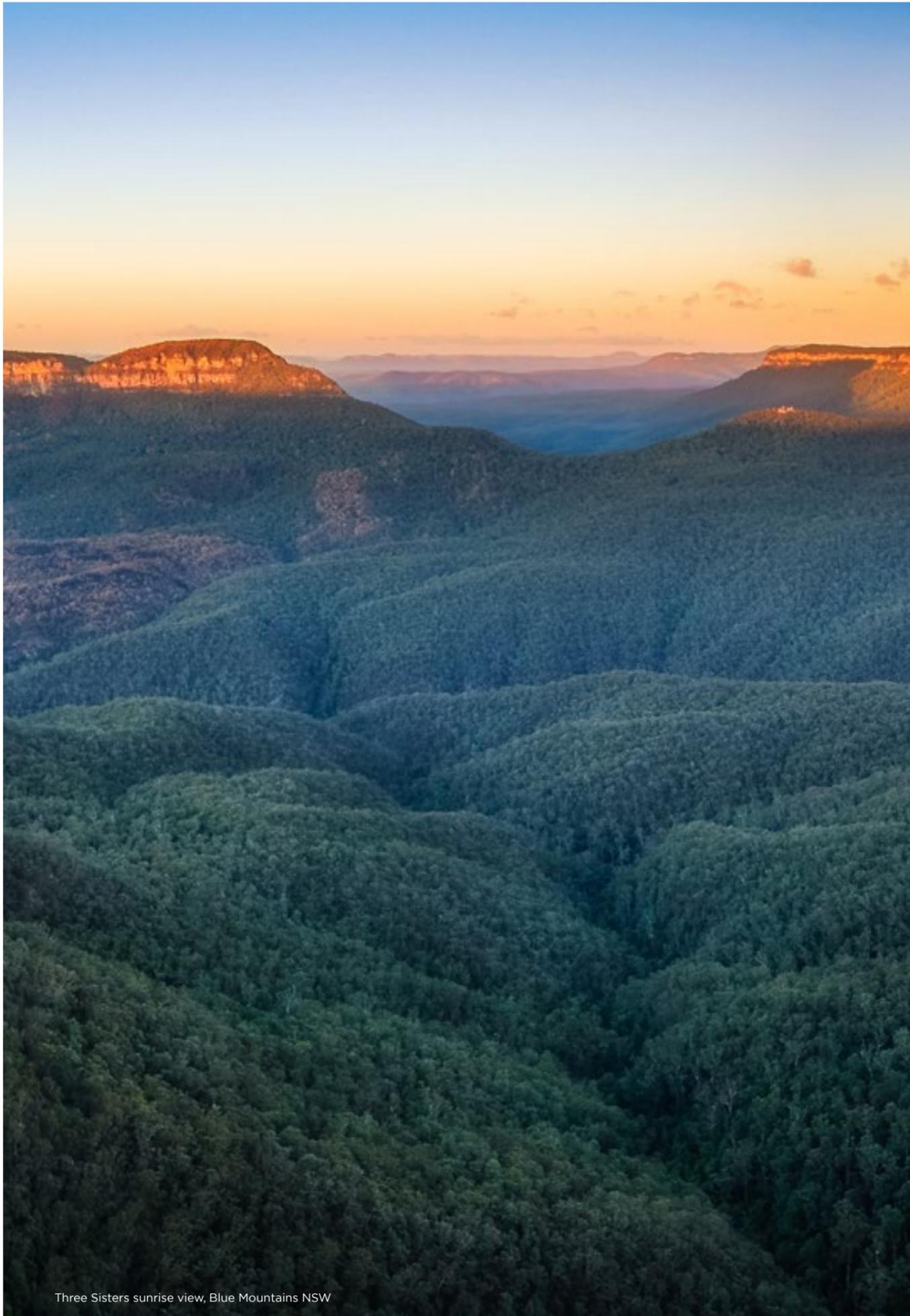


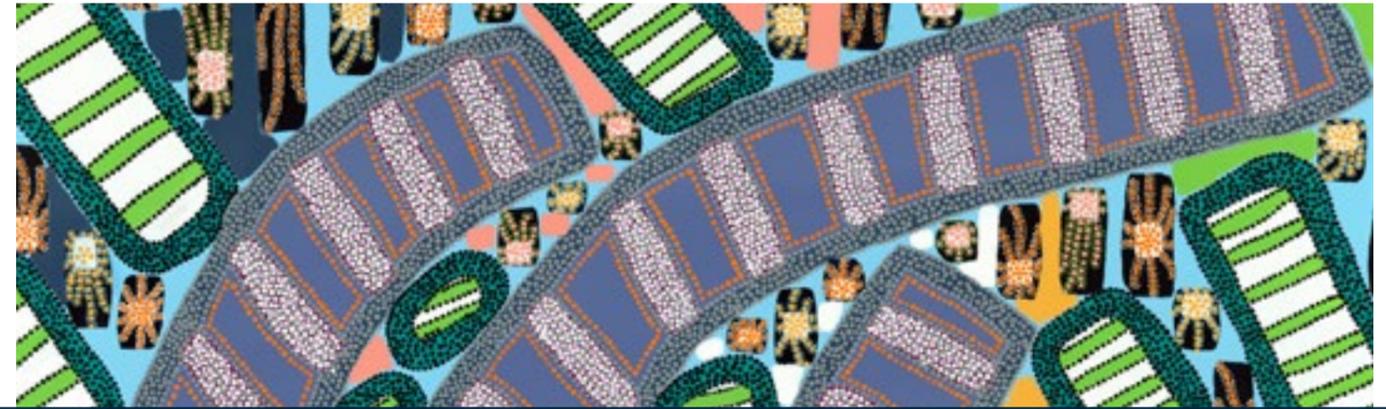
# Easier Access to Government Business Services

A clearer pathway  
for businesses and startups

NSW Innovation and Productivity Council  
February 2021



Three Sisters sunrise view, Blue Mountains NSW



## Acknowledgement of Country

NSW Treasury acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the First Peoples and Traditional Custodians of Australia, and the oldest continuing culture in human history.

We pay respect to Elders past and present and commit to respecting the lands we walk on, and the communities we walk with.

We celebrate the deep and enduring connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country and acknowledge their continuing custodianship of the land, seas and sky.

We acknowledge the ongoing stewardship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the important contribution they make to our communities and economies.

We reflect on the continuing impact of government policies and practices, and recognise our responsibility to work together with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families and communities, towards improved economic, social and cultural outcomes.



# About the NSW Innovation and Productivity Council

The NSW Innovation and Productivity Council (IPC) was established by the *Innovation and Productivity Council Act 1996* (The Act). It advises the NSW Government on priorities for innovation-led economic development and productivity.

IPC members are leaders from industry, education and research sectors. Members are appointed for three-year terms, bringing together a rich and diverse range of experience and expertise to the work of the IPC. The current council was appointed in 2020 and is chaired by Neville Stevens AO, a former Secretary of the Australian Department of Industry and the Australian Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts.

The NSW Chief Scientist & Engineer, Professor Hugh Durrant-Whyte and the NSW Chief Economist, Stephen Walters are special advisors to the Council.

IPC publications are independent reports and do not constitute NSW Government policy. This is consistent with the role of the Council and its object under the Act.

Further information is on the Council's website at:

[treasury.nsw.gov.au/nsw-economy/nsw-innovation-and-productivity-council](https://treasury.nsw.gov.au/nsw-economy/nsw-innovation-and-productivity-council)

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Source: NSW Innovation and Productivity Council 2021, *Easier Access to Government Business Services*, Council Research Paper, Sydney.



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# Foreword from the Chair, NSW Innovation and Productivity Council



**New South Wales leads Australia in being an exciting and attractive location for innovative and startup businesses. An innovation mindset is becoming an increasingly important element of business competitiveness. Businesses, and startups in particular, have told us that they need easier ways to locate and access key NSW Government services. These services do more than support business' administrative needs. They provide access to business advice that includes innovation guidance and connection to researchers and universities.**

All three tiers of government deliver such services. But the nature of government can make it difficult for businesses to navigate the many government information sources and programs.

Running a successful business is challenging at the best of times. Firms of all sizes face the complexities of managing day-to-day operations, employing and retaining the right people, maintaining cashflow and balancing budgets, all while trying to stay competitive and innovative in a global marketplace.

The events of the past year have seen circumstances become even more difficult. NSW businesses have been affected by drought, bushfires, and now by COVID-19 and the difficult economic conditions of a recession. NSW businesses are doing it tough.

At the NSW Innovation and Productivity Council, we are always thinking about ways we can help foster a better environment – one where business is enabled to not only succeed at what it does, but to be more innovative and productive. One way to do this is to provide the NSW Government with information and insights on international innovation best practice.

The Council commends the NSW Government for its already significant efforts to improve NSW citizens' customer service experience through Service NSW. It has also made substantial headway in reducing red tape and making it easier to do business through a range of reforms. But there is still more work to be done to help businesses find the right government services and innovation support.

The Council commissioned the research in response to stakeholders identifying the lack of a proactive and facilitative single contact point for businesses across the NSW innovation ecosystem as a key issue for new, startup and young businesses. They highlighted the benefits of a one-stop-shop 'connector' across the ecosystem.

To explore how NSW Government might improve innovation support for business, the Council looked at local and international 'business hub' models, which provide firms with a central entry point to government and access to a responsive business concierge service. The Council has not attempted to assess the suitability or effectiveness of the current range of businesses services that are available.

In many cases, the Government has provided guidance and support online. But there is now both too much information and not enough guidance on how to find and use it. Businesses can struggle to navigate to the right place; in many cases, there is no one right place. And even if they reach somewhere that has relevant information, they may struggle to distinguish what is relevant to them.

Internationally, the most effective governments coordinate their services to increase business awareness and access, and streamline operations. Such services help businesses to quickly find the relevant resources and solutions for their needs, and deliver a more seamless customer experience across government.

I am pleased to provide this report to the NSW Government to help inform this important discussion. The research underlying this report was completed prior to the rise of COVID-19. Now, as we seek to recover from the pandemic, all levels of government see the need to boost business support. If anything, the impacts from the pandemic have strengthened the need to make government business services clearer and more accessible.

The Council would also like to thank the various stakeholders from business and universities who came together at a workshop held in Sydney at the commencement of this project. The input of those participants laid the foundation for this vision and the suggestions emanated the ideas which are now more fully detailed in this report.



**Neville Stevens AO**  
*Chair, NSW Innovation and  
Productivity Council*

# Foreword from Project Champion, Dr Tony Rumble



**Australia has a long and proud history of innovation. Driven by necessity posed by isolation and limited resources, we have grown into a modern economy, now being transformed by the new wave of innovation enabled by technology. As Australia's largest and most prosperous state, New South Wales leads the way in many areas of private and public sector innovation. Even so, the pace of change seems to quicken almost daily, and opportunities for new products and services increasingly exist against a backdrop of complexity and uncertainty.**

The NSW Government itself continues to innovate in the way it provides support to startup business. This report from the NSW Innovation and Productivity Council (IPC) provides a reasoned and practical set of recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of how businesses, including innovative startups and scaleups, can interact with and be supported by the NSW Government.

Connectivity and networks are a hallmark of modern innovation – they enable and propel change. The IPC includes members drawn from a wide range of backgrounds in the public and private sectors. Recognising the benefits of connective networks, the Council has conducted and participated in several collaborative projects, enabling it to listen to and understand how government can better support the needs of emergent businesses.

One such event was held in the spring of 2019 and involved a full day workshop with stakeholders from business, academia and professional services firms. We were able to listen to their comments, hopes and aspirations – these were wide ranging and creatively inspired, and were a great window into the challenges they face.

One of the dominant themes from the workshop was the opportunity to improve how new businesses interact with the increasing array of support offered to them by the NSW Government. Stakeholders identified the lack of a proactive and facilitative single contact point for businesses across the NSW innovation ecosystem as a key issue for new, startup and young businesses.

In response, the Council commissioned research to flesh out how this could be improved, and especially focused on how other jurisdictions worked to integrate their business support services. The research highlighted the benefits of a 'one-stop-shop' connector across the ecosystem.

Our research supports the opportunity for a new NSW Government 'Business Hub' to provide businesses with easy access to the right government services, and to increase awareness and streamline business interaction with those services.

Timely and efficient access to support services is critical to the time-poor, startup entrepreneur (perhaps still working in their 'day job') – as it also is to businesses as they scale and grow. There is perhaps an even more profound benefit for emergent businesses in regional and rural New South Wales, and as the report recommends, by anchoring a new 'Business Hub' in the highly effective operation of Service NSW. It is hoped that the business support services provided by the NSW Government can be made more effectively accessible to all stakeholders across this great state.

**Tony Rumble PhD**  
*NSW Innovation and  
Productivity Council Member and  
Project Champion*

*Director, The Wealth Partnership*



# Executive summary



## A NSW Government Business Hub will give businesses easy access to the right government services.

The NSW Government provides a wide range of business services, support and programs from several agencies. The Commonwealth and many local governments also offer business support services. These business services include an extensive array of targeted support for businesses with innovative systems, products and services, including startups, whether they are already operating or domiciled in New South Wales, or they are considering or intending to do so.

For businesses themselves, the result can be difficult and confusing to navigate. Some NSW businesses now face a choice of more than ten separate services seeking to take them through the assistance process. Within NSW Government, there are around twenty potential entry points for a prospective new business.

Businesses should not need to decode which of the NSW Government services to approach, or what assistance they can and cannot expect to receive. They should be able to have the government respond to their needs with a seamless and responsive experience. The challenge is made harder because of the other levels of government that may also be involved.

Many overseas jurisdictions have implemented a 'business hub' solution to this problem. New South Wales, too, should implement such an approach.

There are at least two variants on this hub approach.

- The first provides a business 'front door' that helps businesses to access the services on offer. It connects businesses to services.
- The second provides not just a door but the whole shop — a service that itself assists businesses with growth, innovation and finance. It originates business services.

To explore how NSW Government might provide a one-stop-shop connector to improve innovation support for businesses, the Innovation and Productivity Council (IPC) has examined local and international business hub models which provide firms with a central entry point to government and access to a responsive business concierge service.

Overseas jurisdictions have had success with both models. However, a consideration of risks and rewards suggests that initial investment should be directed to creating a successful connector service.

The service will inevitably continue to evolve beyond its initial construction.

Successful implementation will rely on five crucial variables:

- commitment from government
- the right institutional setting
- appropriate processes for evolving and evaluating the service
- buy-in from a group of stakeholders
- implementation capability

Demonstrated service capabilities make Service NSW for Businesses the leading candidate to commence this journey and run the proposed Business Hub. The Business Hub can act as the front door for all businesses in New South Wales (with small business in particular benefiting) and provide a triage role to more specialised services — be it exploring exports, specialised support for high growth firms such as startups and scaleups or the collaborative opportunities enabled by NSW Government as a connector.

# The NSW business support and guidance overload

## 01.

Businesses in New South Wales have more challenges than ever to overcome in the early 2020s. The NSW Premier has made it a government priority to improve the ease of doing business in the State. Additionally, the economy needs to restart as strongly as possible after the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 1.1 What business needs from government

Businesses will need the right kind of assistance to help them to thrive and become more productive — including, where relevant, assistance from government.

The NSW Government already provides substantial business guidance and support. The NSW Customer Service Commissioner conducts a Quarterly Pulse Check Survey (QPCS) with the aim of checking how effectively government services are meeting both consumer and business needs (NSW Customer

Service Commissioner, 2019). In 2019 the QPCS report noted that business satisfaction ‘has stabilised at a high level’ (NSW Customer Service Commissioner, 2019, p. 5).

But the QPCS also emphasised that businesses ‘expect to be treated like a client’ by the government, just as they are treated by their own suppliers (NSW Customer Service Commissioner, 2019, pp. 15, 24). The Customer Service Commissioner found in the report that:

- Businesses want an efficient, transactional relationship with government.
- They also want relevant information, guides, and personalised support.
- Businesses see the Government as a trusted source of information and guidance. The Q1 QCPS report stated that ‘when businesses feel supported by the Government they feel more at ease and more confident’ (NSW Customer Service Commissioner, 2019, p. 15).
- Businesses ranked NSW Government services as needing the third most effort to contact – more than airlines, banks and local councils, though less than dealing with telephone service providers and Federal Government (NSW Customer Service Commissioner, 2019, p. 18)

**‘If the NSW Government was there to provide support and guidance then I feel safe and more confident in my actions, particularly during times [that are] filled with turmoil.’**

*Business owner quoted in 2019 Q1 Quarterly Pulse Check Survey*

## 1.2 What business is not getting

To be effective, business guidance and support must be easy to locate, approachable and helpful. In consultations, the NSW Innovation and Productivity Council (IPC) heard repeatedly that for many businesses, NSW Government guidance and support remains difficult to find and use. As a consequence, the service offering overall is not seen as particularly facilitative or proactive.

While the adequacy of existing programs is beyond the scope of this report, the problem is not simply one of support availability. In many cases, the Government has provided guidance and support online.

But there is now both too much information and not enough guidance on how to find and use it. Businesses can struggle to navigate to the right place; in many cases, there is no one right place. And even if they reach somewhere that has relevant information, they may struggle to distinguish what is relevant to them. Businesses can also be confused about the responsibilities of the different levels of government.

## 1.3 The current information and support overload

Sydney-based businesses now face more than ten different NSW and Commonwealth services that might be called 'entry points' and a larger number of interfaces and touchpoints (phone lines, websites, mail boxes, newsletters, social media, and events).<sup>1</sup> Some of these entry points are badged as 'one-stop shops', though none provides a universal access point for all business services. They are spread across local, state and federal government agencies. Even single agencies have multiple access points and 'brands'. These entry points include:

- **Business Connect** (NSW Treasury) provides online, phone and face-to-face advisors to support small businesses to start, run, adapt or grow.

- **Support for Businesses** through Service NSW (formerly the Easy to do Business program ) provides online, phone and face-to-face guidance and referrals for businesses in a range of industries to help them navigate and meet government regulatory requirements, and provide access to some support and guidance services. The offering includes access to a 'Business Concierge'.
- **Procurement Concierge** – a regional business portal and concierge service to help bushfire-affected communities rebuild. The concierge service offers advice and guidance to prospective buyers wanting to engage suppliers who are based in affected regions.

- The **Global NSW Concierge** (NSW Treasury) provides one-on-one assistance with research and information for larger businesses entering the NSW market.
- The **Sydney Startup Hub** (NSW Treasury) provides online resources and advisory services. Client advisors fielded 505 general queries in 2018. The Local Innovation Network is based here, developing regional entrepreneurship and supporting startups and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
- The **Future Transport Digital Accelerator Concierge** (Transport for NSW) connects innovating businesses in the transport sector with government and with researchers at the Sydney Startup Hub.
- **The GATE** (Department of Planning, Industry and Environment) is an accelerator in Orange for regional innovators in the agricultural technology sector.
- The **Boosting Business Innovation Program** (NSW Treasury) promotes greater collaboration between NSW businesses and New South Wales universities and CSIRO in New South Wales, through accessing research expertise, infrastructure, activities and networks. The program includes TechVouchers that provide funding support for SME/university collaborative R&D projects.
- **Business.gov.au** (Commonwealth Government) is a whole-of-government website for the Australian business community, with links to business advisors, grants, programs and events. It provides

useful resources on business innovation. A guided search facility at the Australian Business Licence and Information Service (ABLIS) subsite also generates individually tailored information about licences, regulations, council approvals and compliance requirements. As a national resource it may not always cover all NSW Government programs.

- The **Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman** (Commonwealth Government) provides advocacy and dispute resolution services.
- The **City of Sydney's Business programs and Business Concierge for Covid-19** (local government) provides grants, business seminars, a retail innovation program and a visiting entrepreneur program for startups.

The NSW innovation ecosystem also includes private and university-run accelerators, incubators, co-working spaces, and innovation hubs, some of them linked to NSW Government initiatives such as the Sydney Startup Hub. More than 100 separate government business innovation initiatives have been identified across Commonwealth and state jurisdictions (excluding the new Covid-19 related measures). **Appendix A** lists New South Wales and Commonwealth business programs.

Local councils also provide business concierge and other business support programs to help entrepreneurs with their businesses. These are not listed or explored further in this report.

<sup>1</sup> The entry points listed were live at the identified sites in late 2020. This may no longer be the case. Another service, the NSW Innovation Concierge (Department of Customer Service) is no longer operating. It provided advice and contacts for businesses wanting to sell to government, and managed the NSW Innovation Observatory, a digital information resource for startups.

FIGURE 1: SPOILT FOR CHOICE

Businesses with no knowledge of available government programs can find it hard to know where to go for help, even within the NSW Government.



\* The selection of brands was identified in mid-2020. Some of these may no longer be current.

**“The correct contact point to access a business service is often unclear”**

As the examples demonstrate, the correct agency or most relevant program or service or contact point is frequently is not obvious. Business owners and managers will undertake their own research, and access advice and guidance from commercial and other non-government providers. But government should provide information on its own programs that is clear and easy to find.

When businesses do make contact with agencies, the agencies themselves may not direct users to the most appropriate options elsewhere, because the agencies themselves may not be fully informed about each others’ offerings. The current diversity of government business support services compromises the intended outcomes. For example, Innovation and Science Australia recently found that ‘the volume and complexity of government (innovation) programs increased the cost of engagement and hindered awareness of programs by firms’ (Innovation and Science Australia, 2020, p. 27).

This problem of overloaded information and government support overload is not confined to Australia. The Canadian Government’s 2011 Jenkins Report, for instance, found exactly the same problem. It reported that ‘Canada’s landscape of programs ... leaves many businesses bewildered by the array of choices’ (Jenkins et al., 2011, p. E-2). Canada, like Australia, has a federal system of government.

Making government business resources more accessible and more usable will save business time and money. It will help startups with their speed to market. It can also improve program delivery and provide the Government with a better return on its investment of taxpayer funds. In doing these things, it will help support the economy to be more productive.

“  
Making  
government  
business  
resources more  
accessible and  
usable will save  
businesses time  
and money”



# Fixing the overload: A single NSW Government Business Hub service

## 02.

In consultations, while stakeholders did not say business guidance and support services lacked value, what they did say is that the landscape of government offerings could be confusing, difficult and time-consuming to navigate. That response is supported by the analysis in Section 1 relating to the number of currently available services.

Many stakeholders needed assistance in finding and using government information and programs. One suggested remedy was a service that would bring together information of this sort.

This report explores this potential solution to the need for guidance and information described above. It looks at local and international models that help businesses find the right government services and innovation support.

It proposes the establishment of a

NSW Government Business Hub as a central entry point to government offerings. It must be recognised, however, that there can be an overlap in the services offered by the different levels of government. Ultimately, the NSW Government can only control its own operations. The challenge of providing a seamless user experience for business services is greater under a federal system than it is for a unitary jurisdiction.

For business users, navigating government business services has often required contacting several agencies and services separately. A hub seeks to provide a better solution by reducing the contacts required, and getting users more quickly to the most appropriate solutions.<sup>2</sup>

Hubs, broadly speaking, adopt either one of two models.

## 2.1 The connector model

The **connector model** connects incoming users to the services that can meet their needs. It is sometimes characterised as a 'front door': it gets users into the 'building' but lets others take care of them after they have entered. It performs a triage function, but does not have to displace other agencies' websites and entry points.

- For example, many Australians use the federal government's MyGov service, the front door to government online services including Medicare, the Australian Taxation Office and Centrelink.

The connector model typically focuses on delivering information and directing users via the web and phone discussions. For example, research confirms the potential effectiveness of a simple and clearly labelled central customer service page focused on guiding users through key tasks, queries and problems (Jakob Nielsen, 2018). Such a page generally acts as a hub in a hub-and-spoke model; linked pages deliver more detailed services and related information. Such a website can be sufficient to meet many users' critical information needs, particularly when designed and tested for usability (Jakob Nielsen, 2012), but not all.

<sup>2</sup> Note that the term 'hub' is used in this report as a neutral catch-all term for an approach which seek to direct users to services, whether provided by them or by other bodies. Terms including 'concierge', 'assistant', 'help desk' and 'one-stop shop' are all used by various services and commentators, but without any consistency of meaning. None of these terms has a clear and accepted definition, and in this report none of these is used as a term of art.

This type of approach is rarely exclusively web-based. However, it is typically web-centric. Users are encouraged to make use of the website, due in particular to its low variable costs. This web interaction is often the first step to engaging through more interactive and tailored channels, including phone. This web-centric model can provide a good return on investment in several ways:

- It provides users with information (such as directions to an existing online service) which is a public good.
- Removing the need for a one-on-one interaction, such as a call to a government agency, helps keep down costs across government. The cost of answering the phone can be in the range of \$10 to \$100 per transaction.
- Collecting information from a user online before a call is initiated also reduces the cost of processing a phone interaction.

**“There should be a clear front door to government business services”**

where more direct engagement is appropriate. Hub staff can then

A website can be a cost-effective filter for queries that may require the later involvement of service staff, with a high variable cost. Once the site has details of users' issues and preferred contact channels, it can provide preliminary guidance, including whether users have reached a stage

provide a more tailored service via call back, email or use direct messaging as appropriate.

Even within the small business sector, there is huge variation in business service needs. For example, the challenges for a sole trader are very different to those for a high technology startup, and different again for a mature business looking for broader market opportunities. This makes effective triaging potentially very challenging.

If the triage establishes that a customer requires specialist support within government, they are then referred to the appropriate service to provide a higher level of facilitation and support (which in New South Wales would be a Business Connect advisor). Access to more specialist support is likely to be of particular value for a startup managing the dual challenges of establishing a new business in parallel with bringing a technical product or service to market. One-on-one expert advice may be essential to help such a business successfully navigate the complexities of the innovation ecosystem.

### Case study:

The **South Moravian Innovation Centre** (JIC) in the Czech Republic has a simple, user-friendly website that helps businesses to understand where they fit in and find the right help. JIC offers services on three levels: The first is aimed at entrepreneurs with a business idea who need help starting a business – who are connected with consultants, mentors and workshops. The second is aimed at startups and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that already have a product but need help developing a growth strategy. The third level is aimed at established businesses that have stagnated and need help to identify new opportunities to grow.

## Deeper engagement

A more advanced version of this model includes staff of the hub engaging more deeply with client firms, while still relying mainly on external resources and agencies to provide further assistance. For example:

- Service NSW's currently existing support for businesses includes the Business Concierge<sup>3</sup> service which helps businesses interact with the relevant parts of government, and to navigate government regulations, including any applicable licence and permit requirements. This one-on-one tailored service begins with a phone call, or a web enquiry which triggers a call back. Service NSW's Business Concierges also offer:
  - help in dealing with councils and state agencies
  - connections to support and guidance

– access to bushfire related and COVID-19 related grants.

- Service NSW also provides support to businesses through web-based content and business guides on key relevant topics. A unique business profile is created for each business, to more effectively enable interactions, including access to support and possible opportunities for growth with the NSW Government.
- The Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce provides a suite of services badged as 'Backed by Atlanta', targeted at established mid-sized Atlanta-based firms (turnover of between \$3 million and \$1 billion) with potential for growth. A customised assistance plan is developed for each firm. The chamber utilises a network of contacts in these areas to support firms. It also conducts networking opportunities for management roles in firms.

## 2.2 The originator model

The originator model for a business hub goes further than triaging and directing users to services. It is also a provider of the government business services a target business might benefit from. Some examples describe themselves as 'one-stop shops'. The services offered vary across jurisdictions. For example:

- The Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship (FIE) service in Belgium meets many needs. These range from awarding grants for SME innovation and research & development projects, to facilitating development of industrial areas. Its clients range from small startups to larger businesses interested in exporting their products.

- Canada's Concierge service is designed to provide Canadian SMEs with a single access point for innovation-related information on funding, expertise, and facilities and equipment (KPMG LLP, 2017, p. 2). A team of up to 15 'industrial technology advisors' have helped SMEs to identify government programs and services that best meet their needs.

The originator model typically supplements web-based information with not only brief phone contact but extended direct assistance via phone, video and face-to-face interaction providing a tailored service. The staff providing this level of service require greater business expertise, covering areas such as innovation, research & development, finance, and a range of government processes. The costs of providing access to such expertise mean this originator approach is much more costly to operate than the more limited connector model.

<sup>3</sup> The NSW concierge is at <https://mybusiness.service.nsw.gov.au/concierge>. Service NSW also provides support to businesses through web-based content and business guides on key topics relevant to business, and a business profile which enables businesses to manage interactions, access support and find opportunities for growth with the NSW Government



An originator model would provide a one-stop-shop for users”

### Case study:

The **Canadian Government's Concierge** was created in the wake of the Canadian Government's 2011 Jenkins Report that identified a weak innovation ecosystem and a business information and advice overload in that country (Jenkins et al., 2011, p. E-2). The report found a need to 'provide a national "concierge" service and associated website to help firms find and access the support tools they need'.

A 2017 evaluation of Concierge by Canada's Office of Audit and Evaluation and KPMG found that implementation of the service had faced challenges 'largely due to a mismatch between resources allocated and expectations for the program' (KPMG LLP, 2017, p. 24). It also reported that the Concierge service 'had evolved to best serve later stage, high potential clients' and that its reach was 'limited by insufficient human resources'.

Advisors in the United Kingdom's (UK's) **Business West** work one-on-one with business owners to create business plans and financial forecasts. Startups are matched with business advisors who guide them over 12 months. Business West has received numerous national and international awards for business development and job creation.

The **Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship** service's digital portal encourages entrepreneurs to call, but they can also email and connect via social media. In 2018, it received around 18,600 phone contacts, 1.5 million visitors to its website and had 10,300 social media interactions. This represents considerable tailored interaction. In 2018, 87 per cent of entrepreneurs surveyed indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with FIE's response time, and 85 per cent said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the response.

## 2.3 The right NSW Government Business Hub model

Some business hubs which use the originator approach have been evaluated as generating significant economic benefits. Evaluations have credited them with assisting jobs and export growth, greater productivity, social, environmental and cultural benefits (BiGGAR Economics, 2017) (Business West, 2020) (JIC, 2020). Despite evidence of inadequate resourcing, the 2017 evaluation of Canada's Concierge service estimated a benefit-cost ratio of almost 5 to 1 (KPMG LLP, 2017).

However, as evidenced by Canada's Concierge, such services should not be expected to emerge immediately as success stories. They carry risks and have limitations that must be understood. Not all attempts to implement an originator model have been successful, although there is little or no published evidence on or post-mortems of failed attempts.

Given the risks, the IPC recommends commencing with a business hub service that adopts the connector mode, with a view to widening it.

The connector model allows for a step-by-step expansion of the hub's scope once bedded down, and as and when this expansion is shown to make operational sense. Implementation should include a clear evaluation plan. This plan should identify the benefit and other comprehensive performance measures that will need to be collected. The evaluation, and possibly also experiments designed to determine business needs, can then help determine how the quality of the service can be improved, and which incremental expansions should take place. This will require some consideration of the broad range of business support services that are available across NSW Government.

Such a process allows for the hub to evolve towards an originator if desired, under which hub consultants may offer richer guidance, advice and possibly further facilitation and one-on-one support via phone, video meeting and possibly face-to-face contact. There could be some experimenting with a small number of high-expertise advisors of the sort used in Canada's Concierge service.

# Implementing the Hub

## 03.

Implementing a NSW Government Business Hub as described in this report is one step in a journey which may not have an end point. A service designed to provide the best access to a wide range of services through multiple channels can be expected to continue evolving, possibly from a connector model to a broader originator model.

Design features and resource needs will require the development of a full business case, including a more detailed assessment of the expected

benefits and costs of options and implementation risks. NSW Treasury leads small business, innovation, industry, trade and export strategies and programs. As such NSW Treasury and the NSW Department of Customer Service are well placed to develop a business case. The IPC could re-main involved to assist the design, execution, and measurement of success of the project.

The success of the project will depend on at least five crucial variables.

Independently of this IPC project, the NSW Department of Customer Service has been improving the customer experience of digital information and service channels, with the implementation of a whole-of-government website consolidation program (see <https://www.nsw.gov.au/nsw-government-communications/websites>). The imperatives of bushfire recovery, and subsequently the economic impacts of Covid-19, have also raised the stakes for the quality of government business services and support measures. To improve service delivery, Service NSW, which sits within the NSW Department of Customer Service, has already implemented the bulk of functionality required for the connector model of

a business hub. Service NSW also has the benefit of experience gained in delivering business services, as well as its network of service centres across the State.

At a minimum, the hub service as proposed in this report, will require additional website build and maintenance work and better interfaces to various agencies and programs, all of which require staffing. Experiments to explore moving beyond the initial connector model – for instance, by introducing dedicated Hub advisors with higher expertise – will require additional funding.

### 3.1 Government commitment

It will be counterproductive to establish a Business Hub, commit to directing the efforts of many agencies to its success, and then not deliver consistently over time. Though the suggested approach need be neither hugely resource-hungry nor ambitious in technical scope, under-resourcing and inability to implement and maintain will both be equally destructive. One objective of the service is to enhance New South Wales' reputation as a jurisdiction friendly to new businesses, startups and business investment generally.

Were a NSW business hub service to be inadequately resourced on a continuing basis, this could erode rather than strengthen New South Wales' standing in the business and investment community.

As noted above, resourcing requirements have yet to be thoroughly investigated and is largely beyond the scope of this report. The choice of agency to oversee the Hub will have a bearing on determining resource needs.

#### Case study:

The successful international examples have been maintained over many years which has allowed them to build up expertise in helping businesses grow. The provision of secure funding for the medium term has also been important to train and retain quality and experienced business advisors. The **Canadian Government's Concierge** service has evolved to best meet small- and medium-sized enterprise (SME) needs in particular, and now brings greater awareness of existing programs, 'but also a body of knowledge of how these programs work, how to access them, and whether or not they fit the needs of a given firm's planned project'.

Scotland's **Interface** provides an independent brokering function between SMEs and university researchers across all business types and sectors. Since its start in 2005, Interface has introduced over 3,000 businesses to academic partners, having been operating for sufficient time to build connections to all Scottish universities, research institutes and colleges.

## 3.2 The right institutional setting

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The service will have a better chance to thrive and develop if it is overseen by the right organisation or agency, and there is continuity. The organisation requires clear skills in creating and evolving highly usable and useful customer focused services, including web- and phone-based services. Leadership should be willing to support a culture that values efforts to better determine user needs.

Service NSW's track record, digital capabilities and customer service culture in delivering well-regarded services is a significant factor in its favour to develop and operate a NSW Government connector Business Hub. Its network of over 100 Service Centres, Mobile Service Centres and council agencies could be leveraged as additional access points to enhance the quality of the service, and also to provide for the marketing of the Hub as an access and triage point to existing business, prospective new businesses, and startups in particular.<sup>4</sup>

## 3.3 Appropriate service evaluation and evolution

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The service will be more likely to prosper if it is built out based on testing and experimentation to identify the usefulness of various approaches and services. A good governance arrangement will promote processes to determine the additional services that users need and value most. Specifically, implementation should include a comprehensive evaluation plan, which identifies the benefit and other comprehensive success measures that will be captured and recorded.

An important element of the ongoing evolution of the service will likely be the ability to conduct experiments at different levels to gauge user responses and cost of providing services. For instance, A/B testing of new website features or a revised client management process may provide data that allows managers to assess whether they improve aspects of the site or process such as web contact form completion or the ultimate levels of qualified clients. As one team of Microsoft researchers has expressed the usefulness of such testing, 'Significant learning and return-on-investment (ROI) are seen when development teams listen to their customers, not to the Highest Paid Person's Opinion (HiPPO)' (Kohavi et al., 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Current Service NSW business offerings already reflect elements of both the connector model, through referrals and linkages to other business-related government services via digital content and the Business Concierge service, and the originator model, through the delivery of grants to support businesses impacted by the 2019/20 bushfires and COVID-19.

## 3.4 Project buy-in from a wide range of organisations

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Buy-in will obviously need to come from the agency or organisation directly responsible for the Hub. But just as important for its success over time will be buy-in from all agencies and program managers who receive clients from the Hub.

Some of those agencies will be at the Australian Government and local government level, and as such outside the control of the NSW Government. Effort will be required for there to be

productive continuing collaboration with these bodies, in order to help maximise the service's success and avoid duplication, and confusion for users. For instance, the service may wish to collaborate closely with the providers of the Australian Business Licence and Information Service (ABLIS).

## 3.5 Information technology project capability

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As with all projects that contain a significant IT component, success will also depend on a willingness to scope the project with user needs in mind, and to limit individual builds to what is truly needed for the project's short- and long-term good. The use of tried and tested off-the-shelf products should be considered.

## 3.6 Further factors for success

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Based on international experience, the following specific factors are important for New South Wales to implement an effective Business Hub service to support businesses:

### Clarity and usability

The service must employ user-friendly interfaces — notably, a highly usable website — and provide clarity on its offerings to the business community. It will not be necessary for the Hub to have its own separate brand or identity, as this is a further potential

source of confusion for users. The Hub may have a distributed physical presence, for example within Service NSW Service Centres. The implementation of the Hub provides an opportunity to test the user experience in understanding different government brands and labelling, the leveraging of Service Centres, and consider whether some consolidation may be desirable. The test for success should be what works best for the customer.

## Comprehensive coverage and highly responsive

A hub must provide comprehensive coverage of and connection to business-relevant services offered by NSW Government programs, and/or those supported by NSW Government (for example NSW Circular, an innovation network established by the NSW Government to support the transition to a Circular Economy). To the maximum extent possible it should also cover and keep up to date on Australian Government and any significant local government programs.

The service must be highly responsive, to give users confidence in the quality of the service offering.

In implementing the Hub, the NSW Government should ensure that any out-of-date or redundant websites or other links to government business services, programs, and service providers, are deleted or updated as appropriate. In this regard, the IPC is pleased to note that the NSW Department of Customer Service is

## “Implementation detail is critical for the Hub’s success”

collaborating across government to help agencies to retire little-used sites or merge information to create a centralised online home of the NSW Government.<sup>5</sup>

## No wrong door

It is important that the Business Hub service has a ‘no wrong door’ approach, so that businesses can continue to directly approach the agency or program if they’ve engaged with it before or already know where to go, or through existing interfaces. New business customers will be encouraged to go through the Business Hub first, to ensure they are gaining access to the services that best suit them. Where customers have gone directly to a service they are familiar with, they should also be reminded of the Business Hub, and the additional services that they may not be aware of that they may be helped to access by using it.

## Staff skills and capabilities

As a one-stop shop with no wrong door for business, businesses can come to the Hub without knowing which programs and services are suited to them. Staff dealing with enquiries will need to have strong customer care skills, and to be familiar with general business needs. Depending on the evolution of the service from a connector to an originator model, the Hub may need to recruit and/or train for rich skills and knowledge across different types of businesses, such as startups. If more specialised business support is required, through the triage process clients should always be connected with a Business Connect advisor, who will have some level of advisory expertise.

## Communication and engagement channels

In its initial stages, the Hub’s primary communications channels will be its website – where communication will be predominantly agency-to-user – email, phone and possibly instant messaging. The fallback option for triage should be for clients to be directed to a Business Connect advisor to ensure specialist support that meets their needs.

## Customer relationship management

The chosen hub should not implement its own customer relationship management system or build its own data system. It should make use of a common data system that extends across the various NSW Government agencies involved in business assistance. This could be built on the single view of customer initiatives being driven by Service NSW. It is essential that the system implemented has adequate functionality for categorising the range of types of support that may be sought. This will help ensure clients get an appropriate response with continuity of service, are not required to duplicate information provision, and facilitate performance measurement.

By sharing information across agencies through a single system, agencies are likely to better help users: staff will be able to see what information has already been given to agencies, and what help they have already received. Such a ‘tell us once’ system should increase customer satisfaction.

## “The Hub’s customers should enjoy a seamless experience”

It will also allow staff to better analyse successes and learn from failures. Market insights from data aggregation could be made available across agencies to inform continuous improvement and government policy development. Industry

insights could also be communicated back to businesses to help them achieve their goals, subject to appropriate privacy protections.

The system chosen will need to manage information efficiently, and to guarantee user privacy and data security. Further project scoping will be needed to determine its capabilities in recording the content of voice, teleconference and face-to-face interactions.

## Data analytics and other technologies

Service NSW already collects and analyses data about customer interactions to improve service delivery and business support. Being the central entry point into government services could enhance Service NSW’s ability to collect more complete data about different types of business and their needs.

Once business needs are well understood, machine learning techniques may allow the Hub to process more queries more efficiently without lowering customer service quality.

## Performance measurement and evaluation

The Hub should take advantage of mechanisms for evaluating programs and measuring the return on government investment. This must be in the context of a comprehensive evaluation plan that is broader than measuring business success: customer satisfaction with the Hub’s services will be a critical measure.

# 3.7 Governance arrangements

The Hub will be providing a service to the agencies providing business services, as well as to business users. It is therefore essential to establish a governance model that provides for adequate input, influence and feedback from the former. In particular, it is desirable that service providers feel ownership of the Hub as a complement to their own engagement, promotion and marketing activities, and are committed to the Hub’s continuing success and possible growth. At the same time, governance should not be overly intrusive so that it stymies effective decision-making. This could include a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that clearly sets down the expectations of all parties, and a process for modifying as appropriate and keeping it up to date.

## Accountability and evaluation

Accountability mechanisms should be a focus of the project scoping exercise in the development of a full business case. Arrangements should support:

- the intrinsic motivation of hub staff to optimise their impact
- sufficient transparency to hold the Hub’s agency to account for performance
- incentives for the Hub’s agency to conduct affordable experiments in increasing the Hub’s effectiveness
- expert and disinterested evaluation of the Hub’s medium- and long-term impact, to aid benefit-cost analysis (Gruen, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.nsw.gov.au/news/nsw-government-to-consolidate-over-500-websites>.



## 3.8 Service NSW is a natural Hub owner

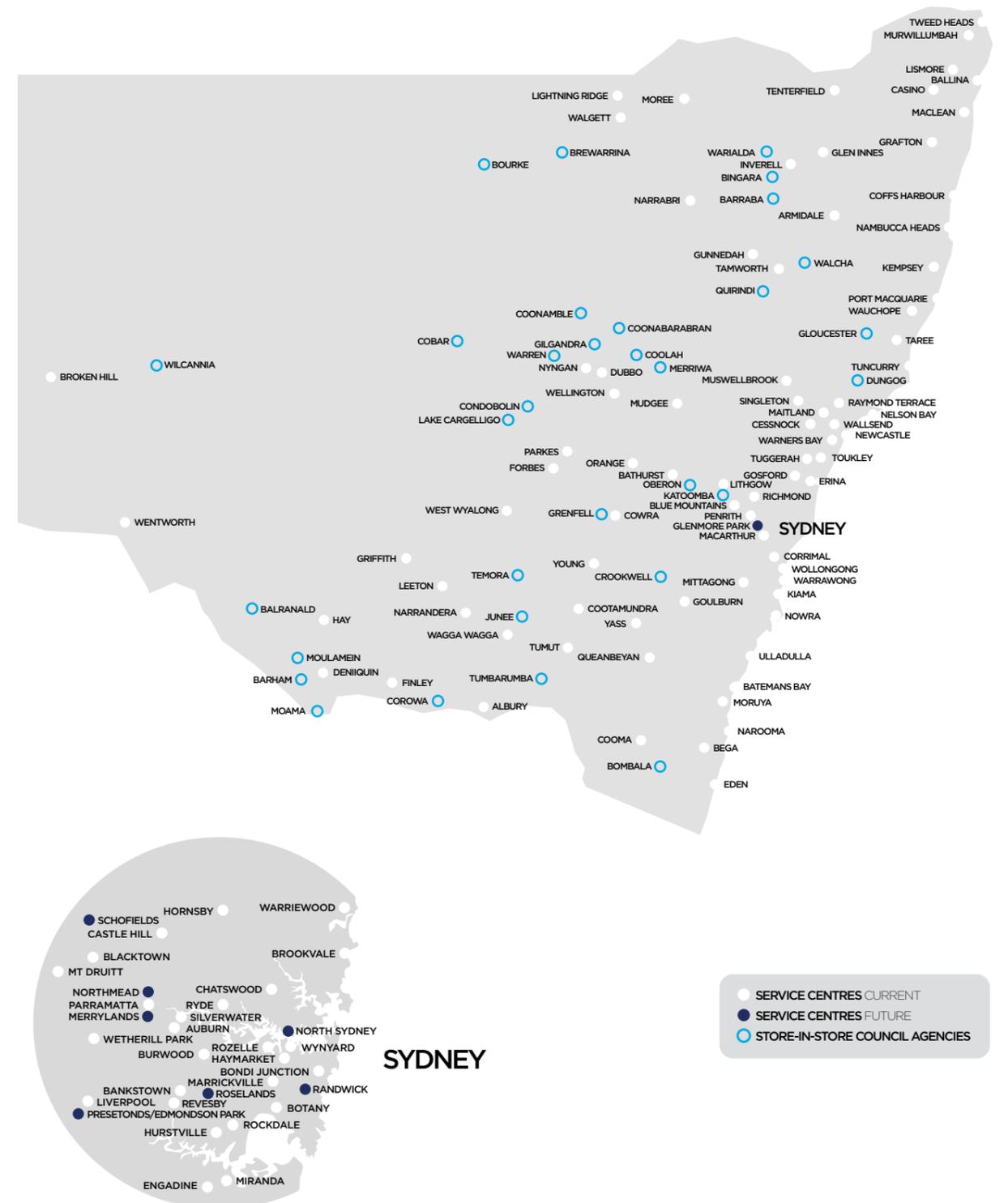
Given the potential benefits from an effective connector model, implementation should be viewed as very achievable. In Service NSW's case, many of the elements already appear to be in place. This report confirms that the existing business functions of Service NSW make it an appropriate agency to be designated as the NSW Government's Business Hub. Among the factors that recommend it are:

- Customer service mandate:** Service NSW has a mandate to deliver customer service excellence across government services including for business.<sup>6</sup>
- Service capability and reputation:** Service NSW has developed a reputation for high quality customer service, guiding businesses across a growing number of industries to navigate government regulation. The NSW Business Chamber's 2016 Red Tape Survey identified it as the best

performing government agency (across all levels of government), while client-facing agencies with functions delivered through Service NSW also demonstrated significant performance improvements (NSW Business Chamber, 2018, p. 9). Service NSW is now undertaking service delivery roles such as co-ordinating funding support for businesses affected by bushfires and by Covid-19 (Service NSW, 2020).

- Brand recognition:** Service NSW has the brand recognition of being a front door to government. It provides a variety of services that are general enough to be a logical starting point for all business enquiries.
- Geographic reach:** Service NSW's spread of service centres and mobile service centres and regionally based Business Concierges leave it well-placed to assist in servicing the approximately 30 per cent of NSW small businesses located in regional New South Wales (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2: LOCATION OF SERVICE NSW CENTRES



## 3.9 The chosen hub should be given support across government

- **Web capabilities:** The current business functions of Service NSW have a web front door at the 'Support for Business' page of the Service NSW website, at <https://mybusiness.service.nsw.gov.au/>. This page in turn currently points to three clearly-labelled core functions:
  - navigational case management service, which is available over the phone, face-to-face and via video conference (October 2020 pilot)
  - a series of web-based business guides on topics including payroll tax, Goods and Services Tax (GST) registration, grants and financial help, and work health and safety, as well as five industry-specific guides
  - a business profile which enables businesses to manage interactions, access support and find opportunities for growth with assistance from the NSW Government.

Heuristic or rules-of-thumb evaluation of government website usability remains under-developed (Welle Donker-Kuijjer et al., 2010). However, the Service NSW business subsite complies with two initial heuristics: clarity of language, and recognition of user tasks. Whether or not Service NSW is designated as the Hub provider, its existing subsite provides a good model for the Hub.

- **Staff skills and capabilities:** Service NSW staff have experience in processing high volumes of customers and currently has a 97 per cent satisfaction rating (Service NSW, 2019). With appropriate resourcing and training, it could further build out its skills as needed.
- **Communication and engagement channels:** Service NSW employs different types of communication to provide a unified and seamless customer experience across channels and devices.<sup>7</sup> Digital services must be complemented by personalised and one-to-one support from people with appropriate expertise and an up-to-date understanding of relevant resources and networks.
- **Data analytics and other technologies:** Service NSW is already collecting and analysing data about their customer interactions to improve service delivery and business support.
- **Existing capabilities:** As described in Section 2, Service NSW already provides both a website and consultations with trained staff who direct users to the required services. The Business Concierge service is delivered by a team of business-focused staff and supported by knowledge management officers who maintain content for sharing with business customers.

Whichever agency is chosen to run the Hub, ideally it should be explicitly acknowledged as the central NSW Government contact and triage point for SMEs to ensure some continuity and consistency of focus. In that role, its profile should be raised through:

- marketing to businesses
- liaison with other NSW agencies and other levels of government.

To the extent that the NSW Government builds a service to store data on users, the Hub provider should be involved in the construction of this 'single source of truth'.

Other NSW Government agencies providing business services to SMEs should point users to the Hub as a possible complement to their own services, to ensure the SME is fully appraised of all business services that are available. The Hub should have a mandate to link to all government business programs in New South Wales. To the extent that agencies offer programs and services useful to particular business user groups, agencies should liaise with the Hub provider on how best to triage in order to connect those services to the users who need them.

There will be a reasonable tendency for agencies other than the Hub provider to prefer to offer their services directly, rather than via the Hub. They should be encouraged to consider what will be most helpful for their prospective customers, and whether providing their own direct channel is ultimately the most clear and helpful approach. Agencies should be kept aware of the problem — described in this report and present in multiple jurisdictions around the world — of user information and support overload.

At the same time, the Hub provider should treat other agencies with business services as clients and ensure it meets their key requirements — including delivering qualified potential clients into their service channels. As noted above, this could in part be effected through the establishment of an MOU that clearly sets out the expectations of all parties.

**“All government stakeholders must be committed to the Hub’s success”**

<sup>7</sup> Businesses can access Service NSW face-to-face, over the phone and digitally. To build awareness of the support available, customers have the option to receive email updates and initiatives are also promoted across Service NSW social media channels. Service NSW also maintains close relationships with councils and local business chambers, and council relationship managers work with these stakeholders to support businesses in their regions.

<sup>8</sup> A qualified client is one who is in a position to make use of the agency's services.

# Recommendations

## 04.

### 4.1 Connector model

#### RECOMMENDATION 1

##### Establish a NSW Business Hub as the front door for accessing government services in New South Wales

The Hub should be a multi-channel service providing information and guidance relating to the availability of business services to all types of businesses, including whether considering to start or if established. While providing direct assistance to guide businesses to access specific NSW Government support, the Hub would undertake a triaging function, directing users to relevant government services using the web and other channels as appropriate. This would include when appropriate connecting clients to independent Business Connect advisors who have run businesses themselves – providing more tailored one-on-one service.

The Hub would have explicit responsibility for keeping information on programs and business services and information up to date.

This service will require further scoping and development of a full business case to ensure that the benefits of the approach to be implemented more than outweigh the costs. This should include the design for governance arrangements. Collaboration and buy-in from all NSW Government agencies that provide business services is needed to ensure successful system-wide coverage and implementation.

Adequate funding and time are needed to enable the Business Hub to establish a reputation and profile, with consistent messaging and quality of services. The NSW Government must be willing to guarantee funding for a minimum of five years.

Irrespective of its organisational location and operational details, the Hub should be established as a standalone operation, to avoid unintended consequences from agency re-organisation or changed Ministerial portfolios.

There should be a government-wide case management system to help provide business customers with a seamless experience.

In implementing the Hub, the NSW Government should ensure that any out of date or redundant websites or other links to government business services and service providers are deleted, or updated as appropriate, and that continues to be the case.

#### RECOMMENDATION 2

##### Have the Hub assist businesses with identifying relevant innovation programs for their circumstances

The Hub would provide access to business advice that includes innovation guidance and connection to researchers and universities, to the extent that it is available under NSW Government programs. The sufficiency and effectiveness of such programs have not been considered by the IPC in preparing this report.

The Hub will also provide referral, where relevant, to other NSW Government concierge services, for example the Global NSW Concierge, or the Procurement Concierge.

#### RECOMMENDATION 3

##### Facilitate access to federal and state business programs

This necessitates buy-in from all agencies providing business services. For the Australian Government and local government, this means best endeavours.

#### RECOMMENDATION 4

##### Develop rigorous measures to evaluate the Hub's success

Develop key performance indicators within a comprehensive evaluation plan and report these back to NSW Treasury and the IPC a year after establishment.

#### RECOMMENDATION 5

##### Build connections to the broader innovation and trade ecosystems

Once the service is established, consider building connections to the broader innovation and trade ecosystems including private services and initiatives (while having regard to probity issues related to government guidance and advice).

### 4.2 Originator model

#### RECOMMENDATION 6

##### Consider extending the scope of the Business Hub to provide more heavily tailored support for the specific needs of each individual business

Once the connector model has been successfully implemented and has been subjected to an evaluation that demonstrates the completion of a successful period of operation, consideration should be given to expanding the scope of the Business Hub to become an originator model. This would involve the Hub becoming a provider of government business services. It could also involve the Hub providing a higher standard of personalised services. This could be through an outsourced model as used for Business Connect.

Some cost recovery from business customers may be necessary to ensure competitive neutrality with commercial providers of business services.

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# Appendix:

## An illustration of recent State and Commonwealth business programs

Business Support Program	Jurisdiction
Accelerating Commercialisation	Commonwealth
Advancing quantum computing technology	Commonwealth
Advancing Renewables Program	Commonwealth
ARC Linkage Grants	Commonwealth
Australian Cyber Security Growth Network	Commonwealth
Australian Renewable Energy Agency scheme	Commonwealth
Australian Synchrotron	Commonwealth
Biomedical Translation Fund to commercialise promising discoveries	Commonwealth
Business Management (advice)	Commonwealth
Business Research and Innovation Initiative	Commonwealth
CRC-P Program	Commonwealth
CSIRO SME Connect	Commonwealth
CSIRO Innovation Fund to commercialise early stage innovations	Commonwealth
CSIRO Kick-Start	Commonwealth
CSIRO ON accelerator programme	Commonwealth
Industry Growth Centres	Commonwealth
Data61: Australia's digital and data	Commonwealth
innovation group	Commonwealth
Defence Global Competitiveness Grants	Commonwealth

Digital Marketplace	Commonwealth
Early Stage Venture Capital Limited Partnership	Commonwealth
Export Finance	Commonwealth
Global Innovation Strategy	Commonwealth
Incubator Support initiative	Commonwealth
Innovation and Science Australia	Commonwealth
Innovation Connections: connecting industry to innovation infrastructure	Commonwealth
Inspiring Australians - Science Engagement Programme	Commonwealth
National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS), Opportunities for women in science, technology, engineering and maths	Commonwealth
R&D Tax Incentive	Commonwealth
Tax incentives for investors	Commonwealth
The Enterprising Community	Commonwealth
Venture Capital Limited Partnership	Commonwealth
NSW Department of Primary Industry Global Agtech Ecosystem (GATE)	NSW
Boosting Business Innovation Program	NSW
Business Connect	NSW
Future transport NSW Accelerator	NSW
Jobs Action Plan rebate	NSW
Jobs for NSW	NSW
Medical Devices Fund	NSW
Minimum Viable Product grants	NSW
Payroll tax relief	NSW
Physical Sciences Fund	NSW
Small Business Month	NSW
Small Business Grant	NSW
Sydney School of Entrepreneurship	NSW
Tech Vouchers	NSW
TradeStart	NSW
Women in business	NSW
Sydney Startup Hub	NSW
Wollongong University "Advantage SME"	NSW

**Published by NSW Treasury**

**treasury.nsw.gov.au**

FIRST PUBLISHED FEBRUARY 2021.

T21/00104

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