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Business Hunter calls for reinstatement of Business Connect funding

Business Hunter has called on the NSW Government to reinstate funding for the Business Connect program, saying it is a valuable support service that helps start-ups and SMEs troubleshoot problems and grow their enterprises.

Business Hunter understands the NSW Government has cut ongoing Business Connect funding from the 2025-26 budget, with registered training providers having received three months' notice to wind up their programs.

"The free Business Connect service provides tailored advice to help small businesses tackle challenges like planning, marketing and cash flow," Business Hunter CEO Bob Hawes said.

"With rising costs and insolvencies at their highest since 2009, small businesses need this sort of support now more than ever. Business Connect provides essential advice and mentorship for entrepreneurs and business operators – for many at a time when they are at their most vulnerable."

Business Hunter, and its state affiliate Business NSW, are calling on the State Government to immediately reinstate Business Connect funding for 2025/26 and commit to working with stakeholders to review its effectiveness and explore new methods of delivery for future years.

Mr Hawes said Hunter region training providers had a good record for effective program delivery, helping many new businesses in the region to grow or get off the ground.

"Newcastle's not-for-profit Business Centre, for instance, has a 40-year track record of providing training and advisory services to local business, and boasts a 98 per cent client satisfaction rate for its Business Connect programs," Mr Hawes said.

"If the NSW Government wants to improve the Business Connect program, it should be looking to reputable providers for guidance on successful delivery models, not cutting them out of the program by pulling funding at short notice."

Mr Hawes said start-ups and SMEs were an integral part of the regional business ecosystem and needed support to thrive.

"Small businesses are the backbone of the Hunter economy – and you never know when today's start-up might become tomorrow's market leader," Mr Hawes said.

"At a time when this region is looking to diversify its economy and drive business innovation, this grassroots support for business is essential."

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