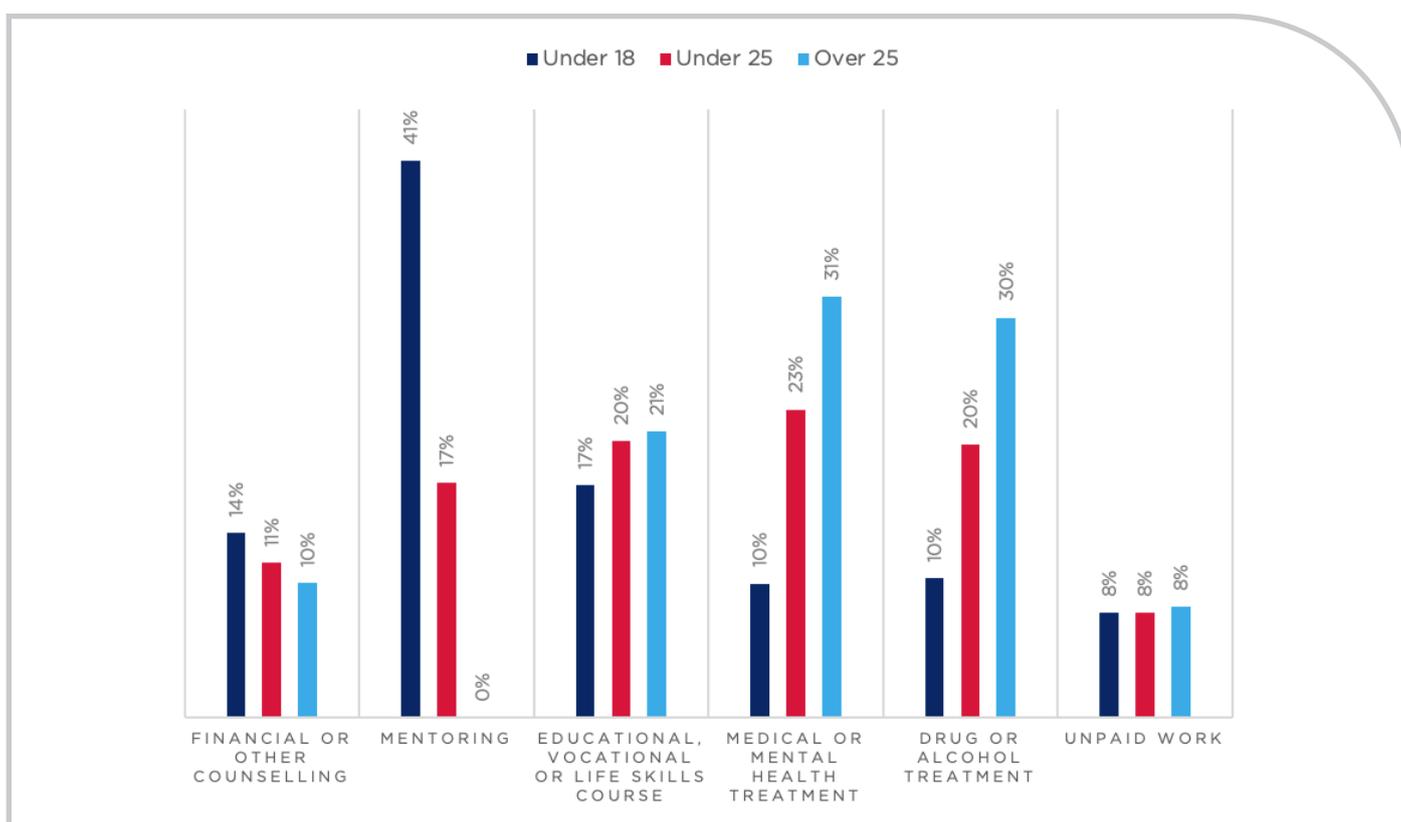
**Table 11.3 - WDO activities undertaken by young people in 2019/20**

Activity type	Number of WDOs approved	
	Under 18	Under 25
Mentoring	756	1,561
Educational, vocational or life skills course	316	1,834
Financial or other counselling	251	1,031
Drug or alcohol treatment	190	1,812
Medical or mental health treatment	182	2,047
Unpaid work	142	695

The distribution of activities across age ranges was stable for activities which attract an hourly cut-out rate (educational, vocational or life skills courses; financial or other counselling and unpaid work). There was variation across the compliance-based activities (medical or mental health treatment, drug or alcohol treatment and mentoring), however, this is to be expected because mentoring is only available to people under 25 years of age.

In the under 18 age range, participants were more likely to undertake mentoring than drug or alcohol treatment or medical or mental health treatment, compared to under 25s.

**Figure 11.3 - WDO activities undertaken in 2019/20 by age range**



## 12 Location of WDO participants

### TAFE NSW and Legal Aid NSW

TAFE NSW campuses across NSW have been WDO sponsors since the scheme commenced. In November 2019, Legal Aid NSW started the process of helping TAFE NSW restructure and centralise their WDO process into six WDO regions across NSW.

Legal Aid NSW helped to add new TAFE WDO administrators onto the new portal IDs, de-activated old portal contacts, organised online WDO training with the Student Services managers and helped to update their internal WDO guidelines.

We also developed new TAFE-specific sponsor resources, such as WDO application form and activity log sheet to help frontline staff comply with their sponsor obligations.

New TAFE NSW activities in this period include:

#### **TAFE fee-free short courses**

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, TAFE NSW, in partnership with the NSW government, offered a number of fee-free short courses to help people upgrade or learn new skills in areas such as administration skills; digital impact; health and medical knowledge and leadership skills.

In addition, TAFE NSW Bushfire Relief courses were offered to eligible people in regions devastated by the bushfires. These fee-free short courses are tailored to provide skills needed to help rebuild devastated communities in Northern and Southern NSW.

The Legal Aid NSW WDO teams have been promoting these short courses to clients as a WDO activity option, particularly in regional areas and during COVID-19 restrictions.

#### **Place-based project in Mt Druitt, Moree and Bourke**

Legal Aid NSW has partnered with Just Reinvest and TAFE NSW to promote TAFE courses and WDOs to Aboriginal students across Mt Druitt, Bourke and Moree communities. The project aims to promote current COVID fee-free courses as well as the Smart & Skilled courses that Aboriginal students can do on a fee-free basis. These regions were chosen as they all have large fines debt amongst the Aboriginal community.

A key objective of the WDO Governance Group is ensuring the WDO scheme is accessible to all people in NSW. In particular, this is a focus for Legal Aid NSW which has specialist staff across NSW who continue to recruit new WDO sponsors in all areas of the state, as well as supporting existing sponsors through education and training.

In this section of the report we have provided heat maps showing the geographic dispersion of approved WDOs.

Location is determined by the WDO participant's residential postcode. Where a customer elected to use the sponsor's address for the WDO (for example, because they are in a residential facility or homeless), the sponsor's postcode was used.

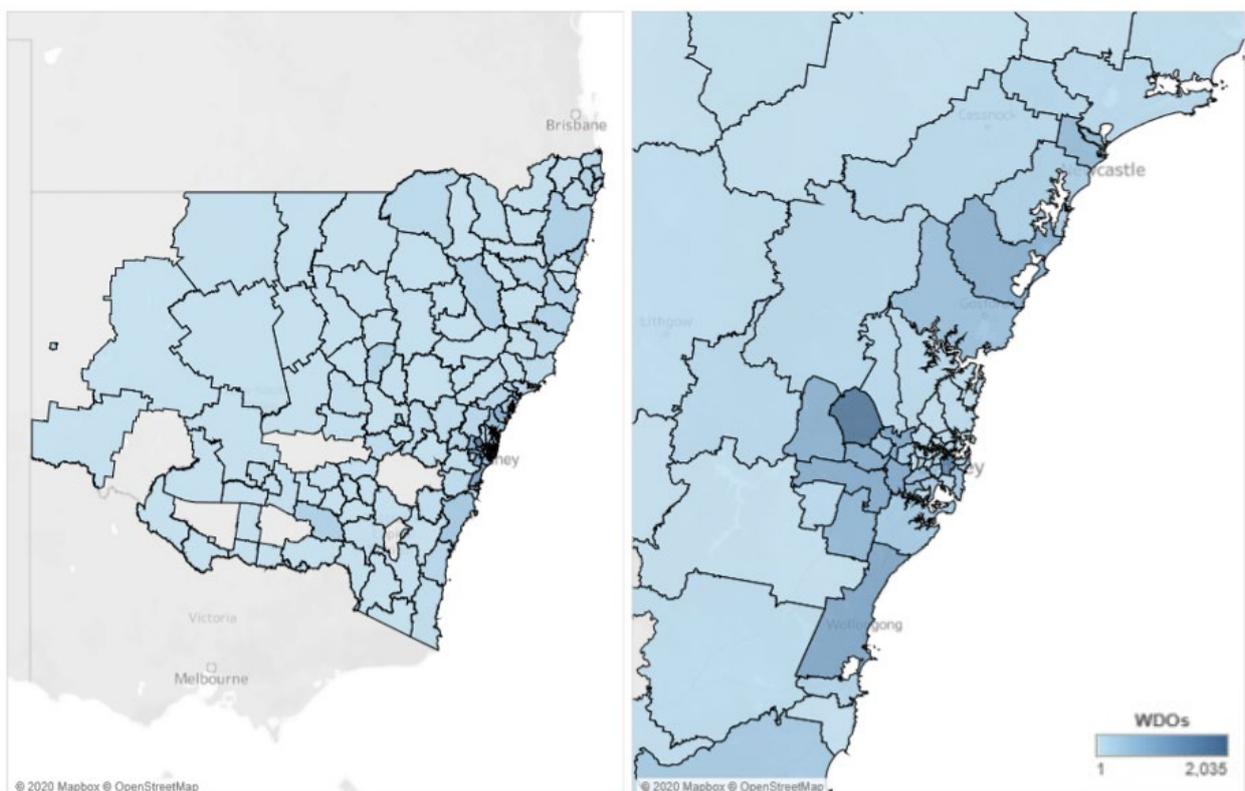
WDOs supported by Corrective Services NSW or Youth Justice NSW for people in custody were excluded so areas with correctional facilities are not over-represented.

The figures on the following pages show the WDO scheme has reached community members right across NSW.

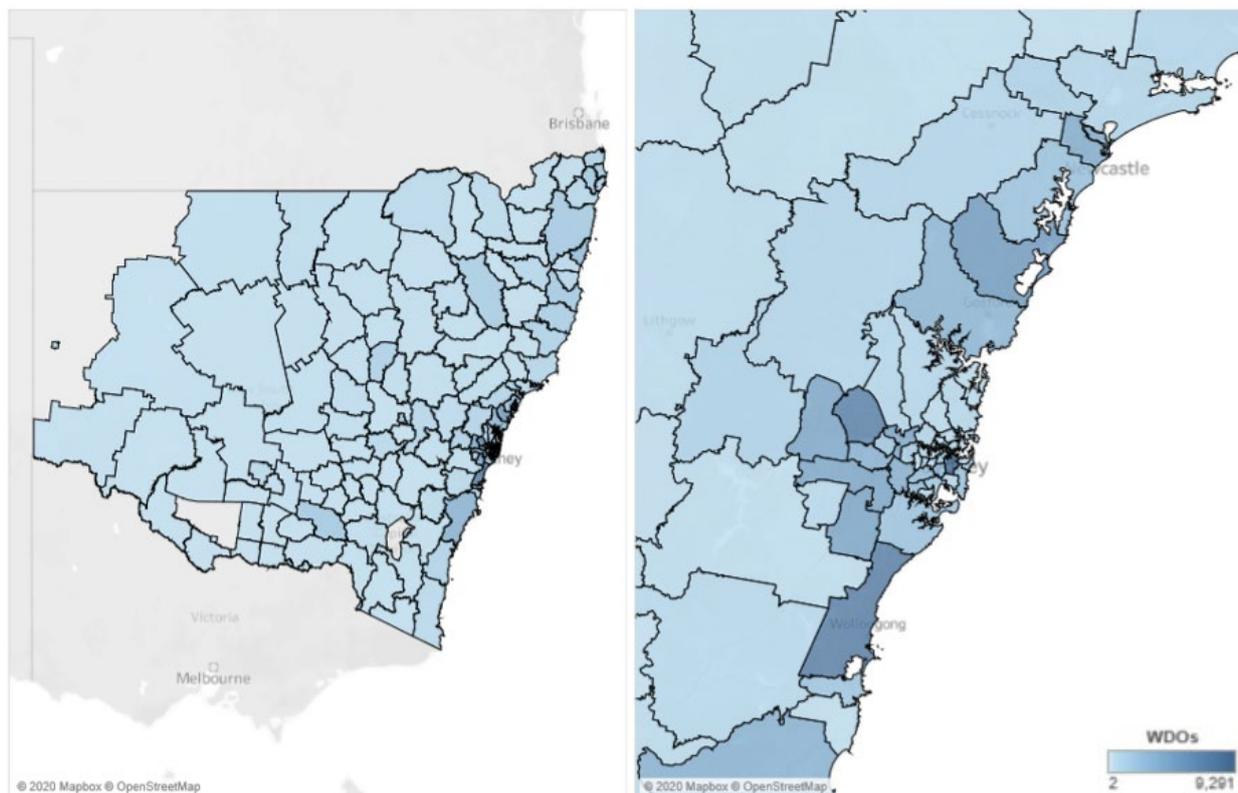
Figure 12.1 shows the geographic coverage of the WDO scheme for all customers in 2019/20. There was good coverage across the State, with only a small number of locations where a WDO was not available. The coverage in 2019/20 is consistent with coverage since the scheme commenced, which is illustrated in Figure 12.2.

Figures 12.3 and 12.4 show the geographic dispersion of WDOs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants. Although the rate of participation in WDOs by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people remained strong in 2019/20 (21%), Figure 12.3 shows that there were a number of areas in Southern NSW where there were no WDOs undertaken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This may be an area for further investigation in 2020/21.

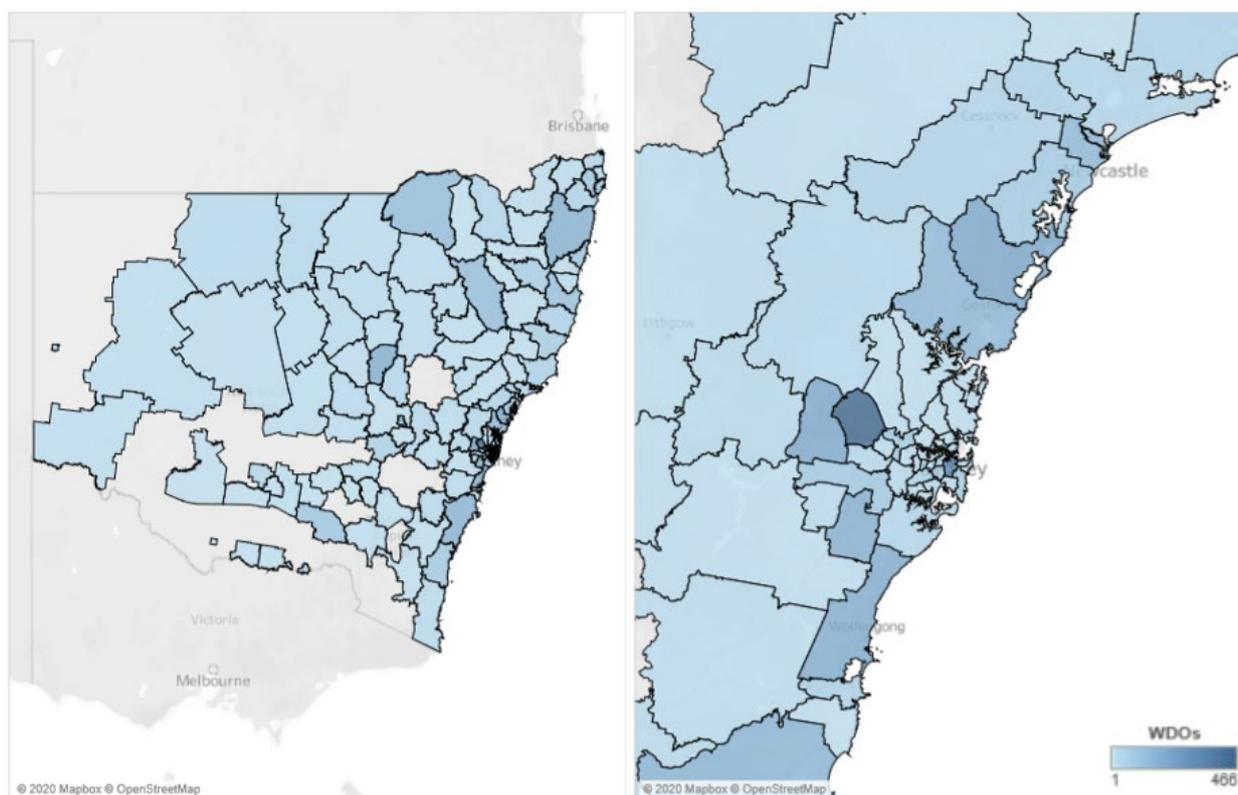
**Figure 12.1 – Geographic dispersion of WDOs approved in 2019/20**



**Figure 12.2 - Geographic dispersion of WDOs approved since the scheme commenced**



**Figure 12.3 - Geographic dispersion of WDOs approved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in 2019/20**



**Figure 12.4 - Geographic dispersion of WDOs approved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people since the scheme commenced**

