

Greater Western Sydney

Dishing it up
From precincts to
production lines,
food is big business

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Data centres, airport add \$31b and counting

Development As private-sector investment drives growth, residents need new infrastructure to benefit from the jobs bonanza, writes Paul Karp.

When NSW's Investment Delivery Authority decided to back 15 data centre projects worth \$52 billion, the sites of two-thirds of the proposed digital engines of growth were in western Sydney.

But the data centre boom propping up Australia's growth rate is just the latest wave of investment into the sprawling region that contains almost one-third of the NSW population.

The Western Sydney International Airport, decades in the planning and due to start commercial flights in November, the 11,200-hectare airport city surrounding it and the Bradfield City Centre, itself five times the size of Barangaroo, have catalysed investment out west like nothing else could.

According to the Bradfield Development Authority (BDA), development applications in the airport city are worth \$31.1 billion of private investment including \$14.2 billion in data centres.

That now eclipses the total government infrastructure investment of \$28 billion, which includes the airport and its associated metro between St Marys and Bradfield, the M12 motorway, and road upgrades.

Jennifer Westacott, the BDA chair and former chair of the Business Council of Australia, says its aim is to develop a city driven by industry and ensure "that actually pushes economic development out across western Sydney. It's a particularly

catalytic series of investments that push a change in industry formation in western Sydney."

In April, Bradfield opened expressions of interest for its enterprise precinct, which Westacott says is attracting interest from "companies across defence, aerospace, [and] traditional manufacturing".

"It's not just the volume of jobs, it's the type of jobs," Westacott says. "Think about data centres, it's high-tech jobs. It's the full ecosystem ... particularly if we start to see a lot of agribusiness take off, as I believe it will, due to the airport's proximity."

Among the private sector projects: an Aldi automated distribution centre, DHL logistics facilities, and data centres at Kemps Creek and Mamre Road.

Of the 15 IDA-supported data centres, four are in Blacktown and two each in Ryde, Penrith, Fairfield and the Hills Shire. NextDC will be supported for its S4, S5 and S7 data centres in Fairfield, Ryde and Eastern Creek. Stockland also won support for three projects.

While Transgrid has warned that not all proponents will be successful, Belinda Dennett, the chief executive of Data Centres Australia, argues Australia can boost data centre investment and achieve the energy transition together.

The Sydney Ring South transmission project, for example, will "strengthen the electricity network into

Continued S8

▶ Path to power runs through the west **S8**



Aniss Chami, CEO of Vitex Pharmaceuticals, sees an answer to capacity and supply constraints. PHOTO: DOMINIC LORRIMER

New cargo hub helps vitamins company pep up production

Alexandra Cain

Being able to freight vitamins and supplements overnight from the new, 24-hour Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport straight to customers in the voracious Chinese market means Vitex Pharmaceuticals needs a new factory.

The Eastern Creek-based company manufactures vitamins and herbal supplements for major brands.

With its new factory just 15 minutes by car from the airport, Vitex will start sending products to customers as soon as it opens for cargo flights in July. To accommodate an expected boost to sales, the factory can produce 30 billion tablets and capsules a year, more than doubling its 12 billion capsule annual capacity.

"Most of our products end up on overseas shelves across South-East Asia, China, India, the Middle East

and the Arab Gulf," says Vitex Pharmaceuticals' CEO Aniss Chami.

"A lot of times, we run into capacity constraints or supply constraints, not because of us, but because of logistics delays.

"Having a shiny airport with a massive logistics hub directly adjacent to our business means we can funnel things through air on night flights."

▶ Full story **S2**

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Parramatta is a city second to none. We are powering up as western Sydney's job engine.

With a gross regional product of \$33.96 billion, Parramatta is one of Australia's fastest-growing economies. But the story is not where we are today, it's where we're headed and how we transform this growth into long-term economic impact.

As the geographical heart of Sydney, Parramatta is in a unique position to drive the next phase of Australia's economic expansion. That is the focus of our new City Economy Strategy – a clear plan to align jobs, investment and infrastructure with where Sydney's population growth is occurring. At the core is an ambitious but necessary target – create 150,000 additional jobs by 2050. Parramatta's population is growing rapidly, bringing with it a more skilled and highly qualified workforce. But without significant shift in local job creation, too many residents will continue to commute long distances, limiting productivity, reducing quality of life and placing pressure on infrastructure.

The broader challenge that sits behind this is the imbalance of jobs across Greater Sydney. Western Sydney is home to a fast-growing, highly capable workforce, yet too many jobs remain concentrated in the east.

More of Greater Sydney's population now lives west of Parramatta than to its east – think Blacktown, Marsden Park, Penrith – rapidly growing communities with highly skilled people who want to work in a CBD without commuting hours into Sydney city.

This is not just an economic plan for Parramatta, it's about unlocking productivity and economic growth for all of Greater Sydney.

A strong local jobs market is not just about employment. It is about building a city that supports business growth while remaining liveable and sustainable. We want people to live, work and thrive in Parramatta and experience everything our city has to offer.

The City Economy Strategy provides a clear roadmap to support businesses, grow key sectors and future-proof jobs for the people of western Sydney and beyond. The opportunity is significant. Parramatta sits at the centre of a region that will drive much of Sydney's population and economic growth over the coming decades.

With major infrastructure transforming connectivity and a pipeline of investment reshaping the urban landscape, the building blocks are in place.

Parramatta's economic strategy is built around three fundamentals that global cities understand well: productivity, place and people.

On all three fronts, City of Parramatta is paving the way for continued growth.

Parramatta's CBD now hosts a \$1.6 billion night-time economy, supported by initiatives such as the Special Entertainment Precinct. We have released a draft Master Plan for a CBD South Parramatta precinct that will turbo-charge our booming night-time economy and create a new Chinatown precinct.

Westmead is emerging as one of the nation's most significant health and biomedical precincts. Cultural investments – including Powerhouse Parramatta and Riverside Theatres – are not merely lifestyle add-ons, but economic enablers that attract visitors, talent and investment.

People are at the heart of Parramatta's growth. Our diversity is not just a social asset, it is an economic one. A globally connected population, strong education pathways and entrepreneurial small business base provide the foundation for long-term growth.

Parramatta is where Australia's future workforce is growing, and where infrastructure investment can deliver the greatest return. It is where the next phase of Sydney's economic transformation will be either enabled or constrained.

Parramatta is not waiting for its future. It is already building it. But momentum alone is not enough. It must be matched with decisions that reflect today's realities, not yesterday's assumptions. It's up to all levels of government to pull all levers – infrastructure investment, planning settings, and education and skills investment, that will allow these jobs to be delivered.

Importantly, we must protect our city's commercial core for jobs by removing planning pathways that allow housing where our city's jobs should be growing.

This is why I called on the NSW Government to exempt Parramatta's commercial core from the Housing Delivery Authority's fast track approval process. The recent decision to do this for part of Parramatta's commercial core is a step in the right direction.

However, we still need stronger exemptions in place as build-to-rent housing via other planning pathways still puts future jobs at risk. Without better protection for jobs in Parramatta's centre, we risk building a "Central Business District" with no space left for businesses. If we get this right, Parramatta will not just rise, it will lead and shape the next phase of Australia's growth.



Western Sydney International Airport has the capacity to expand significantly over the years. PHOTO: WOLTER PEETERS

Cargo hub gives importers and exporters wings

Freight The Western Sydney International Airport opens for cargo flights next month – and there's no curfew, writes Alexandra Cain.

Being able to freight vitamins and supplements overnight from the new, 24-hour Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport straight to customers in the Chinese market means Vitex Pharmaceuticals needs a new factory.

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The opening of the curfew-less airport – most flights from its nearby competitor, Sydney Kingsford Smith Airport, stop from 11pm to 6am each day – offers many pluses, besides the new tech and facilities the aerropolis offers.

For Vitex, being closer to the airport means lower freight costs versus sending products through Sydney airport. Running a business from western Sydney is a boon in other

ways. "Western Sydney is the perfect location to recruit and train up the right people," says Chami. "We can capture a lot of great talent from the Hills District and Parramatta and even from the east. Our CFO drives all the way from Bronte because of the new highways. Our people living in Rooty Hill, Blacktown, Liverpool and Campbelltown can also funnel through good highways."

With more available, affordable land in western Sydney versus central Sydney, scaling up operations from the west makes good commercial sense. "You can't build these mega-factories any more in Botany or Alexandria; those days are gone. This is the new mega-hub for mega factories," says Chami.

A drawback is a lack of foresight in urban planning, with B-doubles often found barrelling down suburban streets not made for big loads. "Master planning of this new aerropolis could have been done much better. They should have involved industry from the beginning," says Chami.

Western Sydney International Airport connects to major arterial roads including the M12, Northern Road, M4 and M5. The airport's figures suggest Sydney's cargo capacity will grow by 33 per cent once it opens. "Exporters and importers will benefit from our integrated cargo precinct's 24-hour capacity, dedicated access via the recently upgraded Northern Road and proximity to freight and logistics hubs in Kemps Creek and developing industrial sites across the aerropolis," says Western Sydney International Airport CEO Simon Hickey.

The cargo hub's anchor tenants include big-name operators dnata Cargo, Menzies Aviation and Qantas Cargo. "Like everything at WSI, the cargo precinct is built for growth, so while we are excited to open stage

one in July, it has capacity to expand significantly over the years ahead."

With 80 per cent of Menzies Aviation's Sydney-based customers' products dispatched up through Asia, being able to send perishable products, pharmaceuticals and anything that is temperature- or time-sensitive through Western Sydney airport means its customers can pursue new business models.

"Being able to depart in the early hours of the morning means packages arrive on doorsteps first thing the next day. It changes some of the concepts in how exporters and importers trade in the Australian market," says Menzies' executive vice president of cargo, Beau Paine.

The business has a 20-year agreement to operate a 22,500-square-metre site at Western Sydney International's cargo hub. A 12,500sqm warehouse will handle pharmaceutical and cool chain products, e-commerce and heavy cargo.

Sydney Airport's master plan indicates the volume of freight that needs to move through the airport will rise from about 650,000 tonnes a year now to 1.4 million by 2045. "So, we need a second airport to support that growth rate," says Paine. "The Western Sydney airport is also going to help road freight moving to Brisbane and Melbourne, because a lot of freight comes into Sydney, but then moved by road to other cities across Australia. That quicker access to the freeways is an added advantage."

Dnata's facility at WSI will provide up to 60,000 tonnes more annual cargo-handling capacity in NSW.

"As a greenfield development, it will give us the opportunity to design a more efficient environment, supporting faster processing of goods and scalable cargo handling," says Burt Sigsworth, managing director of dnata airport operations, Australia.

Dnata plans to spend about \$6 million on equipment and technology, and its facility will include temperature-controlled rooms for handling pets, as well as facial-recognition technology.

Even with all this investment, Sydney Airport will remain the major cargo hub while Western Sydney gears up. "Western Sydney is not expected to take over the bulk cargo that goes out of Sydney Airport for at least a decade," says Export Council of Australia chair Dianne Tipping.

"It is going to slowly grow. Every passenger plane is usually full with cargo when it leaves Sydney Airport and those planes are not intending to move over to Western Sydney Airport in a hurry. They will, but it will not be immediate." AFR

Home builds are stalling as costs outstrip values

Housing Developers are seeking returns in other, more affluent areas. If supply doesn't pick up, essential workers may leave, writes Lucy Slade.

Property developers are struggling to make their projects stack up in Sydney's west as construction costs rapidly rise, hampering critical residential housing supply in Sydney's fastest-growing areas.

The housing affordability crisis is pushing more residents to the outer areas of Sydney, where they have a shot at affording property, while most of Sydney's new migrants are seeking to make the west home, too.

But higher costs for labour, materials, regulatory compliance and taxes are forcing more property developers to leave the west to build luxury apartments in affluent suburbs, or switch to commercial real estate, where buyers can afford to pay a premium.

Residents want freestanding houses but increasing the supply of those involves building more in greenfield areas where basic water and electricity infrastructure is required – a costly endeavour that's not yet matching land values.

If supply doesn't begin to meet demand soon, experts fear skilled workers such as teachers and police officers will be priced out of the market and forced to leave Sydney's west.

Ray White Commercial Western Sydney managing director Peter Vines says for developers it's a simple equation: the cost of construction has risen higher than the market value.

"We've had a lot of developers who have just said we're going to go and start building industrial or commercial or retail because we don't want to be involved with residential any more," Vines says.

"It's not just a rising cost, it's also that a whole lot of people who can deliver their stock don't want to be involved with it any more because of the red tape."

Western Sydney is expected to absorb nearly 59,000 new residents

annually through to 2041, driving a need for 25,636 new homes each year across all housing types – but only 5484 dwellings are under construction across the region, according to Ray White Commercial's report.

Planning activity is improving to 22,500 approvals annually but more than 82,000 dwellings are sitting in the pipeline across western Sydney, the report shows.

"The pipeline is there. The approvals are there. What's missing is the ability to convert those approvals into homes at the pace the region actually requires," Vines says.

ALAND's Andrew Hrsto, a western Sydney migrant who was building thousands of homes in the west until recently, tells *The Australian Financial Review* that his company is moving closer to the city to build, where unit sale prices are higher and will cover build costs.

"It actually is disheartening that I've had to move away from where our bread and butter has been," Hrsto says.

"We still got works in progress [in western Sydney], but just going forward, we just can't keep doing it. It's just too hard."

Local and state government levies are nearly \$100,000 per apartment in parts of the city's west, where large amounts of basic infrastructure are required to support buildings in newer suburbs. Hrsto says these taxes are making his builds unviable.

Vines says most of his buyers would prefer freestanding homes on smaller blocks, as Australians still want the suburban dream, which includes a backyard for their kids to play in.

"It's more affordable to build. It's often quicker," he says.

"Your propensity to have huge blowouts in terms of construction cost is less."

However, there are some areas in the west where home builds have been rushed and residents have



Real estate agent Peter Vines says apartment builds are unviable for developers in western Sydney. PHOTO: PETER RAE

West booms

Greater Sydney house prices, May 2026

Rank	Suburb	Value* (\$m)	Annual change (%)
1	Penrith	1.11	11.7
2	St Marys	1.14	11.6
3	Wyong	0.97	11.0
4	Campbelltown	1.02	10.6
5	Richmond - Windsor	0.99	10.6
6	Mount Druitt	1.02	10.5
7	Bringelly - Green Valley	1.26	10.4
8	Merrylands - Guildford	1.31	9.8
9	Camden	1.22	9.6
10	Sutherland - Menai - Heathcote	1.64	9.2

* Median

SOURCE: COTALITY

moved in without basic infrastructure being completed.

The new south-west suburb of Wilton Greens, near Camden, is an example of infrastructure not keeping up with housing development. A couple bought a plot of land in the suburb four years ago but they won't have their water and sewerage hooked up until 2028, due to a lack of infrastructure.

Liverpool mayor Ned Mannoun says all levels of government need to chip in to build the infrastructure required to improve supply.

"What would make sense is if the state government use their balance sheet with ours and we forward-

funded that infrastructure," he says. "Let's go out there and build \$500 million worth of infrastructure up front and let's recoup that money over the next 10 years. Liverpool at the moment, no one's even trying to build ... the reality is, there's a developer shortage. There is not enough people who are willing to take the risk to build."

Planning Minister Paul Scully blames the former government for building thousands of homes without the schools, services and community facilities to support them.

"Further housing construction and investment attraction will be supported through legislative reforms introduced to the parliament recently,

which all parties should support if they genuinely want to take steps to increase housing supply and support job creation," Scully says.

The annual rate of home value growth in Sydney slowed to 2.3 per cent in May, but values in the outer west and Blue Mountains regions of Penrith and St Marys are the fastest growing at nearly 12 per cent, according to Cotality.

Of the top 10 fastest-growing home value regions in greater Sydney, eight are in outer western areas, one is in Central Coast and the other is in Sutherland.

Sydney's population grew by 75,000 in the 2025 financial year, but the figure is largely made up by migration, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

The areas in greater Sydney experiencing the highest population growth last financial year were Box Hill (up 3900) and Marsden Park (3200) in the outer north-west, and Austral (3100) in the outer south-west, according to the ABS.

Data shows young families are leaving inner Sydney due to housing affordability. Vines believes populations will leave the west too, if supply doesn't improve to keep up with demand. "Rents will continue to rise. I think more people will leave Sydney to go further afield because they cannot afford to live here, so we will lose more skilled labour and skilled professionals." **AFR**

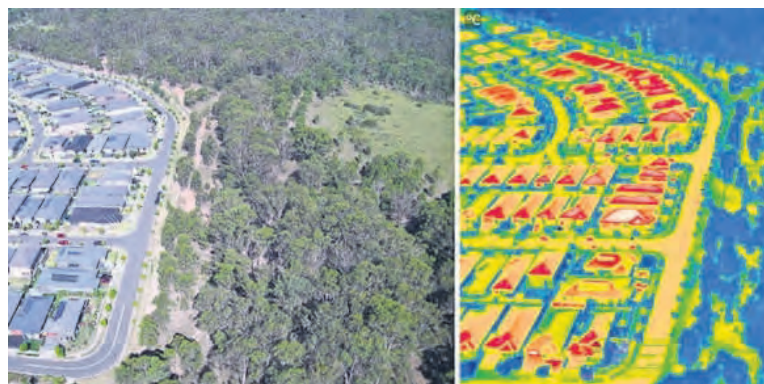
Housing becomes perilously hot topic

Heat sinks Decades of bad planning is making summer unbearable, writes Sian Powell.

Residents of western Sydney now routinely dread the baking days of summer, when temperatures can soar into the 40s in some districts – heat of 44 degrees has been recorded at Badgerys Creek, 43.9 at Penrith Lakes, 43.8 at Richmond Airbase. These are days when it's too hot to let the kids play outside, too hot to walk a few blocks to visit a friend, too hot to ride a bike to the shops or work

in the yard. Decades of poor planning have led to this heat sink and there are no government regulations to force developers to adopt any meaningful heat mitigation measures, says Professor Sebastian Pfautsch, co-lead of the Urban Transformations Research Centre at Western Sydney University.

"We're sleepwalking into the next super-El Nino," he adds, noting extremely hot weather has been predicted for the coming summer by the World Meteorological Association and



An infrared image showing the heat retained by dark roofs in Jordan Springs compared with the surrounding vegetation.

Australia's Bureau of Meteorology. With climate change projected to drive ever-higher temperatures, western Sydney's heat sink is affecting the lives of millions of people.

"We allowed it to happen," Pfautsch says, adding that the worst housing developments have been "moonscaped": flattened, with trees and creek lines removed to allow for the easy

construction of big houses on small blocks with hardly any room for shade trees or even vegetable gardens. The current push for increased housing supply has undermined any impetus for heat mitigation, he adds, and updates to the residential elements of the National Construction Code have been paused for years.

As little as \$12,000 per dwelling

could provide houses able to cope far better with hotter summers but, along with heat-reflective light-coloured roofing and effective tree cover, this seems to have become a difficult ask.

"It's completely ludicrous," Pfautsch says. "Our building quality is going down when we are going into the decades to come where we have to deal with longer and hotter summers."

The NSW government has set a target of 40 per cent average tree canopy cover across Greater Sydney to provide shade and comfort.

Yet Pfautsch says his research suggests that with the current rate, regions in western Sydney, including suburbs such as Box Hill, Kellyville, Schofields and Marsden Park, will have 9 per cent cover by 2040.

He has also analysed Australian Bureau of Statistics data from the last census and found the five-bedroom homes on small blocks on these spreading developments house an average of 3.2 people.

"It's just crazy," he says. "It's not fit for purpose. The families that buy these **Continued S4**

Welcome to challenges of life across Latte Line

Economy This region has long been championed as the city's next great boomtown – so what has been holding it back? Joshua Peach writes.

Demographer and columnist Bernard Salt first popularised the term "Latte Line" when describing the movement of Melbourne's upper and middle classes westward in the early 2010s.

Several years later the term would become synonymous with another city: Sydney. But rather than being used to trace the ebb of higher socio-economic markers towards the city's traditionally lower socio-economic environs, it has instead become a catch-all term for the opposite.

For Sydney, the "Latte Line" has con-

tinually proven difficult to budge and a quick glance at a map of the city's median income, based on 2021 census data taken a decade after the term was first popularised, shows it to be still very much intact. Western suburbs like Penrith, Blacktown and Liverpool have a median income of just under \$2000 a week – nearly \$500 less than the city's coastal and metro suburbs, or about \$24,000 less a year.

The lighter-shaded area of the map, starting around Parramatta and stretching west and south, remains a challenge for the town planners, architects, politicians and local councils hoping to unlock the region's potential

and bring it more in line with the eastern and northern suburbs, which continue to reap much of the benefit of Australia's most populous city.

The west seems perpetually poised on the edge of ever-deferred transformation, caught between a slew of infrastructure, demographic and economic changes that could erode the caffeinated frontier.

They include major state infrastructure projects such as the Western Sydney International Airport, set to

Stark imbalances ... represent cumulative stresses for communities.

Nicky Morrison, professor of planning, Western Sydney University

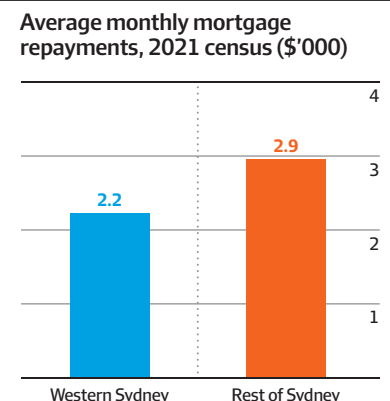
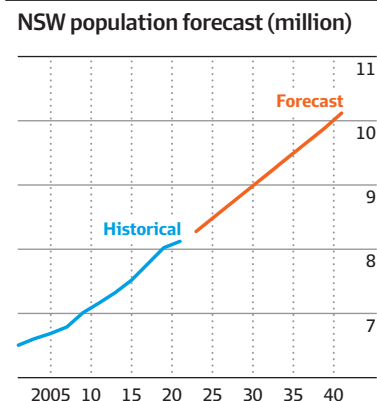
open later this year, and the accompanying Sydney Metro Western Sydney Airport line.

Private investment in the area is also booming, including a \$1 billion Aldi distribution centre set to open next door to the new airport, as well as more than half a dozen new data centres either built or in the planning stages.

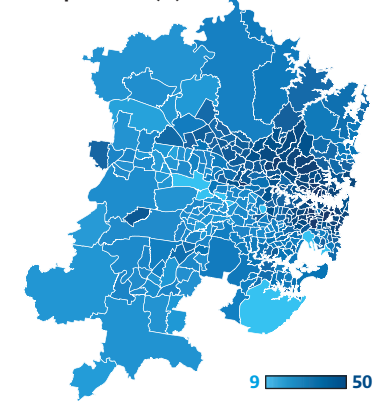
Underpinning these investments are strong economic drivers expected in the coming years, namely migration to the area both nationally and from overseas.

Modelling by Planning NSW forecasts the state's population to top 10 million by early 2040, with about 65 per cent living in the Greater Sydney area. Separate modelling by the University of NSW estimates about half the city's population will reside in its western suburbs by the early 2030s, outpa-

Great divide

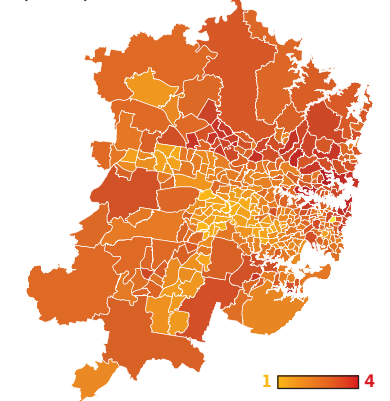


Residents employed in professional occupations* (%)



* As defined by the ABS

Median weekly household income (\$'000)



SOURCE: PLANNING NSW, AUSTRALIAN CENSUS 2021



Parramatta has long been Sydney's second CBD. But the west seems perpetually poised on the edge of transformation. PHOTO: WOLTER PEETERS

cing growth in the rest of the city.

The growth in the region is expected to be driven, in part, by housing affordability.

Despite house prices in some western suburbs continuing to outpace much of the rest of the city, average mortgages remain below the metro averages. But while average mortgages may be smaller, lower overall wages mean many in the region live with more debt than their coastal peers, leaving them more exposed to cost-of-living and interest-rate shocks.

In fact, the "jobs wall" separating Sydney's west from its higher paid and more "professionalised" eastern counterparts remains one of the region's more pressing issues.

Western Sydney averages a professionalisation rate – the number of individuals in an area in jobs such as engineering, business, IT, education and the arts – at around 22 per cent as of the 2021 census. That's up four per-

centage points on 10 years earlier but still well behind the 35.4 per cent average rate closer to the city.

The entrenched issue led one academic report into the region to conclude in 2022 that even with renewed investment there was "still insufficient jobs overall", particularly for the region's rising number of graduates.

Likewise, the same report found that other factors that have long plagued the region continue to thwart its growth, despite unprecedented levels of public and private investment.

"Stark job-housing imbalances, inadequate infrastructure investment, declining housing affordability, a deficit in cultural infrastructure, and extreme urban heat represent increasing and cumulative stresses for western Sydney's local communities, economies, and ecosystems," concluded the report's authors, led by Nicky Morrison, professor of planning at Western Sydney University. **AFR**

From S3

Where housing is a perilously hot topic

homes don't need five bedrooms, but they can't get smaller homes. This model has a 20 per cent profit margin costed in and the development industry doesn't need to change it because the demand is so high."

For its part, earlier this year the NSW government awarded millions of dollars for modest greening projects, including about \$5 million in western Sydney (two projects of \$94,000 and \$203,000 for Fairfield, for instance, one of the most heat-vulnerable areas).

A new Climate Change and Natural Hazards State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) and Urban Heat Policy statement is in the works – the consultation period ended in March, and the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure is now "considering feedback".

Building regulations were boosted in 2023 with the idea that builders are now required to follow BASIX 7-star thermal performance ratings, designed to keep new homes more energy-efficient and more comfortable on hotter days.

Yet Pfautsch says these rules do nothing for the environment outside the house, and new developments can continue with "very little green, zero deep soil, zero shade trees", and he is



Emma Bacon, chief executive of Sweltering Cities, and Sebastian Pfautsch, co-lead of the Urban Transformations Research Centre at Western Sydney University.



not sure how much interior comfort the regulations will ensure on days of extreme heat.

Still, Pfautsch's co-director at WSU's Urban Transformations Research Centre, Professor of Planning Nicky Morrison, says the conversation has shifted from awareness of the problem to co-ordination and funding of solutions at scale.

"There is the recognition that heat really is intersecting with housing," she says, adding that the enabling infrastructure of heat mitigation, including cooling tree canopies, cooling corridors, and cooling roof materials will entail significant upstream costs.

It's hard to break that 'business as usual' model. There are tried and tested developers who aren't wanting to do it, and they'll fight hard on the viability of all this, but I think it's come into mainstream discussions so we do have some levers."

This includes state and local government planning policies now in the works, but policy alone isn't enough, Morrison adds. It's important to make sure change is implemented on the ground. It's not only the new communities that need more thoughtful planning for heat mitigation, says Emma Bacon, chief executive of Sweltering Cities, the NGO she founded in

2020. The broad sweep of existing western Sydney suburbia requires support to deal with oppressive days of high temperatures, she says.

Intense pressure from developers on councils and state governments has kept heat mitigation requirements to a minimum, she adds, and western Sydney needs a planning system that

There is the recognition that heat really is intersecting with housing.

Nicky Morrison, co-director, Urban Transformations Research Centre

ensures sufficient tree cover and heat-minimising roofs among other elements. She and her colleagues have been talking about the potential heat problems of dark roofs for more than six years.

"The pressure is between good design and sustainability," Bacon says.

"We're finding that design and planning is being driven by the market, rather than asking what type of communities we want to live in, what type of nature we want around us.

"Are we going to say it's acceptable for us that there will be places where it will be dangerously hot to leave the house for potentially days or weeks at a

time?" Developers are building the cheapest possible houses, Bacon adds, but with the subsequent power and healthcare costs borne by the owners, they are expensive to live in.

While the state government is largely responsible for planning controls on housing, western Sydney councils are "by far the most advanced of any in the country on heat policy", she says, led by the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils and the council collaboration Resilient Sydney – though much of their guidance is not legally enforceable.

Bacon celebrates even the smaller wins, such as convincing the NSW government to help fund bus shelters and bus seats in some of the west's hottest suburbs.

Standing next to a bare bus-sign pole on a baking street with no shade on a hot day is a painful exercise, and can be dangerous.

Fairfield council area, for instance, has extremely high "heat vulnerability", and bus stops next to childcare or aged car facilities should be sheltered from the sun.

"We pushed the state government to commit funding to put more bus shelters in western Sydney, which they did a couple of months ago," Bacon says.

"That was done by community members volunteering, advocating, talking to local politicians, talking to local councils, supported by us, and we actually got the state government to commit to funding that they'd said no to for years." **AFR**

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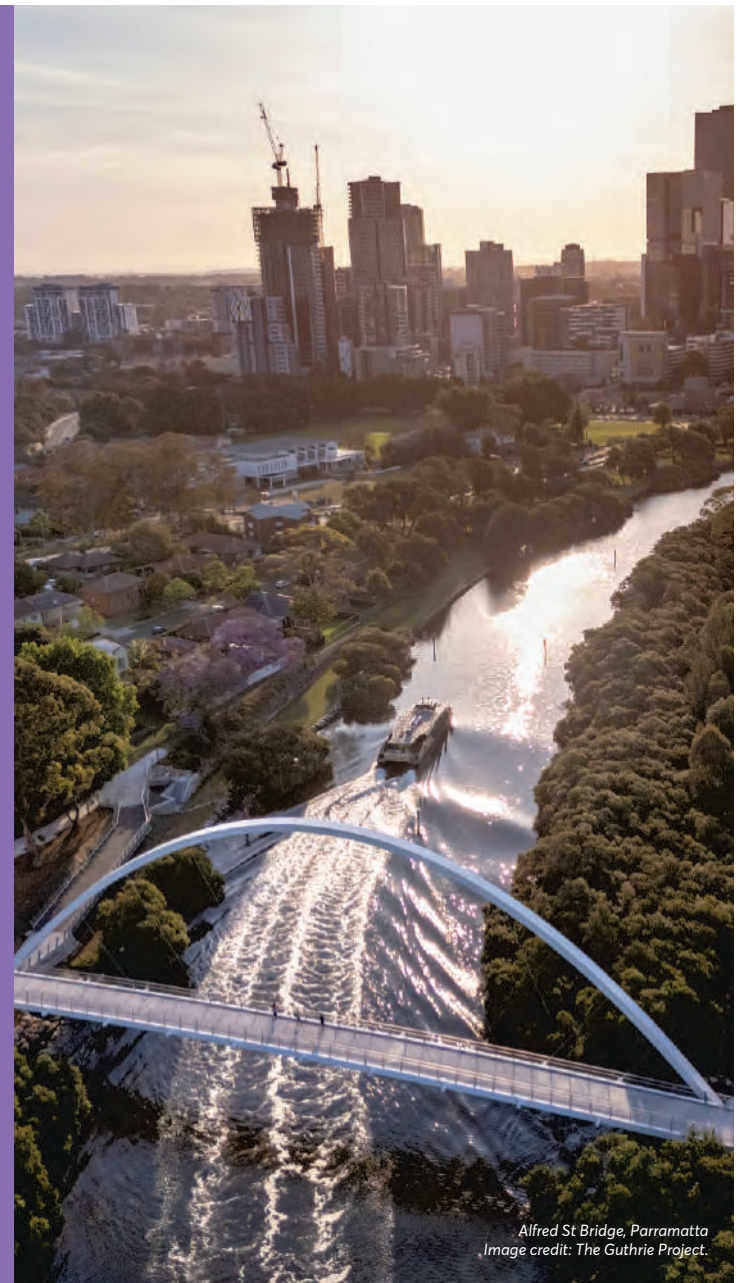
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Migrant cultures serve up exotic mix of flavours

Culinary capital With local restaurants, buzzing precincts, chains and factories, food is a huge part of the district's story, writes Sian Powell.

Ben Nguyen launched the now popular Hai Au Lang Nuong Vietnamese restaurant in Sydney's western suburb of Canley Vale more than 20 years ago, when nearby Cabramatta was widely seen as the centre of authentic Vietnamese dining.

Cabramatta is still known as Little Saigon, but Canley Vale is growing as a restaurant destination and Nguyen now has high hopes of attracting more attention by promoting Canley Vale as a food hub – Sydney's "Little Asia".

"Ever since we came here, a lot of restaurants have opened in Canley Vale and we want to promote that," he says. "It's more cultural. There's a lot of different cultures. We've got Korean, we've got Chinese; we've got a lot more variety now, not like back then, 10 or 15 years ago, it was just Vietnamese."

Broad waves of migration have given birth to international food enclaves across western Sydney, from the Vietnamese cluster in Cabramatta and Canley Vale to Little India in Harris Park, to Koreatown in Strathfield, and an Afghan hub in Merrylands, while Granville is known for its Lebanese bakeries and food outlets.

For obvious reasons, new immigrants often choose to live close to relatives who are already established, in places where there are suitable religious institutions, accessible work and a common language. Restaurants selling authentic international cuisine can provide work for newcomers with little English.

As a result, international food hubs have emerged in a range of western Sydney suburbs over the years – Toongabbie, for instance, is known for a Sri Lankan focus and Auburn for a broad Middle Eastern range of com-

mercial operations and food outlets.

Now it is expected the Sydney Metro will allow for speedy travel around the city, as far as Parramatta in the west, Rouse Hill in the north-west, and Bankstown in the south-west, providing increased ease of access to cuisine enclaves across western Sydney.

For his part, Nguyen came to Sydney in 1988 with his family of Vietnamese refugees looking for peace and freedom.

He was 10, and well remembers his life in Vietnam – memories that have inspired the colourful and lavish decoration in his restaurant.

"My shop has a lot of my childhood memories from Vietnam when I used to live with my grandma and grandpa," he says, adding that the decorations in his restaurant are a tribute to them.

Nguyen originally wanted to open a restaurant in Cabramatta, but by then it was an established Vietnamese enclave and rents were high, so he settled on nearby Canley Vale.

Now, decades later, Nguyen will continue to speak Vietnamese, interact with Vietnamese neighbours and provide authentic Vietnamese food to patrons. "Your origin is your background, your culture, your everything," he says. "It's always there in you."

Western Sydney councils often work to promote the local food hubs. Canley Vale, Canley Heights and Cabramatta are now regarded as "key food, tourism and cultural precincts" by Fairfield City Council. The council estimates about 17 Vietnamese restaurants operate in the district, supported by a broad mix of Vietnamese grocers, cafes, bakers and speciality retailers.

Further north, Cumberland Council promotes Merrylands as a hub for Middle Eastern food, particularly Afghan cuisine, and supports the



Hai Au Lang Nuong Vietnamese restaurant owner Ben Nguyen aims to promote a "Little Asia". PHOTO: LOUIE DOUVIS

restaurant community with business workshops, educational seminars and networking. Over the past year, there has been a 36 per cent increase in total restaurant spending in the Merrylands precinct, more than half from visitors outside the area, a council spokesperson says, adding "the area's food landscape now includes expanding Lebanese, Syrian, Persian and Turkish businesses, contributing to a broader Middle Eastern dining cluster".

In Harris Park, near Parramatta, the cluster of Indian restaurants and businesses was formally named Little India in 2023, and Parramatta Lord Mayor Martin Zaiter says the precinct continues to grow, with more than 50 restaurants and a broad mix of food businesses. "The City of Parramatta also has plans for a Chinatown precinct," he says.

Some of the most popular western Sydney food hub outlets have grown into successful chains. Frango Portuguese charcoal chicken began life in Petersham's Little Portugal in 1989 and has spread to 17 operations: across the west in Penrith, Moorebank and Marsden Park, and even further afield in Sydney's east and north.

Awafi Chicken began with a small takeaway outlet near Granville station

and now has three operations, in Revesby, Peakhurst and Punchbowl.

The Lebanese El Jannah Chicken chain, too, began in 1998 in Granville and now has about 50 premises nationwide, spreading interstate to Victoria and the ACT.

Late last year substantial new investment from US giant General Atlantic was announced, with a plan to increase restaurant numbers to almost 200 in the future.

Adam Leto, CEO of not-for-profit advocacy organisation Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue, says the robust hospitality and tourism culture is an important economic driver for the region.

"What started with European bakeries and delis grew with vibrant Middle Eastern, South Asian, South-East Asian cuisines and Pacific Island communities, and the region has grown into one of Australia's most dynamic culinary landscapes," he says, adding the evolution can be seen in restaurants, cafes, mum-and-dad shops and street food pop-ups, as well as large entertainment venues.

"As global travel increasingly values authenticity and cultural immersion, western Sydney is uniquely placed to lead," Leto says.

"Its food precincts, producers and hospitality operators have the potential to create a new era of destination tourism, one defined by a breadth of global cuisines within a single region, probably not seen anywhere else in the world."

"There is a real opportunity to position western Sydney as a culinary capital that connects Australia to the world."

As well as international enclaves for dining and retail, western Sydney has fostered some of Sydney's largest food and beverage production centres, morphing from a focus on growing food to processing, packaging and distribution.

Leto cites the Primo processed meat facility in Chullora, which distributes deli meat products to supermarkets nationally, and Darrell Lea's Ingleburn factory which produces Australian chocolate and sweets.

"Western Sydney manufacturing is adapting, transitioning towards advanced food manufacturing, logistics and export-oriented production, especially linked to the western Sydney airport and aerotropolis," he says. "The region is seen as a crucial food hub, connecting growers, producers and manufacturers to global markets." **AFR**

Medtech capital's wealth of talent

Start-ups From dementia aids to 'kidney pyjamas', science is becoming commercial reality at Westmead's innovation hub, writes Tess Bennett.

Cognitive scientist Celia Harris is stepping outside the world of research and into her first capital raising as an entrepreneur. Her goal is to raise enough capital to bring her innovative home assistance device for dementia patients to a waiting list of more than 500.

Harris, an associate professor at Western Sydney University's MARCS Institute for Brain, Behaviour and Development, is the chief executive and co-founder of MemoryAid, a gadget

that resembles an old-school telephone atop a tablet. It's designed to help people with dementia maintain their independence for as long as possible by allowing them to stay connected through video calls and personalised audio reminders.

"The memories from your childhood are the ones that stay with you the longest," Harris says. "I thought if we could make a familiar interface, then we could kind of smuggle smart technology underneath."

Family members and carers use a companion app to make video calls to



Celia Harris, CEO of MemoryAid, which tackles dementia. PHOTO: RENEE NOWYTARGER

the MemoryAid. The app can also be used to program prompts that are broken down step by step. For example, the phone may ring throughout the day and play an audio message when it's time to eat lunch, take medication and do daily exercises. The screen also displays images to help patients initiate and track tasks they may otherwise struggle to complete.

"It's designed around fostering independence, enabling people to do the things that they can still do ... [but need] a little bit of support or a little bit of prompting," Harris says.

"It can make a profound difference for people."

To date, the project has been largely funded by prize money MemoryAid received as a global finalist in the Longitude Prize on Dementia and Western Sydney University's tech start-up incubator. But the MemoryAid team is now seeking external investors to commercialise the research project and launch the device to the public this year.

With dementia overtaking heart disease as Australia's leading cause of death, Harris says there is huge demand among Australia's ageing population.

"Every time I'm in the community talking to people with MemoryAid, you can guarantee somebody will come up and say, 'I've been looking for exactly this for my mum,'" she says.

MemoryAid is one of a cluster of new medical start-ups based in the Westmead Innovation Quarter hoping to commercialise novel healthcare innovations for widespread use. Among a high concentration of healthcare professionals, bright ideas have been nurtured by government-backed programs such as the Cicada HealthTech Hub.

Liza Noonan, chief executive of Cicada Innovations, which offers programs to develop leading scientific R&D through to commercial success, says the hub has assisted more than 1000 health innovators since opening in early 2024.

"Western Sydney's medtech success is no accident. The region is rich with world-class medical research institutes and biomedical talent stretching from Westmead to Liverpool," Noonan says.

"In translating research to patient care outcomes, proximity matters, as does the injection of entrepreneurship to support that translation." Start-ups based at Cicada's HealthTech Hub include Curezma, which has developed **Continued S8**

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Parties' path to government runs through region

Opinion



Paul Karp

NSW Treasurer Daniel Mookhey is fond of saying: If you want to know what Australia is going to look like in 10 years, go to western Sydney because it's being created there.

With 41 per cent of its residents born overseas, far higher than the rest of Sydney (12 per cent) or NSW (29 per cent), the region is multicultural Australia at its best, welcoming new migrants and providing economic opportunity.

The NSW government has a western Sydney sensibility. Mookhey was born in Blacktown and raised in Merrylands West, and Deputy Premier and Minister for Western Sydney Prue Car was born and raised in the west.

And the government owes its 2023 election victory to the region: five of the seven seats it won from the Coalition are there, including Penrith and Parramatta, which has overtaken North Sydney to become the city's second-largest CBD.

But Premier Chris Minns ruffled feathers when first elected by deciding to review and refusing to guarantee the future of Metro West due to fears about the enormous cost of the project, which unlike Victoria's Suburban Rail Loop is not being co-funded by the federal government.

By year's end, Minns was all in, teaming the metro from Hunter Street in the city to Westmead just west of Parramatta with hundreds of thousands more homes, part of

the government's plan to tackle the housing shortage with urban in-fill near transport.

Minns presides over the delivery phase of several mega-projects in this part of the world, from Metro West, to the Western Sydney International Airport, and its metro running north-south between St Marys and Bradfield. The airport metro has been besieged with industrial relations disputes, while the cost of Metro West has blown out to \$27.3 billion due to workforce shortages, supply constraints, and now war with Iran.

But still, western Sydney is a huge engine of growth for the state. Based on the DAE business outlook and ABS regional population data, Deloitte estimates the region will grow from a population of 2 million in 2025 to 2.2 million in 2030, and GDP from \$98 billion to \$115 billion.

The Coalition knows that if it has a path back to government, it must run through western Sydney. It is taking the fight to Minns by arguing Labor is under-investing in infrastructure, particularly by not connecting the airport metro to the rest of the metro system.

Kellie Sloane's election to the Liberal leadership in November may have given the opposition a fresh face, but Labor hopes the member for Vaucluse in Sydney's richer eastern suburbs will struggle to connect with the west.

She is trying. In her speech to the Liberal Party federal council on May 29, Sloane said the Coalition wanted to fight for working families going backwards.

"Like the mum in south-western Sydney, qualified and smart, wanting



Premier Chris Minns and Transport Minister John Graham at a Western Sydney Airport metro line site. PHOTO: STEVEN SIEWERT

to take that job in the city, but knowing she can't balance the long commute with raising kids," she said.

"People like Ishaan – a dad from western Sydney who told me he used to spend Saturday mornings on the sidelines of his kid's sport but now drives Uber as a second job on weekends because there is nothing left to cut in the family budget."

Politics is also being upended

by the rise of far-right One Nation, which is eating into the major party vote at state level as well as federal.

In working class and whiter areas like the suburb of Camden on Sydney's south-west fringe, One Nation is expected to poll well. But Labor strategists think that overall, Sydney's west – with its large Chinese, Vietnamese, Indian and Middle Eastern populations – is too

multicultural for One Nation to have enough appeal.

In fact, splintering the vote on the right could be doubly helpful to Labor, given optional preferential voting increases the chances that conservative voters' preferences will exhaust.

Western Sydney may end up being not just the site of new housing, jobs and investment opportunities but an electoral buffer for Labor. **AFR**

From S1

Data centres and airport city add \$31b

south-western Sydney – something that will bring renewable energy from regional NSW and interstate to households and businesses across western Sydney", she says.

"Western Sydney is a key location for cloud and AI inference data centres that require low latency for the critical services they support.

"Global tech companies have invested significantly in this region as an availability zone and it creates an enormous opportunity for the area – both in the demand for construction and trade jobs, but also for the skilled operations and networking workforce."

David Borger, executive director of Business Western Sydney, says precincts like Mamre Road have "completely taken off" with a total of \$20 billion invested in logistics alone around the airport. Revenue per room for hotels is on the rise, resulting in construction of five new hotels with 1000 beds in Parramatta.

Data centres, too, are "a positive thing for the region", Borger says. "There are challenges with the government needing to work through power and water issues but, on balance, it's a space we can play in and win, and do it in a responsible way."

Adam Leto, the CEO of the Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue, says the NSW government "has been clear that Western Sydney is going to do the majority of the heavy lifting" of

population growth. Western Sydney local government areas are slated to deliver nearly 40 per cent of the state's housing targets to 2029 and up to 60 to 70 per cent of Sydney's population growth, he says.

Western Sydney is still the home of the long commute. According to a Transport for NSW spokesperson, average car commutes are up from 15km in 2016-17 to 17km in 2024-25, although journey times are stable at about half an hour. Public transport commutes are up from 31 to 34 kilometres, with times up from 73 minutes to 76 minutes.

NSW Premier Chris Minns intends to finish Metro West to Parramatta and the airport metro but will not go to the March 2027 election promising more metros; the airport metro also faces delays, meaning long bus rides for the first travellers to use the airport.

To the NSW opposition, the story of western Sydney is just another example of what shadow minister Monica Tudehope describes as "the Minns government doing a good job opening lots of infrastructure that the Coalition commissioned and financed when we were in government".

"The question is: what will the next premier open?" she says.

Leto says connecting the airport metro to the rest of the network will be vital to connect local residents to employment opportunities. "It's a key strategic employment centre, as are existing centres Liverpool, Campbelltown and Penrith."

Leto says without more infrastructure commitments residents will face 90-minute commutes, "further continuing the plight that too many workers in western Sydney face every

day". NSW Deputy Premier and Minister for Western Sydney Prue Car says the Coalition's legacy in the area was "phantom projects, failed planning, and underinvestment" leading to "our fastest-growing suburbs [being] without the essential services and infrastructure they required as housing growth exploded".

"We're delivering long-overdue infrastructure that western Sydney requires and planning for the future, with three new metro lines feeding into the region, more than 70 new and upgraded schools and preschools, major road upgrades, two new hospitals, and a plan for sustained investment into digital infrastructure including data centres."

But the Liberals have seized on evidence from Premier's Department secretary Simon Draper to a parliamentary inquiry that the NSW government doesn't have a data centre strategy – although it will set parameters such as power and water requirements for their approval.

James Griffin, opposition spokeswoman for energy and digital investment, says it is "appalling" there is no separate plan, given that Labor has said data centre investment is "keeping the state afloat".

Data Centres Australia argues that estimates about their power consumption are overstated due to phantom demand, essentially duplicate requests.

If data centres are the next big thing for western Sydney after the airport, proponents will be hoping that the pipeline of projects is not a case of phantom investment. For the fast-growing region to reach its potential, industries of the future need to fill in the blank spaces on the map. **AFR**

From S6

Wealth of talent helps build medtech capital

a steroid-free cream for eczema, HiFi Ortho, which designs custom orthopaedic implants, and Latent Knowledge, an AI-powered research tool to make it easier for R&D teams to discover and analyse scientific literature.

Another promising candidate to emerge from Westmead's health and innovation district is iiShield. The medtech start-up is based in Cicada's HealthTech Hub and has developed a product known as "kidney pyjamas" which act as a shield to insulate organs from the body's temperature during transplant surgery.

Jeremy Kwarcinski, a biomedical engineer, and Henry Pleass and Tony Pang – surgeons at Westmead Hospital – began working on the kidney pyjamas in 2018 in their free time.

The device is designed to solve a critical problem in transplant surgery: the average surgeon takes 40 minutes to reconnect the blood supply to the kidney, but within 10 to 15 minutes the organ heats up to dangerous temperatures. "It's all about keeping organs on ice from point A to point B," says Kwarcinski, iiShield's chief executive.

"But ... when you get to point B the surgeon has to take it out of ice and put it inside a nice, warm 37-degree body. As that organ heats up without a blood supply, it starts to die."

Pang, a liver and pancreatic surgeon, says those precious minutes could improve outcomes for the patient.

In 2021, a \$2 million capital injection



"Kidney pyjamas" for use in surgery.

from the NSW government's medical devices fund catapulted iiShield out of the garage and into a fully fledged medical device company. The start-up began life working out of Cicada Innovations' Eveleigh site in inner Sydney, but was the first tenant to move into Cicada's Westmead location when it opened.

Earlier this year they completed the first in-human trials of their flagship device the kidney protective jacket – KPJ for short – with 20 patients at Westmead Hospital.

"The [trial] outcomes and reviews from the surgeons have shown that the device is really, really good at keeping these kidneys at a safer temperature over the course of the surgery," Kwarcinski says.

The company has been able to progress much more quickly due to its proximity to Westmead Hospital, and iiShield can now pursue regulatory approvals for the kidney pyjamas.

"If I make a prototype, I can walk across to the surgeon's office that same day and ask, 'does this work?'" Kwarcinski says. "Everybody here is really pushing not only to make new things, but to use new things." **AFR**