



# NCOSS 2007 State Election Policy

## Summary



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## **About NCOSS**

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Over 800,000 people in NSW live in poverty. NCOSS works for them.

NCOSS is an independent non-government organisation and is the peak body for the non-government human services sector in NSW. NCOSS works with its members on behalf of disadvantaged people and communities towards achieving social justice in New South Wales.

Through current membership forums, NCOSS represents more than 7,000 community organisations and over 100,000 consumers and individuals.

## **The Fairer NSW policy**

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*A Fairer NSW: Bold Solutions and Real Results* aims to build consensus on what needs to be done to secure social justice and how we will know if we have succeeded. It identifies problems, solutions and results to some of the thorniest social issues facing our state.

These proposals are not a shopping list, but a set of opportunities for action by the Government, business, the non-government sector and the community. We believe these 21 proposals, organised across eight cross cutting themes, can achieve real results for people, families and communities that live on the wrong side of the economic and social divide.

## **The need for new solutions to disadvantage, poverty and inequity**

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Stronger efforts need to be made to make NSW a fairer place, where peoples' right to a decent standard of living and to live free from discrimination is respected and promoted. Our approach focuses on quality services,

accessibility, equity, participation, diversity, reducing disadvantage and building a better and fairer society for everyone to enjoy.

NCOSS recognises the unique status of Aboriginal peoples as the traditional owners of the land, and in particular their enduring cultural and spiritual relationship with country. We believe the government must place more emphasis on turning around the appalling disadvantage that many Aboriginal people endure as a result of colonisation. The proposals contained in this document aim to show how some of this can be done.

However, changes to policy, legislation and services cannot succeed if they take place without meeting the very basic principle of self determination of Indigenous peoples. NCOSS calls on the future State Government to fully embrace the principles of self determination not only in words, but also in practice. Social justice for Aboriginal people cannot be achieved without self determination which is simply the right, enjoyed by all peoples to guide their own destiny and have control over decisions that affect their own lives and those of their communities and families.

# ***Giving children and young people the best start in life***

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## **The Every Kid Campaign**

### **A better start in life for children and young people**

NCOSS has joined a coalition of peak and other welfare organisations, resourced by Uniting Care Burnside, to promote the need for investment in the early years, and in young people, as the best means of securing social and economic benefits for people in NSW.

The message is simple: a child's well-being and life opportunities should not be determined by his or her disadvantage. All children must have the opportunity to thrive.

Every kid, regardless of where they live, family income or cultural background should live in safe and secure housing. Every kid needs parents who are supported to care for them the best they can. Every kid needs the chance to learn and succeed at school. Every kid should be able to get urgent dental care when they need it. Every kid should have help to succeed in life, and opportunities for work and study.

Unfortunately many children miss out on these basic things.

### **What needs to be done**

The full list of recommendations and detailed supporting papers for the Every Kid Campaign can be found on the Every Kid website: [www.everykid.net](http://www.everykid.net)

The following recommendations have been prioritised by NCOSS and its members. Details of the oral health and housing services for children are contained in later sections of this summary.

## **NCOSS is calling for:**

- The establishment of integrated child and family centres in every disadvantaged community in NSW. The centres should combine quality early education and care, home visiting, parent education and health screening services.
- A network of respite care services for children at risk.
- Two days a week free early childhood education for all children in the two years prior to school.
- The development and resourcing of standards for schools that reflect the needs of students.

## **The results that can be achieved**

- Strong and stable families.
- Prevention of abuse and neglect.
- Improved school readiness.
- Quality teaching in disadvantaged schools.
- High literacy and numeracy for children regardless of their background or where they live.
- A better start in life for children and young people who currently miss out.

## **Out of Home Care – A guarantee for kids in care**

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There are over 10,000 children and young people in out of home care in NSW.<sup>1</sup>

Outcomes for these young people are much poorer than for others:

- Only 35.6% of young people in care complete their HSC compared to 80% of young people living at home with their families.<sup>2</sup>

- Just under half of kids in care were unemployed 12 months after leaving care.<sup>3</sup>
- One in three young women were pregnant or had a child soon after leaving care.<sup>4</sup>
- Many studies have found a disproportionate link between youth homelessness and care backgrounds.

### **What needs to be done**

If the State is to fulfil its role as a good parent then it must provide those things that we would expect a good parent to provide up to the age of 25.

### **NCOSS is calling for:**

- A Guarantee for Kids in Care

This will ensure that the government provides high quality coordinated and individually tailored services for children and young people up to the age of 25 in the areas of housing, education and training and health services.

Details of the Guarantee are set out in the Every Kid Campaign background paper for Out of Home Care on the campaign website at: [www.everykid.net](http://www.everykid.net)

### **The results that can be achieved**

- Every kid in out of home care has the opportunity to reach their full potential.
- A reduction in homelessness, unemployment and contact with the criminal justice system amongst young people previously in the care system.

# ***Reducing inequality and tackling disadvantage amongst the working poor***

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## **A proposal for a fairer and rational concessions system in NSW**

In NSW we are witnessing an increasing number of 'working poor' - people whose main source of income is wages. The working poor phenomenon is the result of significant changes in the workforce including an increasing number of part-time and/or casual employees.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics measured financial stress of working people. The data showed in one year:

- 59,000 people went without meals.
- 36,000 were unable to heat their homes.
- 89,000 sought help from charities and welfare organisations.
- 537,000 were unable to pay their electricity, gas or phone bills on time.<sup>5</sup>

### **What needs to be done**

Working poor people should be entitled to concessions. This is the case in Victoria.

#### **NCOSS is calling for:**

- The extension of transport concessions to low-income Health Care Card holders at an estimated cost of \$30m per annum.
- The extension of the \$112 energy rebate to Health Care Card holder households at an estimated cost of \$50 m per annum.

#### **The results that can be achieved:**

If the incoming NSW Government adopted the NCOSS concession proposals, we should see:

- Around 145,000 low income earners get help with essential living expenses.<sup>6</sup>
- A significant decrease in transport disadvantage and fuel poverty.

## **Concessions card for Aboriginal people over 45 years**

The NSW Government currently provides a Seniors Card to older people aged over 60 years old who work less than 20 hours a week. This entitles cardholders to a range of discounts for government and private business services. Significantly, the Seniors Card enables beneficiaries to take advantage of concession fares and Pensioner Excursion Tickets on some transport services.

Unfortunately, because the life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is so much lower than for other Australians, many Aboriginal people will never be able to have access to Seniors Card benefits. The most recent data shows Aboriginal males can expect to die some 20 years younger than non Aboriginal males (females 18 years younger).

### **What needs to be done**

Aboriginal people need to gain access to affordable services. While we appreciate the policy priority must be to improve life expectancy for Aboriginal people, the existing inequity must be addressed.

#### **NCOSS is calling for:**

- The eligible age for the Seniors Card to be lowered to 45 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at an estimated cost of \$1m per annum. Potentially the card should also be re-named.

#### **The results that can be achieved:**

- Remove the current inequities in the Seniors Card concession program for approximately 5,000 Aboriginal people; and
- Address social disadvantage by reducing transport costs for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

# Poverty proofing our health system

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## Tackling the social determinants of health

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NSW spends \$8 billion a year on health yet we still have unacceptable levels of health inequity.

Unequal societies are less healthy societies. The single most important factor considered to cause poor and inequitable health outcomes is poverty. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare estimates that health inequities lead to 3,400 avoidable deaths every year.

The most glaring example of health inequity is between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Alongside much lower life expectancy Aboriginal Australians are 17 times more likely to be hospitalised for dialysis, are twice as likely to give birth to low birth weight babies, are more likely to smoke, more likely to die from assault or suicide and overall have higher rates of chronic diseases e.g. asthma, arthritis and diabetes.<sup>7</sup>

### What needs to be done

Inequitable health outcomes are unfair, avoidable and fixable. A preventative approach across the whole of government, addressing the issues of access, service availability and the intersection with the social determinants of health, is long overdue.

### NCOSS is calling for:

- All levels of government (including local government and Area Health Services) and all government departments undertake an Equity Focused Health Impact Statement before any potential government legislation, policy or project is implemented.

Under this proposal, all Cabinet submissions must include an Equity Focused Health Impact Statement. This would have the same

standing as financial impact statements in current cabinet deliberations.

- Increased funding for primary Aboriginal Health services including Aboriginal Medical Centres (\$11.6m per annum) and the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Centre to undertake preventative work around chronic disease.

### Results that can be achieved

If the NSW Government, in a whole of government approach, began tackling the social determinants of health to reduce health inequity across NSW:

- The average life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in NSW would eventually become equal to non Aboriginal people in NSW.
- The difference between life expectancy at birth in low income areas would become equal to or better than the state average life expectancy at birth.

### A Ticket to Health

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#### A proposal for an effective health related transport system for NSW

Barriers to accessing transport affect people's ability to seek treatment when needed. For example, many people located in rural and regional areas who do not own a motor vehicle are likely to face significant difficulties travelling to specialist services, some of which are located 200 or 300 kms away from their home. People who require intensive treatment for an illness – such as cancer or dialysis treatment - may often be required to travel long distances many times per week.

Many Aboriginal communities report that they are dislocated from services to connect

them to health providers. This means that it is not uncommon for Aboriginal people in isolated communities to walk or hitchhike long distances to attend medical appointments, or routinely miss health appointments because of the poor availability of transport.

NSW Health spends a 1/1000th of its annual budget (or \$1 in every \$1,000 allocated to health in NSW) on non emergency health transport services to the general community.

### **What needs to be done**

No person in a situation of health crisis should have to worry how they are going to get to treatment, nor should people routinely miss health appointments because they cannot access affordable transport. NCOSS seeks a commitment from the incoming NSW Government to erase transport as a barrier to good health.

### **NCOSS is calling for:**

- Increased access to health treatment by expanding funding for non emergency health transport services from \$3.2m per annum to \$10m.
- Better health transport for Aboriginal people with dedicated services to Aboriginal communities, including the consolidation and growth of the network of Aboriginal transport coordinators.
- The removal of the administration fee on Health Care Card holders using the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS), with flexibility on upfront payments.
- Increased IPTAAS travel and accommodation reimbursement (to the equivalent of the public service rate).
- Every Area Health Service to set up and run a Health Transport Unit with a transport coordinator. Area Health Services should be required to keep relevant stakeholders informed of the level of their (non emergency) transport budget and the extent of transport

services that they actually provide or fund including the cost of internal transport systems.

### **Results that can be achieved**

If the NSW Government adopted the Ticket to Health proposals we should see:

- Significant improvements in health connectivity for rural, regional and remote communities, Aboriginal communities and amongst low income earners.
- A reduction of at least 50% in the number of people missing health appointments due to transport problems.

# Homes, jobs and services: breaking down the inequality divide

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## Improving housing affordability in NSW

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More than one third of low income households in Sydney are in housing stress, in that they face housing costs of more than 30% of their gross income. For the rest of the State the proportion is just under one quarter.<sup>8</sup>

In Sydney alone there are 175,000 low to moderate income households in housing stress, comprising 115,000 private renters and 60,000 home purchasers.<sup>9</sup>

Recent rises in rents and interest rates can only make this problem worse.

### What needs to be done

A comprehensive package of measures is required to generate a substantial expansion of affordable (including social) housing in NSW over the term of the next Parliament (2007-2011).

### NCOSS is calling for:

- A capital investment of \$400m over four years to provide up to 2,000 additional units of affordable housing.<sup>10</sup>
- Explicit housing affordability targets - new land releases and large scale multi-unit redevelopments should include a minimum affordable housing provision of 10%.
- Bold initiatives directed at generating a new supply of affordable rental housing, such as the waiver of State land tax and/or transfer (stamp) duty, to encourage landlords to lease suitable residential properties to non-profit housing associations on a long term basis.
- Changes to the Residential Tenancies Act 1987 to enshrine 'just cause' evictions and introduce a system of long term residential leases. The Act should provide that a landlord cannot

unreasonably refuse consent to an assignment or subletting of a dwelling that is covered by a long term lease.

### Results that can be achieved

- A breakthrough on the growing problem of housing affordability.
- Reduction in homelessness and housing stress caused by escalating housing costs.
- Stable and secure families with less frequent moves.

### Accessible housing

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The rapid ageing of the population and the growing incidence of disability and mobility impairment is not being matched by a corresponding increase in the availability of housing stock in the general community that is accessible.

### What needs to be done

NSW needs to grasp the opportunity to build housing that meets changing demographic needs. Investing in universal housing now is an investment in the whole communities' housing futures.

The planning system is the ideal vehicle to achieve this.

### NCOSS is calling for:

- A mandatory requirement for all new multi-unit residential developments, to include a proportion of adaptable housing, beginning with a minimum 10% requirement for single-storey multi-unit developments and increasing for higher density developments.
- Demonstrated best practice in the area of adaptable housing as part of the State Government's announced plans to rebuild, modify or upgrade almost one quarter of the State's social housing stock.

- The introduction of a separate requirement that all new multi-unit housing stock should be visitable by people with disabilities.

By *adaptable* we mean housing that is designed in such a way that it can be modified easily in the future to become accessible to both residents and visitors with disabilities or progressive frailties.

By *visitable* we mean housing that has at least one wheelchair accessible entry with an accessible path of travel to the living area and to a suitable toilet.

### **Results that can be achieved**

- Housing that meets people's needs now and in the future.
- Increased housing choices for people with disability, older people and their carers.

### **Real jobs with decent pay**

Increasingly, NSW (Sydney in particular) is becoming polarised with relatively advantaged areas becoming more affluent and disadvantage concentrating in particular areas. The disadvantaged areas have relatively high concentrations of public housing or private rental housing of poorer quality. Education and training levels tend to be lower than the state average. Some people have fallen out of the labour market (i.e. they are not looking for work) because there are too few opportunities or local jobs are taken by better qualified people travelling to the area.

There are significant variations in the rate of unemployment across the state and significant numbers of people in part-time employment who are seeking more hours of work (under-employment). In addition, many jobs are insecure and low paid.

### **What needs to be done**

The key to getting people into real jobs, with decent pay is skills development and opening up opportunities for people who have so far been left behind in enjoying the fruits of the new economy. Enhancing the TAFE sector is a

key strategy for building a skilled workforce in disadvantaged communities. Early school leavers, older people and people with disabilities should have full access to TAFE so that they can develop skills for employment and volunteering and enjoy life long learning.

### **NCOSS is calling for:**

- A coordinated strategy that addresses urban and regional renewal, improved human services and job creation in the most disadvantaged areas (above and beyond Department of Housing renewal areas).

Local strategies should involve all levels of government and the non –government sector with a focus on:

- Improving public spaces.
- Developing transport connectivity.
- Enhancing local education and training institutions (especially TAFE); and
- Identifying local employment needs in partnership with local employers, while concentrating on secure, long term employment.

NCOSS recognises that many of the elements of the proposed strategies exist or have existed in recent history. The new aspect is to bring the elements together in a coordinated strategy and concentrate efforts in the most disadvantaged areas.

### **Results that can be achieved**

- Greater shares of full time jobs in local government areas where employment participation rates are currently below state average; and
- Reduction in the proportion of workforce on minimum wages.

# ***Providing support where it is needed***

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## **Better pathways out of homelessness**

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'Housing is a linchpin of social inclusion'<sup>11</sup>, yet in NSW there are 26,676 people who are homeless<sup>12</sup> and 73,000 households on the public housing waiting list<sup>13</sup>.

13,500 children are in crisis accommodation of whom 5,000 are under 5 years of age.<sup>14</sup> Homelessness is not just an inner Sydney phenomenon. Nor is it just about people sleeping on the street. Hidden homelessness is a growing trend.

Current efforts to deal with homelessness in NSW are fragmented across program and agency boundaries, working against effective policy development, planning, funding, service integration and performance monitoring.

### **What needs to be done**

NSW deserves a more integrated and better planned service system that tackles both the causes and consequences of homelessness. In partnership with Homelessness NSW.ACT, the NSW Women's Refuge Resource Centre and the Youth Accommodation Association, NCOSS is calling for:

- A comprehensive ten year NSW Homelessness Strategy, bringing together separate programs and measures under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), the Partnership Against Homelessness, services for victims of domestic violence, relevant supported housing programs and other inter-departmental initiatives.
- Such a Strategy to be developed on a cross-departmental basis, coordinated by the Premier's Department, in partnership with the non-government sector.

To ensure the required degree of cooperation and change, the final Strategy should be personally endorsed by the Premier.

Results that can be achieved

- Fewer people becoming homeless, through early intervention.
- Improved support for those people who are homeless and have other support needs, such as mental health or substance misuse problems.
- More people getting out, and staying out of homelessness

## **A fairer NSW for people with disability**

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The new Stronger Together ten year Disability Plan will provide \$1.3 billion over the next five years to improve the range, adequacy, availability and appropriateness of supports to people with disabilities in NSW. NCOSS welcomes this as a 'down payment' on disability services promised.

But more needs to be done.

### **What needs to be done**

People living in Boarding Houses deserve:

- Improved legislation.
- Increased health and support services.
- Access to individual advocacy; and
- Relocation for people with disabilities with high support needs to more appropriate community based supported accommodation.

The Provision of Aids for the Disabled Program (PADP) urgently requires a significant increase in funding to cope with both unmet and escalating needs for equipment for people with disabilities. NCOSS asks for an increase of \$15.5m in the first year and then increases until waiting lists and unmet need is addressed.

The NSW Government must also improve the access to people with disabilities to its regular generic infrastructure and services including:

- Accessible physical environment.
- Labour force participation and employment opportunities, especially within government.
- Planning that sets progressive targets for transport accessibility.

**Results that can be achieved**

A fairer NSW for people with disability can deliver:

- Improved quality of life for people in boarding houses.
- Avoidance of further disability caused by lack of proper aids and equipment.
- Closure of all institutions and relocation to community based supported accommodation for those people requiring ongoing support.
- Fulfilment of the rights of people with disabilities to fully participate in society.

# ***Better, more affordable services***

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## **Services need to be accessible, affordable and appropriate.**

Basic services such as health should not be denied to people on the basis of their immigration status, or their ability to speak English. Adequate interpreter and translation services for people with disabilities and people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds must be provided.

Geographic equity must be a priority for human services. Currently there are significant gaps in services and infrastructure outside our major cities, and even on the metropolitan fringe.

## **Smart Move**

### **A proposal for an Integrated Day Fare for Public Transport in NSW**

The poor state of public transport in NSW has received a significant degree of public attention over the last year. Many people across the State struggle to use services that are infrequent, unreliable or simply do not take passengers where they want to go.

Cost is also a major barrier in using public transport across NSW. Fares can be expensive not only because the cost of a single journey may be high but also because fares are not integrated. Different fares apply to different services and passengers are frequently forced to buy a new ticket each time they use a different form of transport (bus or train) as part of a single journey. This can make public transport very costly.

For example people who wish to travel from Horsley Park to Macquarie University can

pay over \$100 return in public transport costs for five days travel. On the other hand, a resident of Mona Vale travelling to Macquarie University would pay a maximum of \$54 per week using a Purple TravelPass. This is despite the fact that the duration and distance of these two journeys is approximately the same.

The situation is even worse in rural and regional NSW, where higher bus fares and a lack of affordable ticket products make travel more expensive on very limited public transport services.

## **What needs to be done**

We need to make our fare system fairer.

## **NCOSS is calling for:**

- A Smartmove Sydney Day Fare of \$10 full fare or \$5 concession, for those not eligible for the \$2.50 Pensioner Excursion Ticket. (Blue Mountains, Central Coast, Illawarra and Lower Hunter Day Fares - \$8 and \$4) It would allow ticket holders all day travel on all bus and rail services.
- Day Fares should also be negotiated for bus and rail services in rural and regional bus contract regions.

## **Results that can be achieved**

- Improved affordability for people currently experiencing transport disadvantage particularly in Western and South Western Sydney
- More people using public transport, reducing reliance on private cars.

## **Enabling older people to be active and connected**

Older people have the right to be active citizens, engaged with the community and full participants in society. This means we must maximise the capacity to contribute by promoting connectivity and minimise premature and unnecessary dependence. Older people can make worthwhile contributions whether or not they require support.

Planned, safe neighbourhoods, transport, support to carers, and access to allied and community health initiatives are critical. Ageing is not linear but cyclical. Proper treatment and management of chronic conditions can maintain and improve independence.

The NSW Healthy Ageing Framework 1998-2003 attempted to provide coordination across all human service government agencies to respond to the needs of older people. Whilst a good start, it gave no measures and there were no public progress reports.

### **What needs to be done**

NSW needs a public plan on ageing that is a forward looking visionary document, with specified and mandatory targets. It should include the following priority actions:

- Extending ComPacks to all metropolitan and regional/rural hospitals and then to private hospitals (estimated cost \$18m per annum).
- The Sub Acute Fast Track Elderly (SAFTE) Care program (still in its pilot stages) should be evaluated and then rolled out to all NSW hospitals and private hospitals.
- Maintain and extend the \$2.50 pensioner excursion fare, regardless of revenue-neutral status and remove the \$10 booking fee for CountryLink rail services.
- Extend the public and community transport network and improve the safety and suitability to access for older people.

Improvements to Home and Community Care services should include:

- Timely approval and release of annual HACC growth funding.
- Accelerated growth funding to address the significant unmet needs for home support services to older people, people with disabilities and carers.
- Improved services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and CALD communities as well as rural and remote areas.
- Better integration with other related support systems, i.e. health, residential aged care and disability support systems, especially to avoid cost shifting to HACC due to the inadequacy of other systems.
- Improved accountability and integration of the NSW Home Care Service.

### **Results that can be achieved**

Enabling older people to be active and connected can deliver:

- Better connectivity and reduction in isolation.
- Older people's right to participate in society is respected, promoted and delivered.
- Fewer hospital admissions and re-admissions and improved separation rates.
- Better inter-generational relations.

### **Better Oral Health across NSW**

Good oral health is not simply the absence of oral health problems but is a state of well-being in which a person can eat, speak, work and socialise without discomfort or embarrassment.

The oral health of our community, particularly disadvantaged people is in sharp decline.

- Two thirds of NSW adults don't have all of their natural teeth, yet only one in 10 have a dental check-up each year.
- Around 33% of NSW children have evidence of tooth decay; and
- Less than half have a dental check-up each year.<sup>15</sup>

Of great concern is the increasing hospitalisation rate for the removal or restoration of teeth among children, which has increased by 80% for children aged 5 – 14 years.<sup>16</sup>

As a result of poor funding, the public dental system has become one that predominantly provides emergency, acute or episodic treatment. There is limited long term care and little in the way of prevention. It is well recognised that the public dental system is under severe strain:

- Demand for the service far outweighs current resources, often resulting in long waiting times. Some commentators have estimated the NSW public dental system to have 200,000 people waiting for treatment.
- By 2010, there will be a 30% increase in demand for dental services from the public sector and just over a 20% increase in demand from the private sector.<sup>17</sup>
- However, by 2010 there will be 1,500 fewer dental professionals (including para-dentals) than is required to maintain the current level.<sup>18</sup>

### **What needs to be done**

An increase in funding from NSW Health for public dental services is drastically needed, particularly in rural areas.

### **NCOSS is calling for:**

The incoming NSW Government to adequately fund the public dental system with an initial boost of \$170m recurrent, with negotiations to take place with the Commonwealth about increasing this figure on a cost-share basis up to \$700m p.a.

### **Results that can be achieved**

- No person should have to wait more than 24 hours to receive emergency dental care.
- The reduction in waiting times and the waiting list for public dental services.
- Greater access to, and availability of, dental services in rural and remote areas.
- The reduction in hospitalisation rates for the removal or restoration of teeth for children, adults and disadvantaged population groups.

# A roadmap for justice reform

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## **Providing support to older people, women, children and communities surviving violence and abuse**

Domestic violence, family violence, sexual assault and abuse continue to be a blight upon families and communities in NSW. Every person should live free from violence, however we are a long way from achieving that basic level of safety and security for many people.

- One in three women have experienced physical violence at some stage in their lives since the age of 15. One in five have experienced sexual assault.<sup>19</sup>
- Approximately 20,000 Apprehended Violence Orders (AVOs) are in place in NSW each year.<sup>20</sup>
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are six times more likely to be victims of domestic assault than non-Aboriginal people.<sup>21</sup>

The impact of family violence, neglect and sexual assault upon children cannot be over-emphasised. Nor can the impact on children experiencing or witnessing domestic violence.

Violence and abuse against people with a disability, including intellectual disability, same sex domestic violence, homophobic violence and elder abuse are starting to be identified as issues, however the true extent remains masked as very few people report abuse. Racial violence is also on the rise.

### **What needs to be done**

There have been multiple inquiries, taskforces and reports on domestic and family violence. A consistent theme is the need to adequately invest in prevention and early intervention. There have been repeated calls to provide a cohesive and consistent response to domestic violence, sexual assault and abuse that is

culturally sensitive, that treats the trauma and does not re-victimise and listens to and respects the experiences of people surviving violence.

The Premier should make a personal commitment to drive re-investment in front line, specialist women's services so that there is a continuum of care for survivors – not just a crisis response.

Priority actions should include:

- Establishment of an independent Domestic Violence Related Homicide Review Team (DVRHRT) situated in the Ombudsman Office
- Provide an integrated domestic violence intervention response through the establishment of a 24 hour, seven days a week domestic violence multi-agency project.
- Enhance funding for refuges, particularly the Far West safe houses.
- Target a re-investment funding program to women specialist workers in community and women's health and family support services to provide reparative counselling and groupwork services for women and children.
- Funding a state-wide, systemic and culturally sensitive prevention and early intervention strategy, that is established and managed by Aboriginal communities. This should include family support, legal services, specialist counselling, children and young people's services
- Implement the recommendations from the NSW Report *"Breaking the Silence: Creating the Future. Addressing child sexual assault in Aboriginal communities in NSW"* (2006).
- Establish an Elder Abuse hotline (similar to the domestic violence line).

## Results

- A reduction in domestic and family violence, through early intervention.
- Improved support for survivors.
- Direct assistance to older people experiencing abuse.

## **Closing the revolving door of prison**

Addressing the causes of overrepresentation of disadvantaged groups in the criminal justice system can help to prevent crime and keep people out of prison in the first place. Actively pursuing programs and actions to stop people coming back to prison (recidivism) is also vital if crime rates are to keep heading in the right direction.

It must also be acknowledged that prison might not be the right place for people suffering from severe mental illness or who have an intellectual disability.

- In 2003, 54% of women in prison, and 41% of men in prison had reported receiving a form of psychiatric treatment at some point in their lives.<sup>22</sup>
- In 2003, at least 10% of young people in detention centres had intellectual disabilities and a further 27% were functioning in the borderline range of intellectual disability.<sup>23</sup>
- Aboriginal people are nearly 16 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Indigenous people.<sup>24</sup> Between 2000 and 2004 the population of Aboriginal women in NSW prisons increased by 25%.<sup>25</sup>

Recidivism rates in NSW are the worst in Australia. 44% of prisoners released return to prison within two years.<sup>26</sup>

There is a paucity of post release human services for offenders generally and the situation is particularly bad for Aboriginal people and for people with dual or multiple diagnosis. Many people go straight from prison to homeless services. Within nine months of release, 50% of prisoners are homeless.<sup>27</sup>

## What needs to be done

We need to tackle the causes of crime as well as the consequences. This is not only a matter of fairness but also to improve community safety.

Problem solving courts and diversionary schemes are showing positive results and should be rolled out across the state.

NSW should look closely at establishing a Disability Diversionary Court. In the meantime improving continuity and disability expertise of legal aid lawyers would be a cost effective way to improve our justice system.

Improved rehabilitation programs and proper discharge from prison can help to reduce recidivism. Needs vary but key services need to be coordinated through proper case management and include education and training, accommodation and related support, alcohol and other drugs services, and mental health services.

## Results

Closing the revolving door of prison proposals can deliver

- A reduction in the over-representation of Aboriginal people, people with intellectual disability, people who are homeless and people with a mental illness in our prison and juvenile justice systems.
- A reduction in the high recidivism rate in NSW.
- A reduction in crime, as the causes of crime are managed alongside recidivism.

## **Protecting and promoting human rights in NSW**

Australia is the only western nation without a national Bill of Rights. As a result, some states have taken up the challenge and introduced their own human rights laws.

Human rights are about the fair treatment of individuals and are put in place to ensure that people are treated with dignity and respect.

They are particularly important for people who suffer disadvantage. Human rights are a means of promoting social justice for people who have been subjected to historical disadvantage including Indigenous peoples.

Although some rights are protected by equal opportunity and anti-discrimination laws, these laws are patchy and do not cover many areas of rights.

### **What needs to be done**

Human rights belong to all of us. A Charter of Human Rights is a form of democratic insurance that helps to keep the Government accountable.

### **NCOSS is calling for:**

- A widespread community consultation on how best to protect and promote human rights, including whether or not NSW should adopt a Charter of Human Rights, and if so what the Charter of Human Rights should include and how it should work.
- Following the community consultation, the adoption of a NSW Charter of Human Rights as an Act of the NSW Parliament.

### **Result**

A NSW Charter of Rights could guarantee human rights and ensure that all NSW laws and policies were consistent with these rights. It would:

- Protect the fundamental human rights of all members of the NSW community.
- Complement our democratic system by protecting the very rights and values that underpin it.
- Bring all our human rights into one easy to find law.
- Be based on a comprehensive process of public consultation, so that it reflects the community's shared values and beliefs.

# A Vibrant Third Sector

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## **A sensible funding policy for NSW**

Funding levels directly impact upon the capacity of non government organisations. Inferior wages, conditions and the lack of job security are some of the negative impacts of current funding policy. This is creating major systemic barriers to the recruitment and retention of experienced and qualified staff in the sector, at a time when a number of government agencies are seeking to outsource more of their service delivery.

The range of funding policies of the various human service government agencies also creates unnecessary duplication. This patchwork of funding policies increases compliance costs and inhibits inter-government and inter-sectorial collaboration.

### **What needs to be done**

#### **NCOSS is calling for:**

- A common human services agency funding policy in NSW that includes a negotiated approach to full indexation and fully funds award wages at the appropriate professional levels.
- This policy must also provide longer term funding security to enable realistic strategic and business planning for non government organisations.

See: [www.ncoss.org.au/hot/compact/Working-Together-good-funding-jul06.pdf](http://www.ncoss.org.au/hot/compact/Working-Together-good-funding-jul06.pdf)

The NSW funding policy must align with the principles contained in the Working Together for NSW Agreement between the NSW Government and the non-government sector.

### **Results**

- A stable and sustainable community sector capable of retaining and attracting qualified professional staff within a highly competitive employment market.

- Greater efficiencies derived from less red tape.
- Improved viability for an estimated 7,000 NGOs in NSW.

## **A state-wide NGO sector development strategy**

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Whilst most human service agencies have some 'capacity building' initiatives there is no coordinated and state-wide approach to the future development of the non-government sector. There is no comprehensive workforce strategy to ensure the sector can continue to deliver quality services on behalf of government in response to community needs. NSW is way behind other jurisdictions in developing industry plans with, and for, the community sector.

### **What needs to be done**

NSW needs a state-wide sector development strategy informed by a comprehensive whole of community sector needs analysis.

The strategy should take the long view of capacity building and include a minimum implementation phase of five years. All human service agencies that have funded NGO programs would be expected to contribute to the development, funding and implementation of the strategy. A workforce development strategy needs to be a central component, and address both current and projected skills shortages in the sector.

### **Results**

- Better community services
- A guaranteed workforce that is highly skilled

## **Regional Service 'Hubs'**

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Community organisations, particularly those in regional and rural NSW, often have limited

access to specialist corporate services such as human resource advice, strategic planning, financial administrative support, IT support and professional development opportunities.

The corporate support needs of these organisations are best understood and delivered locally. This reduces the costs and often increases relevance.

### **What needs to be done**

The Regional Services Hubs (RSH) are a capacity building strategy that delivers regional corporate services, within reach and within budget. Similar models operate in the United States and the Republic of Ireland (Community Development Corporations) and more recently in the Northern Territory.

### **Results**

A funded network of Regional Service Hubs can:

- Deliver much needed corporate services to NGOs in regional and rural NSW.
- Save on costs through sharing services.
- Generate local jobs.

### **Increased Research Capacity-Better Practice, Better Outcomes**

Because we work across service delivery, community development and policy, the community sector is very well positioned to develop, implement and evaluate new approaches to improve outcomes for disadvantaged people and communities.

The community sector is a 'natural laboratory' and has the potential to substantially contribute to the research-policy-practice dynamic. A strong research evidence base is essential to inform service delivery practice and improve outcomes; however the capacity of the community sector in these areas is limited by the lack of dedicated research capacity and formal links with relevant academics and research institutes.

### **What needs to be done**

Research literacy and evidence-based practice is crucial to the future of the third sector. Government funding is required to enhance research capacity. This funding should provide for a small number of dedicated research positions that;

- Undertake research within the community sector on key issues to inform improved practice and better policy.
- Act as facilitators or 'knowledge brokers' between the community sector and researchers/research institutes using partnership models.
- Translate findings and tested evidence based learning's into practical resources to enhance service delivery capacity.

### **Results**

- Services and Government are better informed and better able to meet the needs of the community.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> NSW Department of Community Services (2006) Annual Statistical Report 2004/05

<sup>2</sup> Cashmore J and Paxman M (1996) Cited by CREATE Foundation, Australian Children and Young People in Care, Report Card Education, December 2004, pg 7.

<sup>3</sup> Cashmore J and Paxman M. (1996) Longitudinal study of wards leaving care. Social Policy Research Centre. Sydney, executive summary

<sup>4</sup> Mendes, P & Moslehuddin B. 2004. Graduating from the Child Welfare System: A Comparison of the UK and Australian Leaving Care Debates, International Journal of Social Welfare, 13, Blackwell Publishing p334.

<sup>5</sup> Australian Council of Trade Unions (2004) New Data Fuels 'Working Poor' Fears: 60,000 People Can't Afford Food, [www.actu.asn.au](http://www.actu.asn.au).

<sup>6</sup> Estimated number of people with Health Care Cards who are not on a Centrelink pension or benefit. Hansard 21 June 2005

<sup>7</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 2005

<sup>8</sup> Yates, Judy and Gabriel, Michelle: Housing affordability in Australia, AHURI Background Report, February 2006, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> City of Cities: a Plan for Sydney's Future, Department of Planning, December 2005 p. 127.

<sup>10</sup> This costing assumes that the additional units of affordable housing would be allocated to the community housing sector. This would facilitate access to private sector loan funds and Commonwealth taxation and rent assistance subsidies. If it were decided to allocate some of the additional units to public housing, increased funding would be required.

<sup>11</sup> The Senate Community Affairs References Committee Inquiry into Poverty and Financial Hardship "A hand up not a hand out: Renewing the fight against poverty", March 2004

<sup>12</sup> 2001 census figure

<sup>13</sup> As at 30 June 2005

<sup>14</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2006. Homeless Children in SAAP 2004-05, Bulletin no 48. Cat. No. AUS 85. Canberra:AIHW.

<sup>15</sup> The Health of the People of NSW- Report of the Chief Health Officer 2004, NSW Health

<sup>16</sup> The Health of the People of NSW- Report of the Chief Health Officer 2004, NSW Health

<sup>17</sup> Australia's National Oral Health Plan 2004-2013 National Advisory Committee on Oral Health 2004

<sup>18</sup> Australia's National Oral Health Plan 2004-2013 National Advisory Committee on Oral Health 2004

<sup>19</sup> Phillips. J & Park. M 'Measuring violence against women: a review of the literature and statistics' Parliament of Australia: Parliamentary library. 6 December 2004.

<http://www.aph.gov.au/LIBRARY/INTGUIDE/SP/ViolenceAgainstWomen.htm>

<sup>20</sup> Michael Stocker and Dr Olav Nielssen, Apprehended Violence Orders And Stalking <http://www.aic.gov.au/conferences/stalking/StocNiel.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Julie People, Trends and patterns in domestic violence assaults (Crime and Justice Bulletin No. 89 October 2005) [http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/bocsar/ll\\_bocsar.nsf/vwFiles/cjb89.doc/\\$file/cjb89.doc](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/bocsar/ll_bocsar.nsf/vwFiles/cjb89.doc/$file/cjb89.doc)

<sup>22</sup> Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Inquiry into Civics and Electoral Education (2 June 2006) <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/em/education/subs/sub034.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Department of Juvenile Justice, 2003 NSW Young People in Custody Health Survey, Key Findings Report.

<sup>24</sup> Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/em/education/subs/sub034.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Australian Medical Association, Undue Punishment? Aboriginal People and Torres Strait Islanders In Prison: An Unacceptable Reality (Report Card Series 2006 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health) [www.ama.com.au/web.nsf/doc/WEEN-6PU9BH/\\$file/Indigenous\\_Report\\_Card\\_2006.pdf](http://www.ama.com.au/web.nsf/doc/WEEN-6PU9BH/$file/Indigenous_Report_Card_2006.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> Sentencing Advisory Council, Recidivism (Reviewed 16/6/2006) <http://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/CA256F8200D281D/page/Sentencing+Monitoring-Prison+and+detention-Recidivism?OpenDocument&1=90-Sentencing+Monitoring~&2=30-Prison+and+detention~&3=70-Recidivism~>

<sup>27</sup> E. Baldry 'Prison boom will prove a social bust', SMH, 18.1.05 [http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/bocsar/ll\\_bocsar.nsf/vwFiles/cjb26.pdf/\\$file/cjb26.pdf](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/bocsar/ll_bocsar.nsf/vwFiles/cjb26.pdf/$file/cjb26.pdf)