Big issues for new ministers

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The Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS) has highlighted some critical work priorities for the recently reshuffled Carr Cabinet, which arise from today's release of the Production Commission's Report into Government Service Provision 2005.

"Overall, the Report provides a very mixed review of the performance of key NSW Government departments, programs and services," said NCOSS Director, Gary Moore.

"For new Education and Training Minister, Carmel Tebbutt, the Report shows that retention rates of young people to years 10, 11 and 12 in NSW schools remain below the national average, with the retention rates of indigenous students being much lower than non-indigenous students and also below the national average."

"With NSW having the highest student to staff ratio in government primary schools and the third highest in government secondary schools, it is critical that the Minister can sustainably implement the Government's policy of lowering class sizes."

"However, it is disturbing to note that in vocational education and training, NSW has the lowest percentage of TAFE graduates who were unemployed on the commencement of their course and who gained employment after the course."

"For new Community Services Minister, Reba Meagher, the report highlights a widely varied performance. Whilst NSW has the third highest real spending per child on child protection in general, it has the second lowest spending per child protection notification and the third lowest spending for children who are actually in care in an out of home care service."

"For 2003-04 in children's services, the NSW Government spent less per child than any other State or territory government. To compound this, expenditure per child actually fell from the previous financial year and is lower than the 2001-02 financial year in real terms."

"For new Ageing and Disabilities Services Minister, John Della Bosca, the report suggests big improvements need to be made in some key community care and disabilities services performance. NSW spends by far the lowest per capita on Home and Community Care Services (HACC) and its spending rate is only 50% of the national average."

"The report shows that NSW only meets 35% of the identified need for daily living activities services of older people. NSW also has the lowest proportion of people with disability who are using community access services."

"Other areas of NSW Government performance that this report highlights for attention include mental health, where despite a significant lift in recurrent spending per person, NSW still lags behind the national average."

"NSW retains its low levels of funding available to non government organisations that provide mental health services and continues to have a below national per capita average number of mental health beds in public hospitals and full time direct care mental health professionals."

"The report also makes it clear that housing affordability in the private rental sector is a continuing huge social policy issue."

"Nationally, 69% of private renters are in housing stress (paying more than 30% of their income in rent). In

NSW, this figure rises to 75%."

"Even after receiving Commonwealth Rent Assistance, 40% of private renters in receipt of this payment remain in housing related stress."

"The current Commonwealth Rental Assistance Scheme appears to be having a marginal impact on affordability in the face of very high rents in Sydney and increasingly in regional NSW centres," added Mr Moore.