

A nighttime photograph of a street festival or market. The scene is illuminated by numerous strings of small, warm-white lights that create a canopy effect over the street. In the background, a multi-story building with a prominent 'W' logo is visible, likely Western Sydney University. The street is lined with trees and various stalls or tents, some with colorful awnings. People are seen walking and interacting in the foreground, adding a sense of activity and community to the scene.

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

Exploring the intersections of education, income and identity in Western Sydney

A CENTRE FOR WESTERN SYDNEY ISSUES PAPER



CENTRE FOR
WESTERN SYDNEY



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

With respect for Aboriginal cultural protocol and out of recognition that its campuses occupy their traditional lands, Western Sydney University acknowledges the Darug, Eora, Dharawal (also referred to as Tharawal) and Wiradjuri peoples and thanks them for their support of its work in their lands (Western Sydney and beyond).

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE EXPLORING THE INTERSECTIONS OF EDUCATION, INCOME AND IDENTITY IN WESTERN SYDNEY

A Centre for Western Sydney (CfWS) issues paper,
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BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

KEY POINTS

- 1** 48.4 per cent of people in Western Sydney hold a Certificate III or higher compared to 62.9 per cent in the rest of Sydney.*
- 2** North Sydney has the highest proportion of people with qualifications at 74.1 per cent.
- 3** In the Fairfield LGA, 30.5 per cent of residents hold a Certificate III or above. This is lower among women, where 24.9 percent hold a qualification.
- 4** 35.5 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Western Sydney hold a Certificate III or higher, compared with 47.8 per cent in the rest of Sydney.
- 5** A greater percentage of Western Sydney residents who speak a language other than English at home hold a Certificate III than the general population in the region.
- 6** Western Sydney is at the centre of the nation's cost-of-living crisis with 52.1 per cent of residents earning less than \$800 a week compared to 40 per cent in the rest of Sydney.
- 7** At 67.7 per cent, Fairfield has the highest percentage of people earning less than the minimum wage.
- 8** Almost six-out-of-ten Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Western Sydney, or 58.5 per cent, earn less than \$800 a week.
- 9** Despite almost half of the women living in Western Sydney holding a Certificate III or higher, six-out-of-ten earn less than \$800 a week.

*'The rest of Sydney' refers to the areas of Sydney outside of Western Sydney.



BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

EMPOWERING ALL OF WESTERN SYDNEY

WESTERN SYDNEY continues to undergo a profound transformation. Its population is booming, major infrastructure projects are helping drive economic growth, and new opportunities are being created.

Despite these strengths, challenges remain. Western Sydney's highly educated and talented residents continue to be hindered by too few jobs close to home and more is needed to increase women's workforce participation. As a diverse, dynamic and entrepreneurial region, Western Sydney has the potential to lead the nation's economy.

The potential to lead the nation's economy.

To realise this ambition, the Centre for Western Sydney argues a fundamental policymaking shift is required – to **adopt an intersectional, place-based approach** to reimagining how we address inequity, and ultimately productivity.

If this region is to capitalise on the new opportunities being created, everyone who calls Western Sydney home needs to be empowered to be part of the broader community and economy.

Deeper insights are needed, on how we can better serve different parts of our communities – based not only on where they live, but who they are. Only then will we be able to dismantle the barriers that stand in the way of success, for our people and our region.

This paper examines the key trends in the 2021 census that highlight the relationships between place and identity for key groups in Western Sydney: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, multicultural communities and women and how these identities intersect across educational attainment and income.



BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

EDUCATION AND SKILLS UNDERPIN THE ECONOMY

Education plays a pivotal role in Western Sydney's productivity and underpins the economy.

In our *Untapped Talent* paper in October 2022, the CfWS highlighted the significant increase in Western Sydney's educational attainment over the decade.¹ 27.2 per cent of Western Sydney residents now hold a university degree, compared to 26.3 per cent nationally and 27.8 per cent across NSW.

This paper, *Bridging the Divide*, explores the trends around the proportion of people in the region who hold a Certificate III or higher qualification. This is significant in Western Sydney where highly skilled trades in manufacturing and construction are among the top five industries of employment.

Projects including the Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport and the Bradfield City Centre are also creating new, higher skilled jobs.

A Certificate III indicates skills and knowledge in a vocational field. It is a qualification that is considered equivalent to the completion of high school or Year 12 and is recognised nationally.²

As the world of work undergoes rapid change, people will need to embrace lifelong learning and continually upskill and reskill. This means further education models will also evolve with people mixing and matching short courses – including micro-credentials – from both higher education and vocational education and training providers. A Certificate III will increasingly become an important building block in the qualifications of some people.



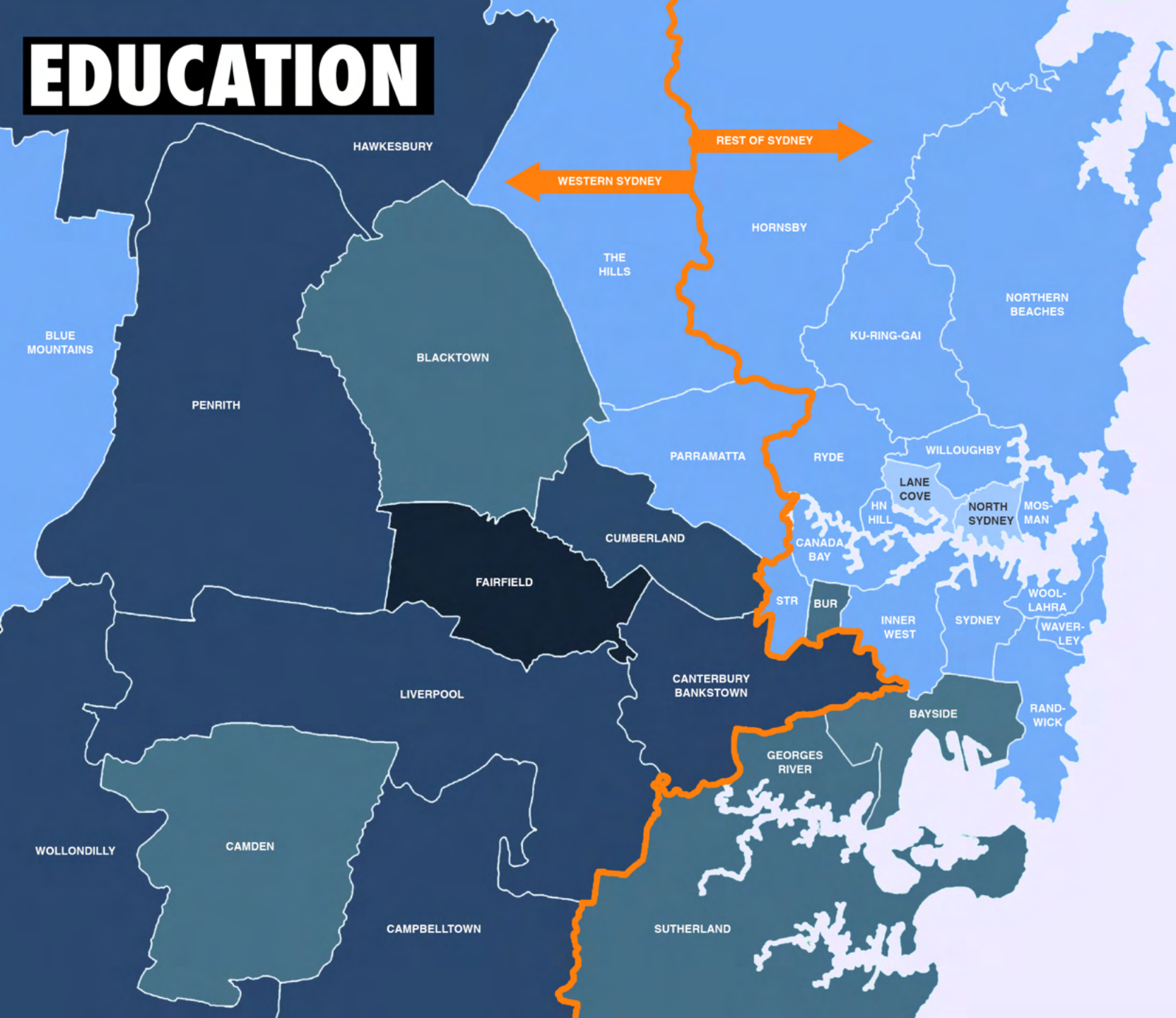
EDUCATION

Mapping and analysis by the Centre for Western Sydney
www.westernsydney.edu.au/cws

FIGURE 1

Educational Attainment

Proportion of population who hold a Certificate III or higher qualification, 2021



30.5	Fairfield	61.5	Northern Beaches
42.9	Liverpool	61.5	Randwick
43.1	Canterbury-Bankstown	62.1	Parramatta
44.6	Cumberland	62.3	The Hills
45.7	Campbelltown	62.6	Canada Bay
46.0	Penrith	64.1	Ryde
49.6	Wollondilly	64.3	Hornsby
49.8	Hawkesbury	65.2	Inner West
50.8	Blacktown	67.4	Willoughby
52.9	Camden	67.6	Ku-ring-gai
54.6	Bayside	67.9	Woollahra
54.7	Georges River	68.0	Waverley
55.3	Burwood	68.1	Sydney
57.7	Sutherland	69.0	Mosman
61.0	Strathfield	71.5	Lane Cove
61.2	Hunters Hill	74.1	North Sydney
61.2	Blue Mountains		



BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

WESTERN SYDNEY has markedly lower rates of people with a Certificate III or above than the rest of Sydney.

Nearly half of those who live in Western Sydney, 48.4 per cent, hold a Certificate III or higher compared with 62.9 per cent across the rest of Sydney (Figure 1).

Educational attainment is particularly pronounced in North Sydney, where three-quarters of locals, or 74.1 per cent, hold a Certificate III or higher. On the flipside, less than 40 kilometres away the rate of educational attainment falls. In Fairfield, only one-in-three residents, or 30.5 per cent, hold a Certificate III or above (Figure 1).

Fairfield has the lowest proportion of qualified people in Western Sydney – falling behind the next lowest Local Government Area (LGA) of Liverpool by more than 12 percentage points.

But the story is not uniform across the region, underscoring the importance of a granular place-based approach that digs deeper into inequity at a suburban level.

Inequities exist in the West.

Some LGAs in Western Sydney are almost on par in educational attainment with the rest of the city. For example, 61.2 per cent of people living in both Hunters Hill and the Blue Mountains hold a Certificate III or higher, and this is slightly higher in LGAs such as Parramatta and the Hills which are above 62 per cent (Figure 1).



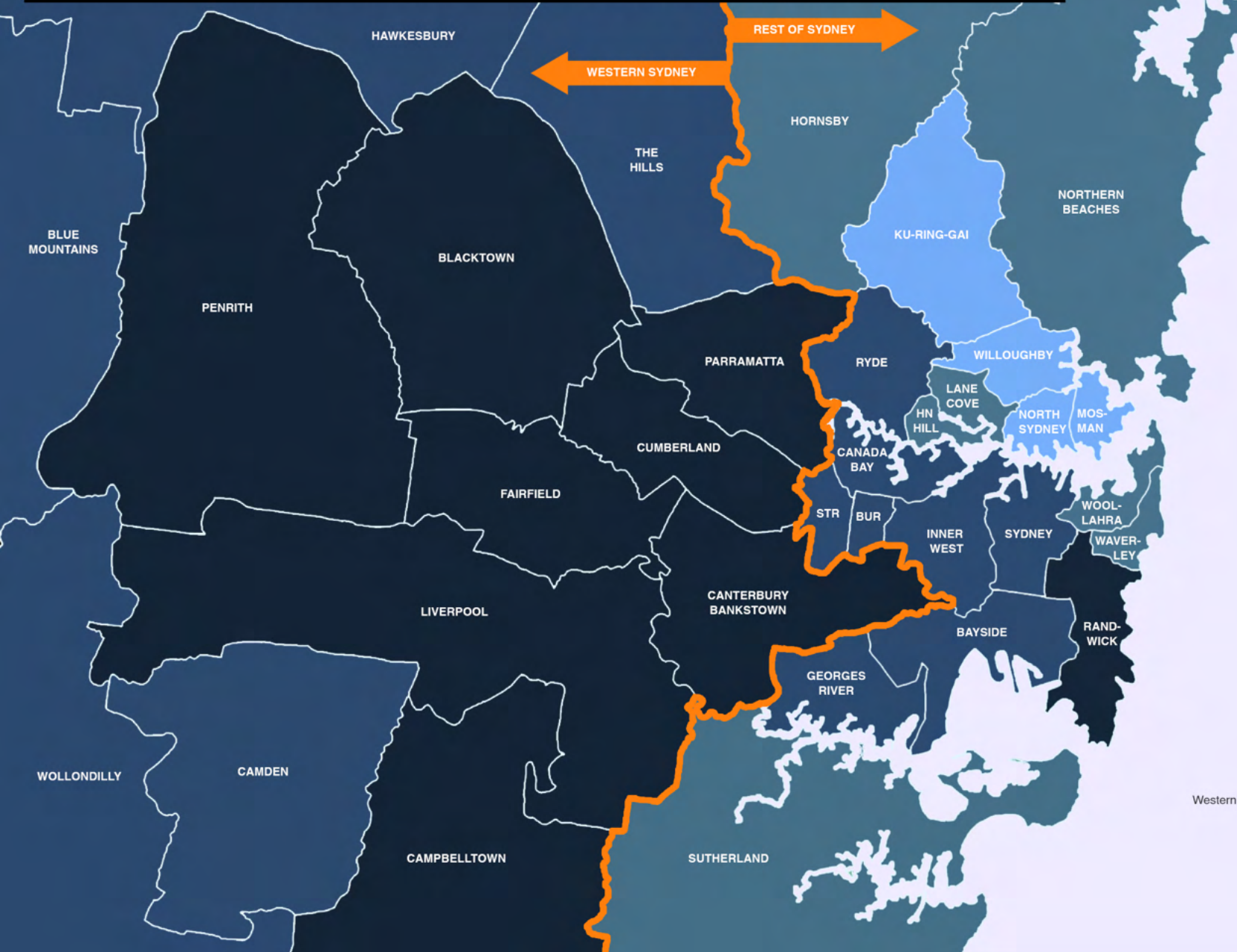
EDUCATION - FIRST NATIONS

Mapping and analysis by the Centre for Western Sydney
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FIGURE 2

Educational Attainment

Proportion of population who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and hold a Certificate III or higher qualification, 2021



28.2	Fairfield	46.4	Camden
28.6	Blacktown	48.4	The Hills
31.7	Liverpool	48.6	Blue Mountains
31.8	Campbelltown	49.0	Inner West
33.6	Parramatta	49.2	Ryde
36.9	Randwick	50.9	Hornsby
36.9	Canterbury-Bankstown	51.9	Sutherland
37.0	Penrith	53.3	Hunters Hill
37.0	Cumberland	54.4	Northern Beaches
41.4	Strathfield	55.4	Waverley
41.4	Hawkesbury	57.0	Lane Cove
41.4	Burwood	59.4	Woollahra
42.2	Bayside	61.7	Willoughby
44.7	Canada Bay	63.5	Ku-ring-gai
44.8	Georges River	67.1	North Sydney
45.1	Wollondilly	67.6	Mosman
45.4	Sydney		



BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

FIRST NATIONS EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

In addition to where someone lives, some communities and groups in Western Sydney are more likely to experience lower levels of educational attainment than the rest of the population.

While nearly half of all Western Sydney residents hold a Certificate III or higher, this falls to 35.7 per cent for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the region (Figure 2).

In the eastern suburbs, in the rest of Sydney, 47.8 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations have that level of qualification (Figure 2).

First Nations communities in Western Sydney less likely to hold a Certificate III or higher.

But less than one-in-three, or 28.6 per cent, of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Blacktown – which is home to one of Sydney’s largest populations of First Nations people – have a Certificate III or higher. This is compared to almost 50 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Hills or the Blue Mountains (Figure 2).



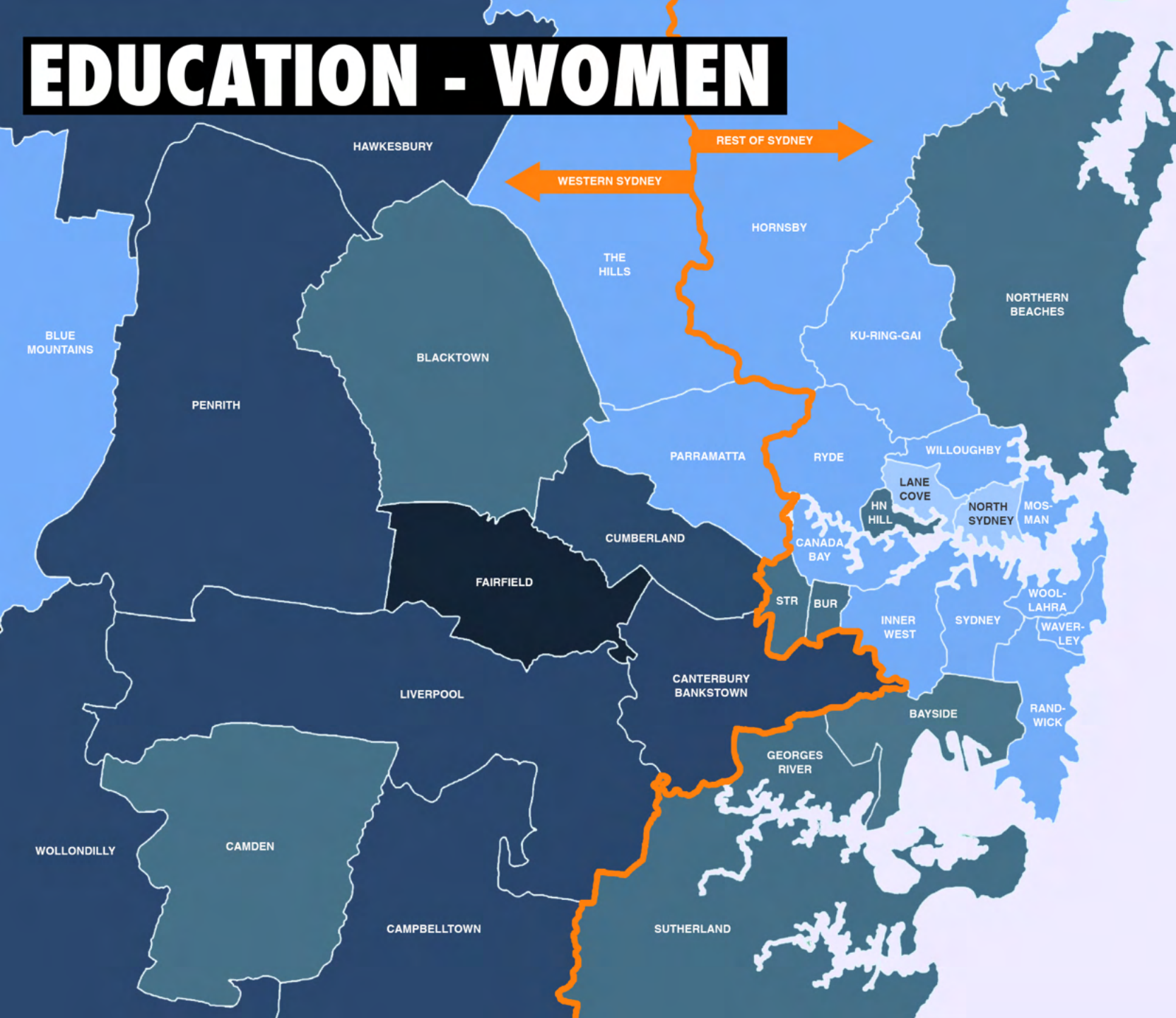
EDUCATION - WOMEN

Mapping and analysis by the Centre for Western Sydney
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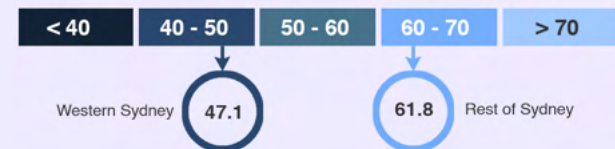
FIGURE 3

Educational Attainment

Proportion of women who hold a Certificate III or higher qualification, 2021



29.4	Fairfield	60.0	The Hills
41.7	Canterbury-Bankstown	60.6	Blue Mountains
42.0	Liverpool	61.0	Parramatta
44.0	Campbelltown	61.3	Canada Bay
44.2	Cumberland	61.8	Randwick
44.4	Penrith	62.4	Hornsby
45.9	Wollondilly	62.7	Ryde
47.2	Hawkesbury	66.2	Ku-ring-gai
50.0	Blacktown	66.3	Inner West
51.2	Camden	66.5	Willoughby
52.8	Georges River	67.1	Woollahra
53.7	Bayside	67.7	Mosman
53.8	Sutherland	68.1	Waverley
55.3	Burwood	69.0	Sydney
59.5	Northern Beaches	71.8	Lane Cove
59.7	Strathfield	73.9	North Sydney
59.7	Hunters Hill		



BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

WOMEN AND EDUCATION

QUALIFICATIONS ARE PATCHY FOR WOMEN ACROSS THE REGION.

Encouraging more women to enter the workforce, return to work or advance in their careers is an important step to unlocking Western Sydney's full economic potential. Increasing women's participation is an economic – not just a social – imperative.

Nearly half, or 47.1 per cent, of Western Sydney women have a Certificate III qualification or higher compared to 61.8 per cent in the rest of Sydney (Figure 3).

14.7% gap between women in the East and West.

On an LGA basis, women's attainment rates are staggeringly low in Fairfield where only 29.4 per cent hold a Certificate III or higher, followed by Canterbury-Bankstown where 41.7 per cent hold a qualification (Figure 3).



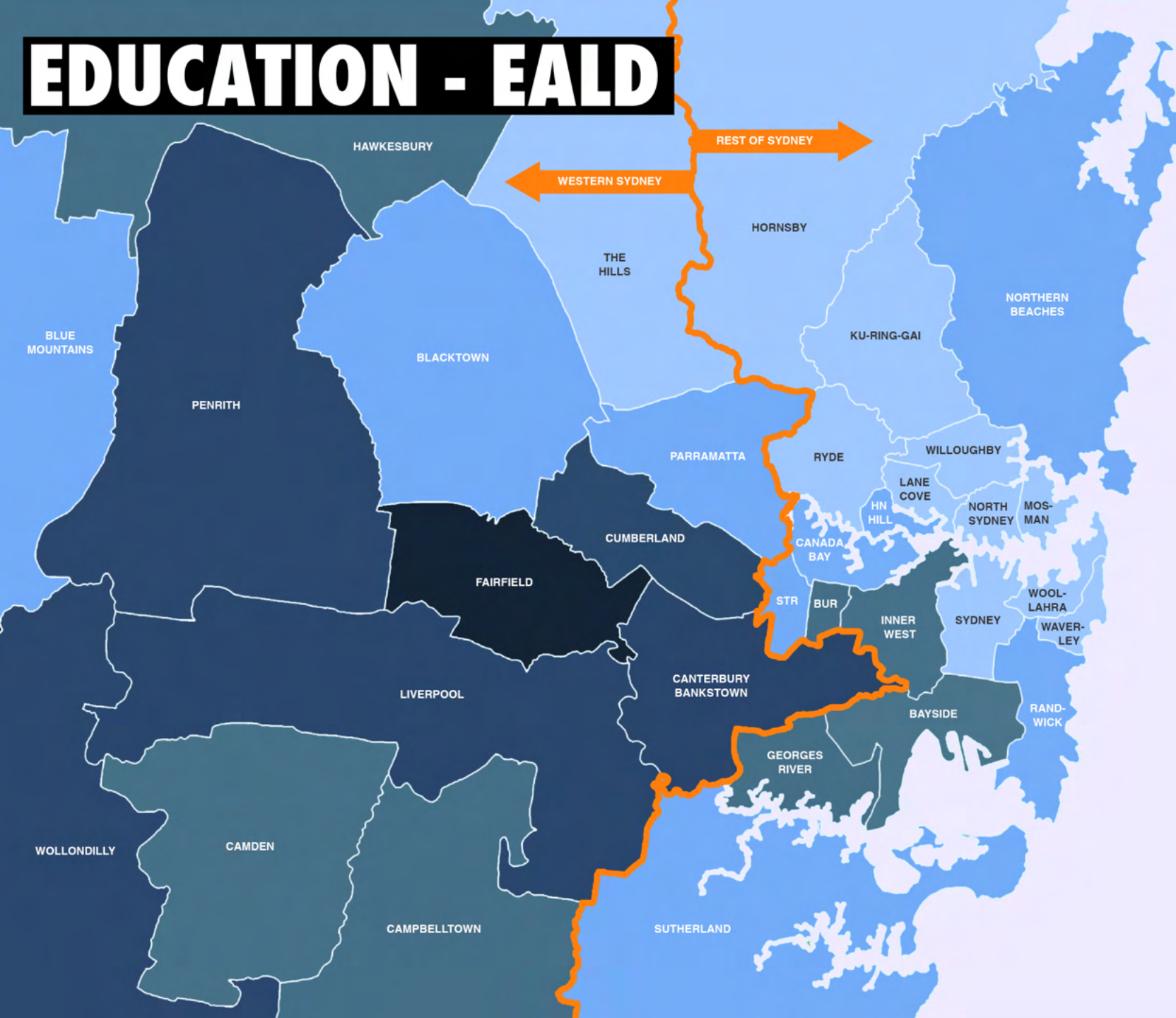
EDUCATION - EALD

Mapping and analysis by the Centre for Western Sydney
www.westernsydney.edu.au/cws

FIGURE 4

Educational Attainment

Proportion of population who speak a language other than English at home and hold a Certificate III or higher qualification, 2021



30.5	Fairfield	65.3	Canada Bay
44.8	Canterbury-Bankstown	65.6	Northern Beaches
46.3	Liverpool	66.3	Hunters Hill
49.1	Cumberland	69.1	Blue Mountains
49.8	Wollondilly	69.6	Parramatta
53.9	Hawkesbury	70.1	Ryde
57.4	Burwood	70.3	Willoughby
57.4	Penrith	71.4	The Hills
57.4	Campbelltown	72.3	Sydney
58.1	Georges River	72.3	Woollahra
58.2	Inner West	72.6	Waverley
58.5	Bayside	72.9	Hornsby
58.9	Camden	74.0	Ku-ring-gai
62.3	Sutherland	76.0	Mosman
62.6	Blacktown	78.3	Lane Cove
65.1	Strathfield	81.2	North Sydney
65.1	Randwick		



BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

MIGRANTS RICH IN SKILLS

WESTERN SYDNEY'S GREATEST STRENGTHS include its cultural and linguistic diversity. A higher proportion of people who speak a language other than English at home - 52.6 per cent - hold a Certificate III or higher compared to the general population in the region at 48.4 per cent.

Importantly, this finding contradicts the narrative that migrants lack skills and the ability to contribute to the economy.*

Non-English speakers in Fairfield, however, record notably lower percentages of educational attainment (30.5 per cent) followed by Canterbury-Bankstown (44.8 per cent) and Liverpool (46.3 per cent; Figure 4). This further highlights the need for policies to prioritise not only where someone lives but some of the barriers holding them back, such as their ability to speak English.

Migrant skills are spatially diverse.

In the rest of Sydney, a high percentage of people who speak a language other than English at home hold Certificates III or above – including in North Sydney (81.2 per cent), Lane Cove (78.3 per cent), and Ku-ring-gai (74 per cent; Figure 4).

*It is important to note that a holistic measurement of cultural and linguistic diversity must also examine other datapoints including born overseas, parents born overseas, ethnicity and religious affiliation. For the purposes of this analysis, language other than English spoken at home has been analysed.

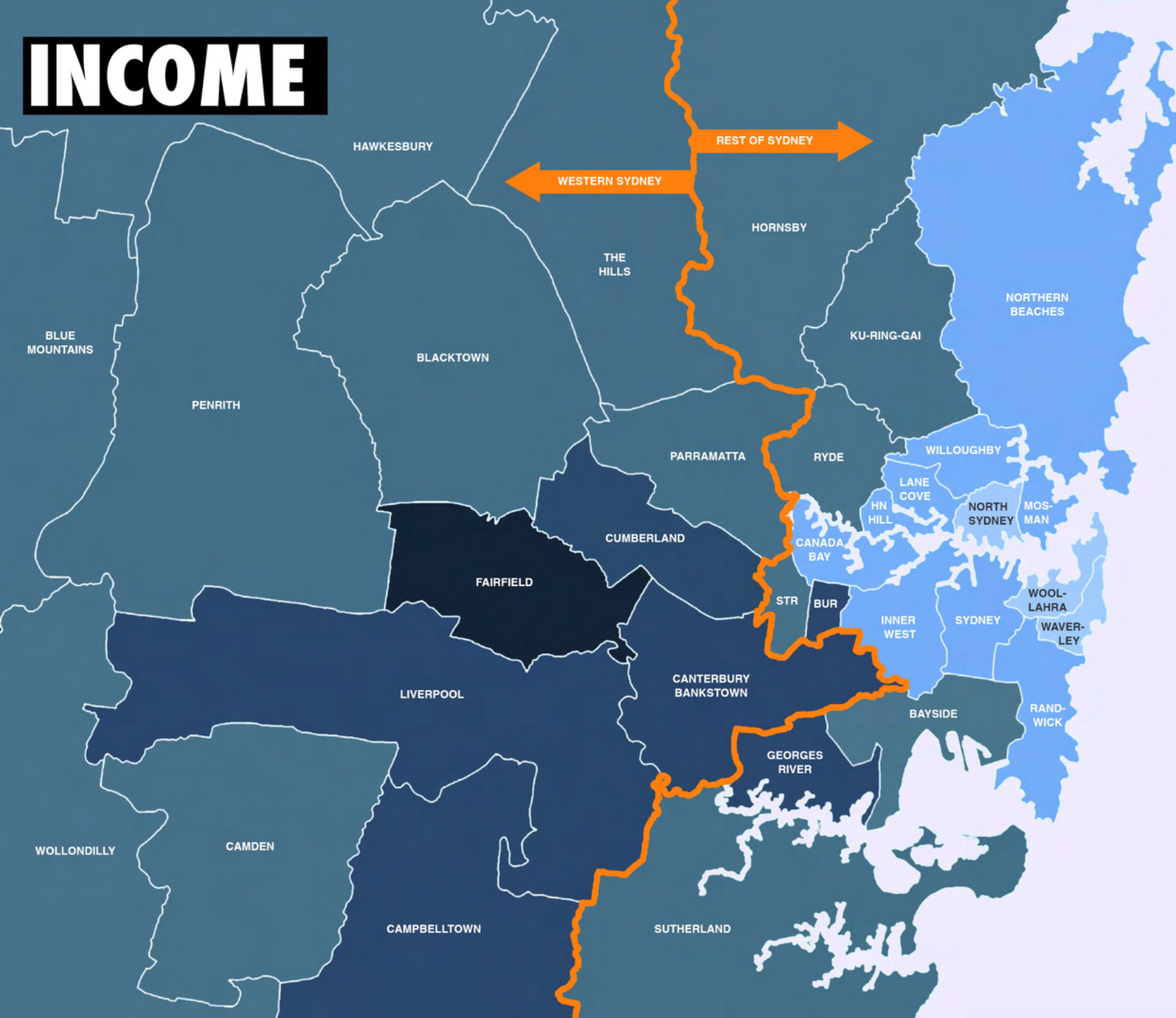
INCOME

Mapping and analysis by the Centre for Western Sydney
www.westernsydney.edu.au/cws

FIGURE 5

Personal Income

Proportion of population earning less than \$800 a week, 2021



67.4	Fairfield	42.5	The Hills
59.0	Canterbury-Bankstown	41.9	Camden
57.9	Cumberland	41.8	Sutherland
55.2	Liverpool	41.1	Ku-ring-gai
53.3	Burwood	39.7	Hunters Hill
53.2	Campbelltown	39.6	Willoughby
50.4	Georges River	39.4	Canada Bay
49.3	Blue Mountains	39.1	Randwick
48.6	Blacktown	39.0	Northern Beaches
47.2	Hawkesbury	36.3	Inner West
46.9	Penrith	34.3	Sydney
46.8	Bayside	32.0	Mosman
46.8	Strathfield	31.3	Lane Cove
46.6	Wollondilly	29.8	Waverley
45.7	Parramatta	28.3	Woollahra
44.7	Hornsby	26.5	North Sydney
44.2	Ryde		



BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS IS CENTRED IN THE WEST. As Australians grapple with the current cost-of-living crisis, it is critical to examine the intersection of where they live, with other indicators of vulnerability, such as language proficiency, gender, and Indigeneity on pay packets.

More than half of all residents in the region, or 52 per cent, earn less than \$800 a week compared to the rest of Sydney at 40 per cent (Figure 5). This is less than the minimum wage, which currently stands at \$882.80 a week before tax.³

Only 15.8 per cent of people in Western Sydney earn more than \$1750 a week – with almost double that, or 29.9 per cent, of residents reaching that salary in the rest of Sydney (Figure 5).

Struggling to make ends meet.

While Western Sydney is the centre of the cost-of-living crunch, several key LGAs fare worse than others and require more focused policy attention.

About two-thirds of those living in Fairfield earn less than the minimum wage, followed by Canterbury-Bankstown (59 per cent) and Cumberland (57.9 per cent; Figure 5).

These figures demonstrate the importance of identifying which vulnerable groups within these areas should receive targeted assistance.

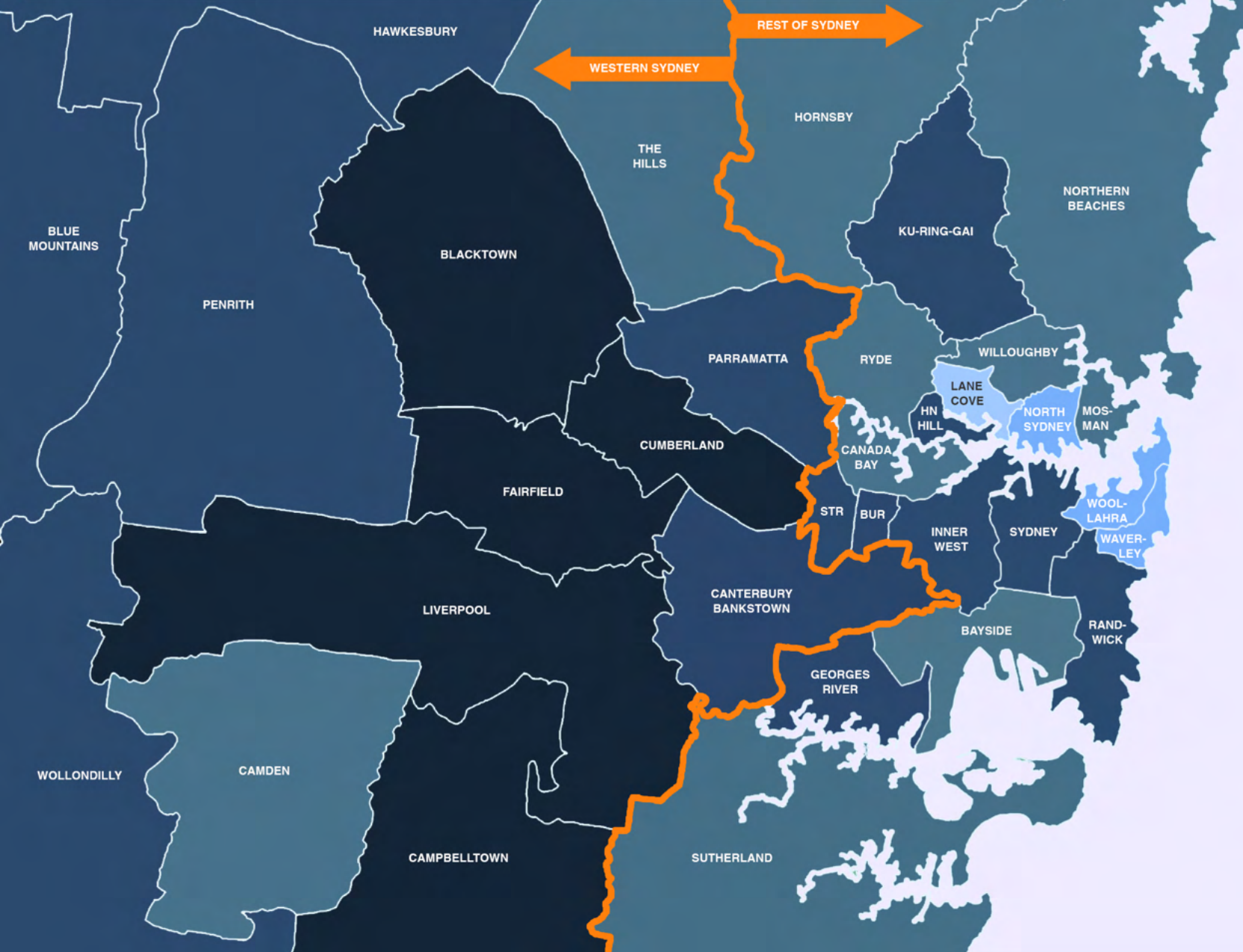
INCOME - FIRST NATIONS

Mapping and analysis by the Centre for Western Sydney
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FIGURE 6

Personal Income

Proportion of population who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander earning less than \$800 a week, 2021



67.9	Fairfield	51.0	Ku-ring-gai
64.7	Liverpool	50.4	Inner West
64.3	Blacktown	49.2	Hornsby
63.1	Cumberland	48.5	Ryde
62.9	Campbelltown	48.5	Bayside
58.1	Canterbury-Bankstown	48.1	Sutherland
57.6	Strathfield	47.4	The Hills
57.0	Hawkesbury	47.2	Canada Bay
57.0	Randwick	45.9	Mosman
54.9	Hunters Hill	45.8	Camden
54.8	Parramatta	44.5	Northern Beaches
54.5	Blue Mountains	40.5	Willoughby
54.2	Penrith	36.3	North Sydney
53.3	Georges River	35.2	Waverley
53.2	Sydney	30.3	Woollahra
53.2	Wollondilly	27.4	Lane Cove
52.7	Burwood		



BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

FIRST NATIONS PERSONAL INCOME

First Nations people in Western Sydney experience a wide range of inequities and barriers. The proportion of the ATSI population in the region earning less than \$800 stands at almost six in 10 people or 58.5 per cent – higher than the broader Indigenous population in the rest of Sydney at 49.6 per cent (Figure 6).

An 8.9% gap in educational attainment between Western Sydney and the rest of Sydney.

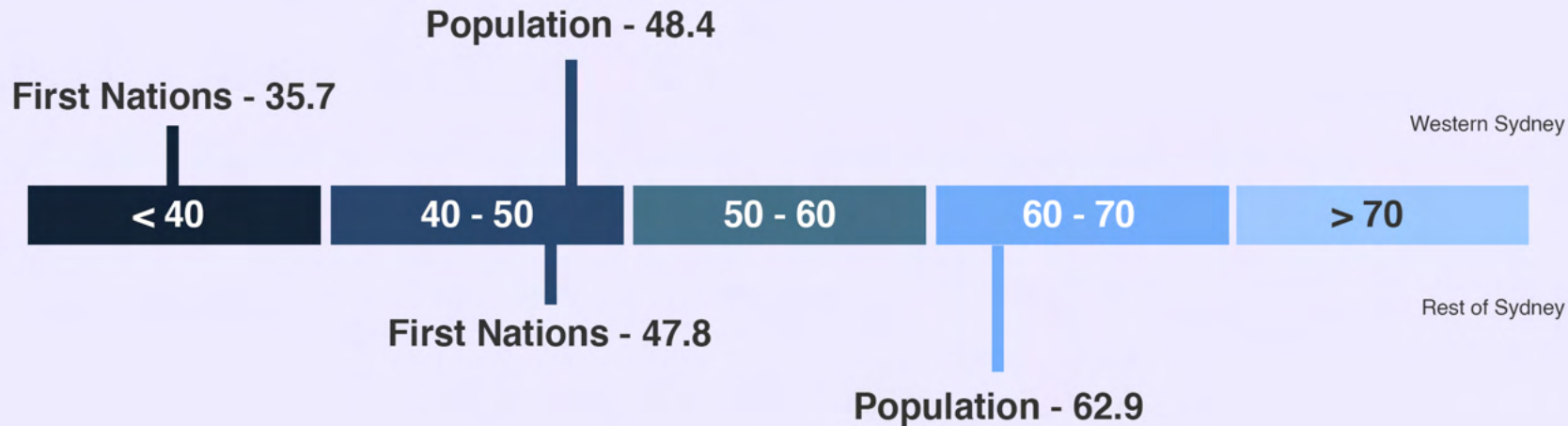
This disparity is particularly pronounced once again in Fairfield where 67.9 per cent of First Nations residents earn less than \$800 a week, followed by Liverpool (64.7 per cent) and Blacktown (64.3 per cent; Figure 6).

These findings demonstrate the significance of place-based approaches to initiatives and programs for closing the gap, particularly within the Western Sydney region where a significant Indigenous population resides.

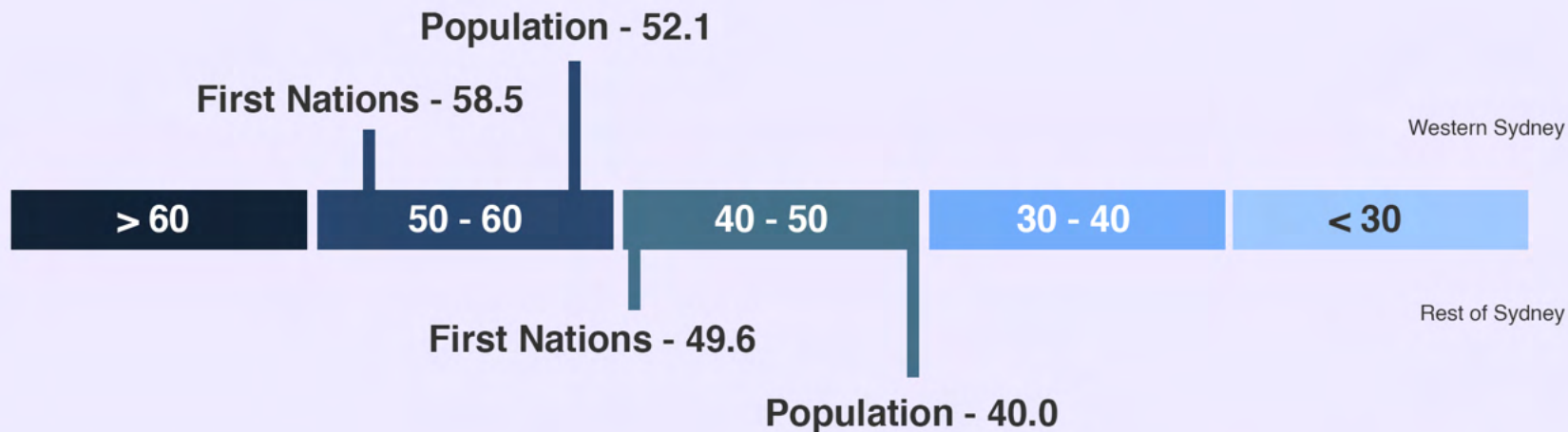
AT A GLANCE - EDUCATION AND INCOME

FIGURE 7

Proportion of population who hold a Certificate III or higher qualification



Proportion of population earning less than \$800 a week



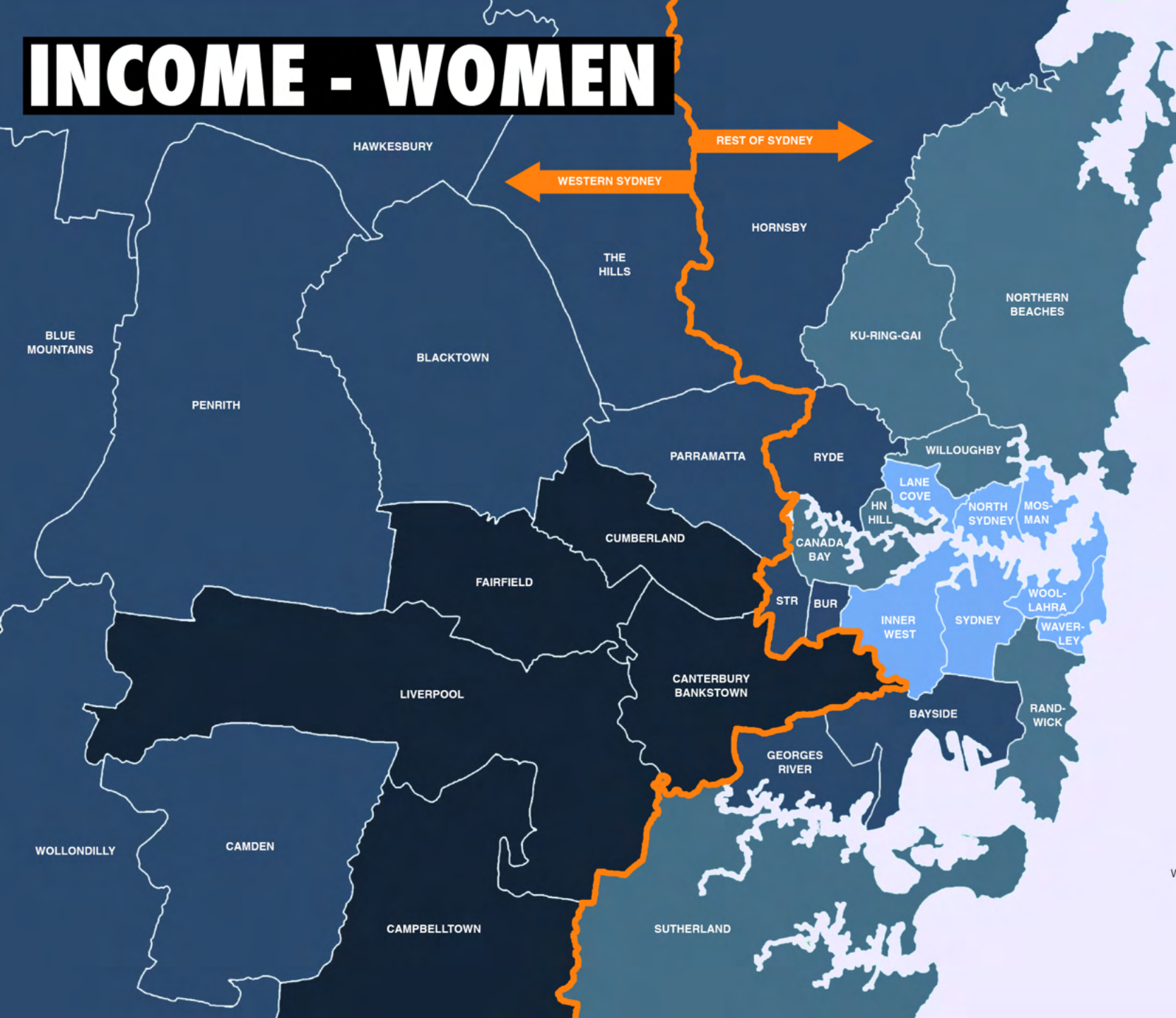
INCOME - WOMEN

Mapping and analysis by the Centre for Western Sydney
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FIGURE 8

Personal Income

Proportion of women earning less than \$800 a week, 2021



74.4	Fairfield	50.6	Ryde
66.5	Cumberland	50.2	The Hills
66.5	Canterbury-Bankstown	49.6	Sutherland
63.2	Liverpool	47.5	Ku-ring-gai
62.4	Campbelltown	45.9	Northern Beaches
58.8	Burwood	45.6	Willoughby
57.4	Blacktown	45.2	Canada Bay
57.0	Georges River	45.2	Hunters Hill
56.6	Wollondilly	43.2	Randwick
56.6	Hawkesbury	39.5	Inner West
56.4	Blue Mountains	39.1	Sydney
55.7	Penrith	37.2	Mosman
53.9	Strathfield	36.2	Lane Cove
53.8	Parramatta	34.9	Waverley
53.5	Bayside	32.5	Woolahra
52.1	Hornsby	30.4	North Sydney
51.7	Camden		



**BRIDGING THE DIVIDE****GEOGRAPHIC GENDER PAY GAP PERSISTS**

Alarmingly, our analysis shows that women in Western Sydney are the group experiencing the greatest levels of income disparity based on where they live. In all, 60.3 per cent of women in the region earn less than \$800 a week compared with 45.9 per cent in the rest of Sydney.

**60.3% of women in Western Sydney
earn less than minimum wage.**

When this is broken down by LGA, the gap is even greater. More than seven-out-of-ten women in Fairfield, or 74.4 per cent, earn less than the minimum wage compared to three-out-of-ten in North Sydney (Figure 8).

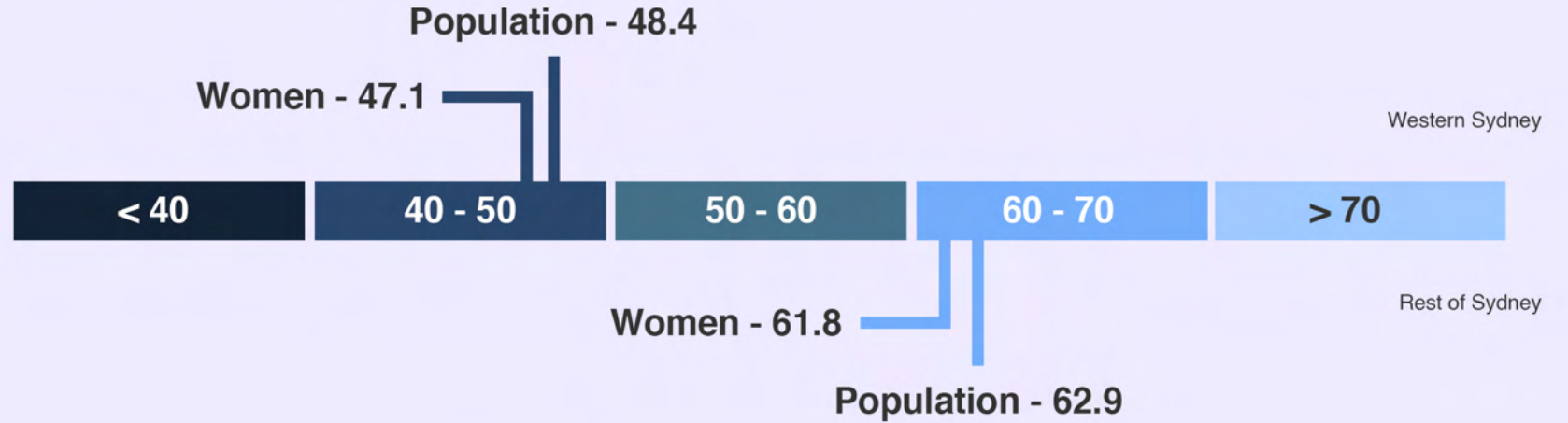
Women in Woollahra in Sydney's eastern suburbs earn the most across the city with nearly four-out-of-ten, or 39.1 per cent, earning more than \$1,750 per week (Figure 8).

Important to this spatial analysis, is that some LGAs have a more balanced distribution across income brackets. For example, the Inner West has a distribution of 39.5 per cent of women earning less than \$800, 30.9 per cent earning between \$800 and \$1,750, and 29.6 per cent earning more than \$1,750 (Figure 8).

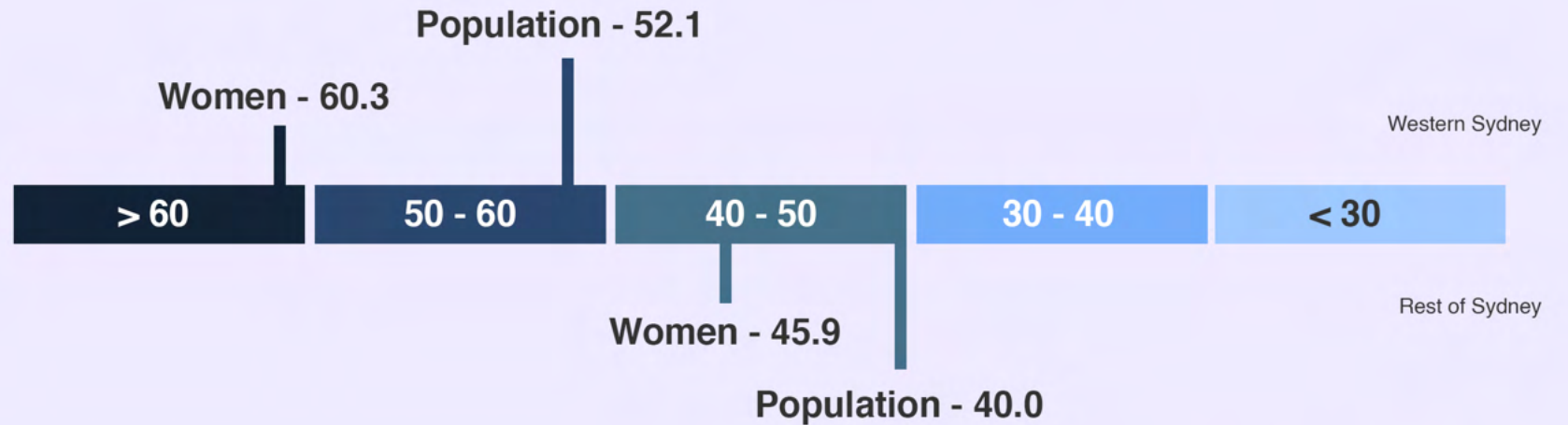
AT A GLANCE - EDUCATION AND INCOME

FIGURE 9

Proportion of population who hold a Certificate III or higher qualification



Proportion of population earning less than \$800 a week



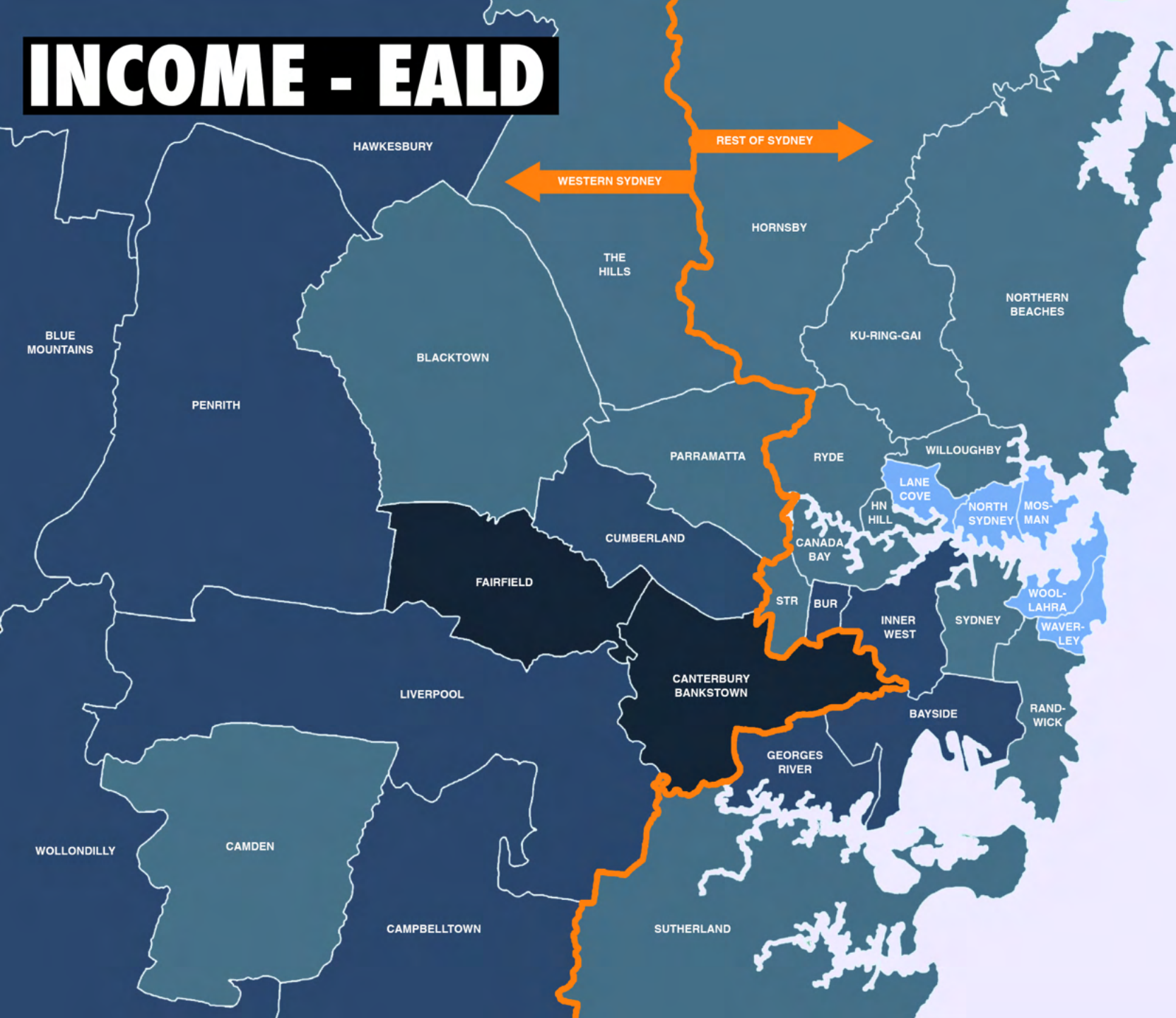
INCOME - EALD

Mapping and analysis by the Centre for Western Sydney
www.westernsydney.edu.au/cws

FIGURE 10

Personal Income

Proportion of population who speak a language other than English at home earning less than \$800 a week, 2021



70.1	Fairfield	47.4	Ryde
63.0	Canterbury-Bankstown	47.2	Blacktown
59.3	Cumberland	46.4	Sutherland
58.4	Liverpool	46.4	Willoughby
57.5	Burwood	45.8	Canada Bay
53.9	Georges River	45.5	Hunters Hill
53.3	Blue Mountains	45.4	Hornsby
53.0	Campbelltown	45.0	Camden
52.8	Wollondilly	44.5	Ku-ring-gai
52.3	Hawkesbury	43.8	Northern Beaches
52.2	Bayside	43.0	The Hills
51.5	Inner West	37.7	Waverley
50.0	Penrith	37.4	Mosman
49.4	Strathfield	35.2	Lane Cove
48.4	Randwick	35.1	Woollahra
47.6	Parramatta	32.1	North Sydney
47.5	Sydney		



BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

LANGUAGE, LOCATION AND QUALIFICATIONS

Language, location and qualifications influence wages.

The proportion of people who speak a language other than English at home in Western Sydney and earn less than \$800 a week sits at 55.9 per cent, compared with 47.9 per cent for the rest of Sydney (Figure 10).

LANGUAGE DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTS INCOME LEVELS IN WESTERN SYDNEY

This is particularly pronounced in key LGA's including Fairfield and Cumberland where 70.1 per cent and 63 per cent of residents who speak a language other than English at home earn less than \$800 per week.

In addition, residents who speak a language other than English at home are less likely to be in higher income brackets. They make up 13.5 per cent of those earning more than \$1,750 compared with 21.5 per cent of people who speak a language other than English in the rest of Sydney (Figure 10).

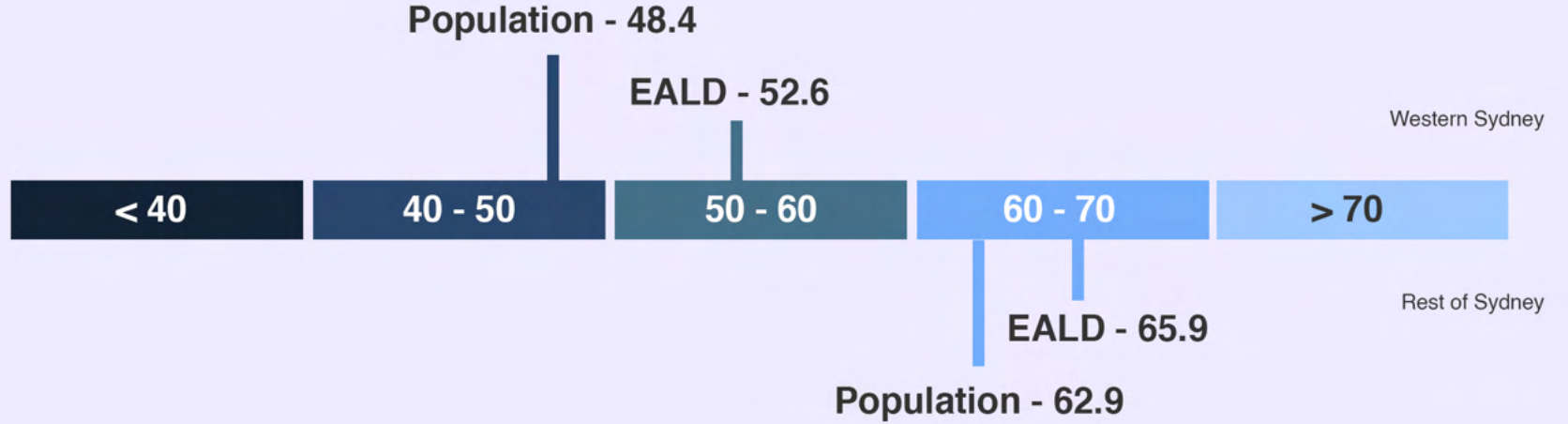


Photo: Kyisoe Han.

Figure 11

AT A GLANCE - EDUCATION AND INCOME

Proportion of population who hold a Certificate III or higher qualification



Proportion of population earning less than \$800 a week

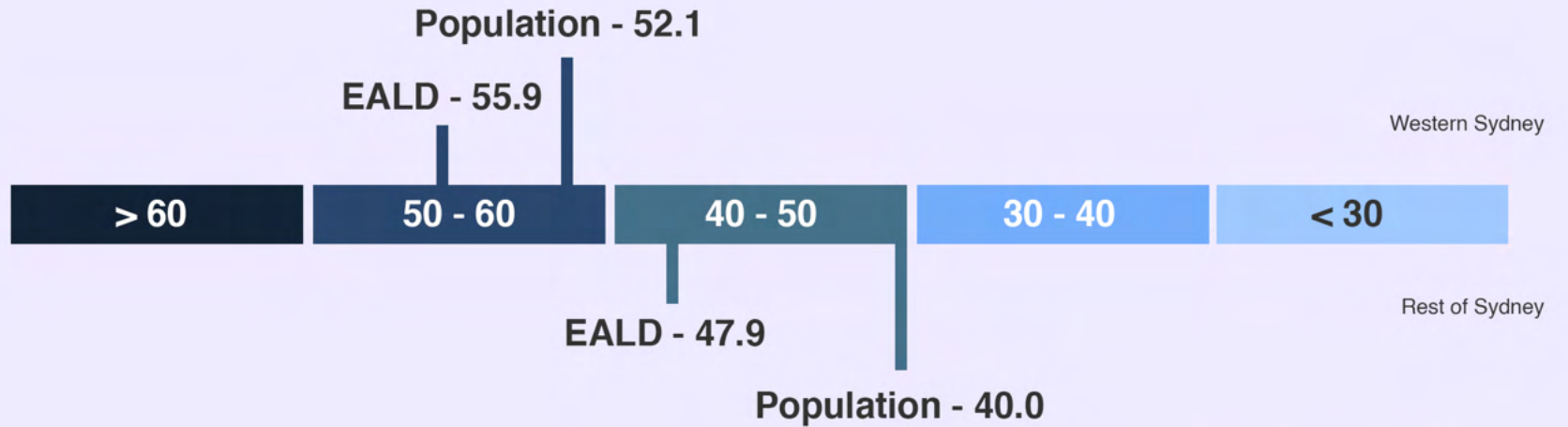




Photo: Kyisoe Han.

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS

At the CfWS, we advocate for a place-based approach to policymaking to deliver long term and significant benefits to the community.

To maximise investments including new or upgraded schools, hospitals and community centres – the funding of programs and support services should target not only the differences in locations at a granular level but also where barriers intersect more acutely in particular geographies.

Obstacles converge to entrench disadvantage.

Too often, as this issues paper highlights, obstacles converge to entrench disadvantage. Place-based policymaking can directly address the unique ways that inequities cut across social groups to drive meaningful change and boost productivity.

The transformation of the entire region depends on interventions and solutions that directly eliminate the intersecting and compounding barriers that some of the area’s most vulnerable groups continue to face – not only based on where they live, but also who they are.

Until this is addressed, some pockets of Western Sydney remain at risk of falling behind as the rest of the region moves forward.

Instead of a one-size-fits-all approach, investment needs to be targeted to the groups and LGAs in the region that are struggling. This is how we can unleash the potential of our communities and ensure everyone in Western Sydney is able to contribute to the broader community and economy.

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

KEY ACTIONS

- 1** Remove barriers to work for women. Investment in childcare in Western Sydney needs to be prioritised to close the gaps in earnings between women in the region compared to the rest of Sydney.
- 2** Examine how place-based investments such as local jobs and targeted education interventions can help women, first nations and migrant communities enter, re-enter or advance in the workforce. Solutions must be tailored to place, and vulnerable groups based on the intersecting barriers faced.
- 3** Reduce the obstacles that highly skilled migrants face to higher paid jobs. Look at streamlining the recognition of overseas qualifications and skills, addressing discrimination in job application processes, and introducing workforce transition programs in areas of need for vulnerable groups.
- 4** Target investments in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to create opportunities that break cycles of disadvantage.

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

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**CENTRE FOR
WESTERN SYDNEY**

About the Centre for Western Sydney

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY is the only university in NSW with a legislated commitment to conduct research that meets the needs of Western Sydney communities. Fulfilling this unique mandate for research, the University established the Centre for Western Sydney in 2014.

The Centre combines world-class research expertise with frank and fearless advocacy on issues of importance to Western Sydney. The Centre's work is guided by its ambition for a thriving Western Sydney that is understood and respected for its strengths and contributions regionally, nationally, and internationally. Delivered through a strong politics of listening, the Centre aims to drive informed dialogue and action for, and with its region.



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