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Ill and infirm stranded

Lana Lam

IT'S a tale of two cities when it comes to community transport for Inner West residents.

According to Inner West Community Transport (IWCT) manager Ben Benevento, residents in Ashfield, Burwood, Strathfield and Canada Bay can't use services that are readily available to people in neighbouring suburbs.

"There's a lack of equity in terms of community transport program funding not covering the whole state," he said.

IWCT provides transport for frail aged and young people with a permanent or severe disability. The service is funded by the Health Department.

There's about 90,000 trips that [community transport] have to refuse because they don't have enough funding — Gladys Berejikian

However, the Burwood-based group does not have community transport program funding from the Transport Ministry, which means residents who do not fall into the two categories are left stranded. Mr Benevento said every week they had to turn away people who needed help getting around.

"It might mean you've broken your leg and you can't drive your car," he said. "We would pick them up from home and take them to their medical appointment."

A community transport group in Leichhardt does have the funding, Mr Benevento said, so those residents could access community transport, which creates a divide based on

postcode. "Someone who lives in Leichhardt will be able to access that service but someone from Ashfield won't," he said.

Another problem is that the funding of \$3 million per year has not increased since 1998.

Opposition transport spokeswoman Gladys Berejikian met the group last

week, pledging that if the Liberals win the next state election, they will double the funding.

"It's been 11 years (since an increase) and this is in a climate where the demand is growing," she said.

"The peak body for community transport in NSW tells me that there's about 90,000 trips that they

have to refuse because they don't have enough funding."

A Health Department spokeswoman said the funding was increased each year in line with the CPI.



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Opposition transport spokeswoman Gladys Berejiklian meets Ben Benevento (on her left) and John Sim at the Inner West Community Transport Office at Burwood. Photo: CRAIG WILSON