

# NSW Productivity Commission Discussion Paper

NCOSS Submission

26 November 2019

## About NCOSS

The NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS) works with and for people experiencing poverty and disadvantage to see positive change in our communities.

When rates of poverty and inequality are low, everyone in NSW benefits. With 80 years of knowledge and experience informing our vision, NCOSS is uniquely placed to bring together civil society to work with government and business to ensure communities in NSW are strong for everyone.

As the peak body for community services in NSW we support the sector to deliver innovative services that grow and evolve as needs and circumstances evolve.

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## Recommendations

### Part 1

Use the productivity reform agenda to strategically target the community services sector – part of the fast growing healthcare and social assistance industry - to help address existing and impending vulnerabilities in the NSW economy, address future demand and support those who are at risk of disadvantage in the community.

The community services sector, research institutions and the NSW government work together to create a whole of Community Services Industry Plan for NSW that articulates the vision of a thriving sector and the steps needed over the next 10 years to achieve that vision.

Combine this with an industry specific institute that brings together: needs-based training and development opportunities; research and development to drive best practice and innovation; and forward planning to ensure a fit for purpose, world-class social services sector.

### Part 2

Implement a systematic and comprehensive plan to improve the energy efficiency of existing homes.

Undertake a review of thermal performance and energy costs of social housing stock across the state and implement a program to improve their energy efficiency, prioritising homes where health, climate and hardship risks are greatest.

### Part 3

Develop a social procurement framework that covers procurement of goods, services and construction.

For buyers the framework provides guidance to embed social procurement into existing processes. For suppliers, it will inform of the methods to deliver on Government objectives while continuing to grow their business by participating in government procurement.

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Section 1: Building human capital for a modern  
and evolving economy

## Introduction

The environment in which the community services sector operates is undergoing significant and ongoing transformation. This is due to changes in government policy, approaches to government operations and global social and economic factors. Population growth, an ageing population and the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) present challenges that place increasing demands on the sector.

The community sector is an essential and growing industry and one that requires workforce growth and increased workforce quality to keep up with demand. A renewed focus on productivity in NSW is an unparalleled opportunity to develop a resilient and adaptable community services industry and labour market. However, building a larger and suitably qualified workforce in a short timeframe requires careful planning.

This NCOSS submission argues that there is a need to develop and implement an overarching industry plan that encompasses the entire community services sector and sets a vision for the future. A co-ordinated, needs-based, person-centred plan for community services with a unifying and longer-term vision will address the underutilisation of human capital in the care sector identified in the Discussion Paper.<sup>1</sup>

## NSW is changing

NSW is growing rapidly and in 2020 the population is predicted to reach 8 million.<sup>2,3,4,5</sup> We have a strong economy and a budget in surplus, yet more than 880 000 people in NSW live with significant economic disadvantage. One in six children live below the poverty line.<sup>6</sup> There is a crippling shortage of affordable housing for people on low incomes.<sup>7</sup> Low wage growth, increasing underemployment and overall increasing inequality interact with inadequate income support policies to produce very difficult conditions for people experiencing disadvantage.<sup>8,9,10</sup>

While this scenario is true across the state and nation, research demonstrates that the situation is felt particularly acutely in regional communities. In a changing environment, these NSW communities could experience exacerbated employment shortages, poverty, increasing costs for essential food and goods and poorer health outcomes.<sup>11,12,13,14</sup>

With these challenges in mind, NCOSS recommends the NSW Productivity Commission go further than simply acknowledging the 'distributional impacts' of increased productivity. Targeting productivity opportunities in our regions, to support the vulnerable in our community has enormous potential. Improving the productive capacity of the community services workforce both builds human capital and changes the trajectory for those being left behind.

**Recommendation:** Use the productivity reform agenda to strategically target the community services sector – part of the fast growing healthcare and social assistance industry - to help address existing and impending vulnerabilities in the NSW economy, address future demand and support those who are at risk of disadvantage in the community.

## The community services sector is a significant economic contributor

*“If we want to find productivity gains for Australia, looking at a set of services that make up around one-fifth of our output, are consumed by a wide variety of people, are particularly important for those who are struggling, and have a high level of government involvement, are a pretty good place to start.”* Mark Brennan, Chairman of the Productivity Commission<sup>15</sup>

The community services sector is a multibillion-dollar industry made up of thousands of organisations that support tens of thousands of NSW residents who are living with disadvantage and who need support and care. Excluding housing, health and education, ‘human services’ make up around 14 per cent of our national output.<sup>16</sup>

The Productivity Commission’s 2018 report into inequality in Australia shows that ‘in-kind transfers’—human services—significantly reduce the level of inequality in Australia. Human services broadly have a larger impact on reducing inequality (as measured by the fall in the Gini coefficient) than our progressive income tax system. Improving productivity in sectors like the community services helps to reduce inequality in Australia.<sup>17</sup> These services matter for the wellbeing of many people.

Improving the productivity in community services can have a large influence on the economy.

### **What is the community services sector?**

Community services are the segment of human services outside of health and education. The community services sector helps people experiencing poverty, hardship, discrimination and disadvantage. Community service organisations include disability services, housing and homelessness services, aged care services, community and mental health services, youth and family services, neighbourhood centres and community development organisations, financial counselling, women’s services and the peaks and advocacy groups that represent the people they support.<sup>18</sup>

The community services paid workforce is a significant employer. Nationally, the sector matches the size of the Australian retail sector and makes up to 12.5 per cent of the NSW workforce.<sup>19</sup> The community services sector is the country’s fastest growing; employment in the sector has grown by over 24 per cent in the past five years.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, due to population growth, the ageing population, the implementation of the NDIS and other government reforms, the industry is set for rapid growth for decades to come; numbers of workers in the industry are projected to grow nationally by 16.3 per cent compared with 7.3 per cent for other industries.<sup>21,22</sup>

In addition to the paid workforce the sector provides volunteers, who contribute around \$328 million unpaid hours.<sup>23</sup>

The expansion of this workforce presents significant opportunity for NSW government but realisation of this opportunity will require coherent and comprehensive systems thinking to ensure that we respond in a way that recognises all parts of the complex whole. Those providing support and care will need education and training at scale. Employment pathways will need to be drawn and facilitated. There is a unique opportunity to reimagine the community sector as an industry with a rewarding range of professional and fulfilling career opportunities.

## The sector is facing real challenges

The community services sector is flexible and mature and has a strong history of supporting people in poverty and living with disadvantage. Despite its contribution to the NSW workforce and economy, there are persistent structural challenges in the sector.<sup>24</sup> With considerable policy reform agenda and fiscal tightening, the working environment is changing rapidly and dramatically, with the potential to put the industry's capacity at risk. We need to ensure that community service organisations are equipped and resourced to adapt and continue to produce results for the people and communities of NSW.

**Workforce demographics:** Many workers are approaching retirement age, especially in small organisations.<sup>25</sup> The vast majority of the workforce is female. In 2017, organisations in the NSW sector had on average 77.6 per cent female workforce and one in five organisations were completely staffed by women. According to 41.6 per cent of NSW organisations, recruitment and retention difficulties relate directly to the systemic undervaluing of the community service industry.<sup>26</sup>

**Pay:** In May 2018, the average weekly earnings of the community sector workforce was lower than that of comparable occupations in other industries—\$838.90 compared with \$1,106.40 respectively.<sup>27</sup> Despite the wage increases resulting from the Equal Remuneration Order, community service employees still feel their work is financially undervalued, and that wages and conditions need to improve to attract and retain highly skilled and qualified staff.<sup>28</sup>

**Qualifications:** Organisations that have a focus on ageing, disability and carer services have a lower proportion of degree-qualified staff than health-related services, at around 2 in 5. Organisations based outside of metropolitan areas have even fewer degree-qualified employees.<sup>29</sup>

**Professional development:** Limited resources dedicated to professional development is a clear and constant challenge to the community sector.<sup>30</sup> In particular, there is a need for quality training that is culturally appropriate, accessible and relevant to particular needs such as management, governance, CALD and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers, mature age workers and work in regional and rural areas.<sup>31</sup>

**Job security:** Employment in the sector is characterised by high rates of part time and casual roles.<sup>32</sup> Part time workers made up 32 per cent of the total industry workforce in 2018.<sup>33</sup> Workforce data shows a consistent trend in the disability workforce toward casual employment particularly in small and medium organisations.<sup>34</sup> Organisations report offering casual positions to cater for fluctuations in demand and because of short funding contracts uncertainty about the continuity of their funding.<sup>35</sup>

**Recruitment:** Our population is ageing. Our older people will increasingly need care and support in the community. The NDIS is also spurring the growth of the disability support workforce. Disability workforce data for June 2018 showed a net growth rate for disability support workers of 10 per cent annually.<sup>36</sup> This compares to an all-industry figure of 2.5 per cent over that year.

Yet the challenge of recruiting and retaining an adequate community sector workforce, particularly in rural and remote areas is well recognised. There are shortages of staff across the sector.<sup>37</sup> In 2017, 40.7 per cent of community sector organisations had difficulty recruiting and retaining degree qualified staff and 32.5 per cent

had difficulty recruiting other frontline practitioners.<sup>38</sup> 63 per cent of organisations in the disability sector had extreme or moderate difficulty in recruiting disability support workers in 2018, up 45 per cent from 2017.<sup>39</sup>

**Reform agenda:** Community services are undergoing a period of significant change in NSW, new models of service delivery, new ways of doing business, and a stronger focus on achieving and measuring social and economic outcomes are changing the service delivery landscape. Ongoing Royal Commissions and Productivity Commission Inquiries are likely to recommend changes to the way community service organisations are run and how their workforces are supported. The sector needs to strategically accommodate the consequences of these important processes.

## There are significant opportunities for the sector too

**Technology:** The emergence of new technologies has dramatically influenced the ways we live and work. Technology will alter the combination of skills required to keep the economy running.

Smarter use of technology will enhance service delivery, increase efficiency and reduce professional isolation for those living and working in rural and remote areas.<sup>40</sup> Effective technology use allows organisations to respond to environmental changes and constraints and adapt quickly.<sup>41</sup>

However, NSW community sector organisations have already constrained resources and struggle to undertake the investment and reform required to take advantage of technology. A 2016 Survey found that the biggest challenges for not for profit organisations are IT budget, keeping abreast of IT changes and internal IT capacity.<sup>42</sup> Support and direction for IT plans could substantially increase the productivity of the sector, by allowing an organisation to clearly identify areas of investment in IT operations in order to operate efficiently, generate revenue, and measure program outcomes.<sup>43</sup>

**Skills that cannot be automated:** It is predicted that around 9 per cent of jobs in the Australian workforce are at significant risk of automation. This risk is concentrated amongst particular geographic, demographic and socioeconomic groups, typically with low and semi-skilled occupations.<sup>44</sup>

There remains a key suite of people-focussed skills – social and emotional intelligence, active listening, empathy, and creativity – that are central to the health and social care workforce<sup>45</sup> and that cannot be automated. While technology changes the way that community services are delivered and managed, these occupations are among the most resilient because building complex relationships with people cannot be wholly replicated or replaced by technology.

**New demand for new workforces:** Community services growth demands a wide range of skills from tertiary allied and health professions to the delivery of practical supports. NSW has a need and an opportunity to build a pipeline of workers across a broad spectrum of occupations. The present workforce challenge can be seen as a chance to target ‘hard to reach’ or ‘hard to employ’ communities or people traditionally locked out of the labour market. For example, nearly 30 per cent of Newstart recipients in NSW are aged 55 and over (at March 2019). Many older Australians want to continue to work but find it difficult to get work if they have become unemployed.<sup>46</sup>



There are also pools of potential employees in the form of people requiring retraining from industries facing reduction, lower socio-economic groups and vulnerable people such as those re-joining the community following incarceration. The Discussion Paper acknowledges the underutilisation of such human capital in the health and care sectors and that this may compromise the ability for the sector to respond to rising demand.

The Discussion Paper also identifies that improving the quality and availability of training and the ability of the VET system to deliver the skills businesses need are key to increasing productivity.<sup>47</sup> A coherent strategy for this growing industry is an obvious path to higher employment and increased productivity.

## A Community Services Industry Plan

The NSW community services sector is vibrant, diverse and adaptable and we want it to thrive. We are facing significant advancement in technology and change in the economic and social demographics of our communities. This combined with ongoing reform in service delivery is putting an ever-increasing strain on the community services industry. With a strategic view, coordination and cooperation, we can join up concurrent challenges and opportunities and find significant economic gains that improve the lives of many Australians.

The government together with the community sector needs to build an evidence-informed, robustly designed plan for the future.<sup>48</sup> A strategic Community Services Industry Plan will ensure those most vulnerable in our community will receive supports they need, and are able to participate in society to their full potential. This approach is the very essence of increasing the value derived from existing assets that can contribute to the growth of the economy.

### What will a Community Services Industry Plan look like?

The Community Services Industry Plan is guided by a vision for the future of the whole community services industry.

**Vision:** A community services industry and workforce that is equipped to deliver the level and quality of service required to meet demand. Individuals and communities that are vulnerable have the support and choice of services to improve their lives and pursue their aspirations. Organisations have evidence that outcomes delivered create lasting change in the lives of individuals and their communities, demonstrated through research and evaluation. Effective workforce attraction and retention strategies have been developed, increasing diversity in the workforce, and improving pay and conditions.

The proposed Community Service Industry Plan will:

- be an industry-owned and led plan in partnership with a research institution and government
- provide an overarching framework for the whole industry and comprehensively guide sector and workforce development
- create employment pathways that connect demand to supply opportunity
- address the intersections, interdependence and transition points between fields of service provision
- provide a “helicopter” view over the major trends and strategies that will impact to assist in planning for the future community services.

Modelled off similar processes in other states and territories, an Industry Plan will be built from research evidence and bring together all available relevant datasets. Consultation with NSW community organisations and communities will be key. Using the Victorian Community Service Industry Plan as a model, the NSW Government should invest in understanding the industry's role and profile now, what it should look like in 10 years' time, and fund the steps and inputs that are required to get there.

A 2016 review of evidence found that a strategic approach to creating a sustainable and effective social care workforce across regional Australia needs to involve investing in capability, building the workforce and improving efficiency through collaboration, technology and service development.<sup>49</sup>

Additionally, the plan will articulate priority areas for research and development and the desired outcomes industry hopes to achieve over the short, medium and longer term.

The community services industry needs to be innovative, best practice and continuously improving. Sector organisations are not funded for this work. As such a central institute with an academic perspective along with a sector representative body could efficiently and effectively play this role.

NCOSS, as the peak body for community services in NSW, is in a unique position to support such a plan. With a membership spanning across community services delivery in NSW, NCOSS is well placed to work in partnership with the NSW Government and the diversity of the sector to lead the development of a Community Services Industry Plan.

## Community Services Industry Plan

**Treasurer's Productivity priorities:** A strengthened and more efficient community services workforce will make it easier for the community services sector to do business. Better access to support services will help lower the cost of living for people living with disadvantage.

**Premier's Priorities:** A strengthened and more efficient community services workforce can contribute to several Premier's Priorities by improving the lives of people experiencing systemic disadvantage and challenges:

- bumping up education results
- increasing the number of Aboriginal young people reaching their potential
- protecting our most vulnerable children
- increasing permanency in out-of-home care
- reducing recidivism in the prison population
- reducing homelessness
- improving outpatient and community care
- reducing the rate of suicide

## Existing example: the Victorian Industry Plan and the Future Social Services Institute

As in NSW, the Victorian community sector employs more people than any other key industry in the economy. Due to population growth, the ageing population and the growth of the NDIS, the sector in Victoria has been projected to grow by 16 per cent between 2015 and 2020, accounting for almost a quarter of all projected employment growth to that year.\*

VCOSS produced an industry plan in 2016 that:

- sets a vision for community services
- takes account of the economic, technological and social shifts that will impact on service delivery in the future
- moves the current fragmented system towards a co-ordinated, person-centred experience of community services
- provides a unifying, longer term plan to support the industry.

VCOSS now works with the Future Social Service Institute (FSSI) in a collaboration with RMIT University and the Victorian Government. The FSSI aims to implement the vision of the Victorian industry Plan through:

- Designing world-best education programs for the social service sector
- Training the future workforce
- Researching emerging trends and opportunities in social sector reform
- Empowering not-for-profits to reorient to a global market

\*VCOSS (2015) Building on the value of Victoria's community sector, Melbourne

### Recommendations:

The community services sector, research institutions and the NSW government work together to create a whole of Community Services Industry Plan for NSW that articulates the vision of a thriving sector and the steps needed over the next 10 years to achieve that vision.

Combine this with an industry specific institute that brings together: needs-based training and development opportunities; research and development to drive best practice and innovation; and forward planning to ensure a fit for purpose, world-class social services sector.

# NSW Productivity Commission Discussion Paper

NCOSS Submission

Section 2: Reliable, sustainable and  
productive use of our energy and water

This section of the NCOSS submission will respond to the discussion paper's identification that there is scope for NSW to implement initiatives that improve energy efficiency and energy demand management.

## **Comment: climate change and productivity in NSW**

NCOSS notes the absence in this Discussion Paper of the greatest challenge we face as a community; the consequences of the unfolding climate crisis. High profile individuals and organisations are naming this as one of the most significant threats to our economy and productivity.<sup>50</sup>

The NSW Government has an opportunity to proactively and specifically seek solutions to climate and sustainability challenges and options for a just transition to a cleaner economy. Transitions away from mining and fossil fuels are inevitable and will impact productivity.<sup>51</sup> If communities that are dependent upon these

industries in the regions of NSW are not supported to take advantage of growth in other industries, thousands of jobs could be lost with none available to replace them.<sup>52</sup>

Climate change is not only a threat to our economy and environment, it threatens people's livelihoods, health, quality of life and employment. Climate change impacts are most acute for those most vulnerable in the community.<sup>53</sup> How NSW works with this change or against it will determine our prosperity going forward.

## Improving asset utilisation and demand management

People living with economic disadvantage spend a significant proportion of their income on utility costs due to homes with poor energy efficiency.<sup>54,55</sup> This is a particularly urgent problem in older private rentals and public housing.<sup>56</sup> Excess heat, cold and dampness from inefficient homes generate and aggravate a range of illnesses and allergies at significant personal and public health cost.<sup>57,58</sup> Energy is expended unnecessarily, putting pressure on the grid, especially during weather extremes.

Improving the energy efficiency of people's homes is a productivity opportunity because energy efficiency:

- reduces the size of energy bills
- improves health and wellbeing
- reduces greenhouse gas emissions
- improves the reliability and security of the energy grid
- reduces energy costs through reducing peak demand
- creates jobs<sup>59</sup>

The 'Report for Achieving Low Energy Existing Homes Version 5.0' outlines a number of measures through which to improve the efficiency of existing properties. The report's recommendations provide national productivity benefits with a net present value of \$5 billion and a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 52.7 MtO2e by 2050.<sup>60</sup> Previous NSW Government costings have estimated that upgrading social housing alone could deliver around \$171 million in bill savings between now and 2050 and around \$9 million in net benefit to NSW.<sup>61</sup>

There is strong community support for energy efficiency measures in Australia,<sup>62</sup> and robust evidence upon which to design a program that assists vulnerable consumers to decrease their energy use and participate in the retail electricity market.<sup>63,64</sup> Many programs have been successfully trialled in Australia and implemented overseas. In NSW, programs such as the Low Income Energy Efficiency Program (LIEEP) Power Savers Project and in Queensland the Switched on Communities program combine education with physical improvements and efficiency retrofits. They successfully improve the safety of vulnerable families from extreme weather and alleviate economic hardship.<sup>65,66,67</sup> There are positive flow on-effects for employment and local economies.<sup>68</sup>

## Energy efficient homes

**Treasurer's Productivity priorities:** Making it easier to do business, lowering the cost of living for people living, making housing more affordable.

**Premier's Priorities:** Safer, healthier, more energy efficient housing can contribute to several Premier's Priorities by improving the lives of people living in poverty or on low incomes:

- increasing the number of Aboriginal young people reaching their potential
- protecting our most vulnerable children
- reducing homelessness

### Recommendations:

Implement a systematic and comprehensive plan to improve the energy efficiency of existing homes.

Undertake a review of thermal performance and energy costs of social housing stock across the state and implement a program to improve their energy efficiency, prioritising homes where health, climate and hardship risks are greatest.

# NSW Productivity Commission Discussion Paper

NCOSS Submission

## Section 3: Smart ways to get more from our infrastructure

The Discussion Paper recognises that maximising the value from investments and existing assets is critical to the productivity of our cities and regions. In this section, NCOSS responds to how existing innovative service delivery models can be further leveraged to improve productivity and outcomes.

Australia has experienced an unprecedented era of prosperity. Yet unemployment rates among the most disadvantaged are rising, along with the 'underutilisation rate'; the rate of people who want to work more than they are.<sup>69</sup> As employment enables individuals to contribute financially and socially with greater capacity to their communities and families, the impact of unemployment effects communities and the economy as well as the individuals and their families.

People living with disadvantage can face significant barriers to gaining and retaining paid work. These include low educational attainment, caring duties, disability, addiction and criminal records. Getting the long-term jobless into stable employment is a major challenge, especially in areas of concentrated disadvantage.

## Unlocking the value of social enterprise and social procurement

Mainstream employment programs are not the solution for those experiencing disadvantage. Social enterprises on the other hand can address the specific needs of disadvantaged individuals by providing transitional employment opportunities. Two examples of this are the provision of 'destination' and pathway employment opportunities. 'Destination' opportunities are targeted to people who experience the greatest barriers. A pathway approach equips people with the skills and experience they need in a staged and well-supported manner.

In the rapidly growing social procurement sector social enterprises and Indigenous-owned businesses are emerging in response to the demand. There has been a surge in the jobs available to long-term unemployed people, people with disabilities, new migrants and Indigenous Australians. Such businesses are also seeing local jobs grow and the prioritising of local business.

### What is Social Procurement?

Social Procurement is an innovative service delivery model that can be leveraged to improve productivity by creating opportunities for participation in the economy for those traditionally excluded, whilst also creating beneficial social outcomes. Social procurement is the choice by organisations to generate social value through the inclusion of social objectives in their purchasing and procurement practices. Social procurement has the potential to create job opportunities for under-represented groups, reinvigorating marginalized communities.

Social procurement offers public sector bodies a way to:

- build and sustain stronger communities, promoting social inclusion and breaking cycles of disadvantage
- open new opportunities for strengthening the local and state skill base
- strengthen local economic development
- grow and strengthen innovative partnerships with corporate and community stakeholders and across the public sector
- demonstrate leadership
- achieve greater value for money and ensure that this value reflects triple-bottom line principles\*

\* Social Procurement in NSW – A Guide to achieving social value through public sector procurement

Faced with the challenges of an ageing population and fiscal shortfalls, there is more pressure on Governments to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public spending than ever before. Public procurement is used as a lever to drive economic growth and achieve secondary policy objectives such as unlocking innovation, small-medium sized enterprise participation, and delivering sustainable outcomes. From an economic perspective, public procurement is increasingly recognised as a lever for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public spending.

Social procurement should be considered in the context of the aforementioned Community Services Industry Plan.



## Social Procurement

**Treasurer's Productivity priorities:** Making it easier to do business, lowering the cost of living for people living, making housing more affordable.

### Recommendation:

Develop a social procurement framework that covers procurement of goods, services and construction.

For buyers the framework provides guidance to embed social procurement into existing processes. For suppliers, it will inform of the methods to deliver on Government objectives while continuing to grow their business by participating in government procurement.

## Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the NSW productivity Commission's first major discussion paper. Our recommendations provide opportunities for the NSW Government to support continued growth in the state's living standards and the wellbeing of its whole population.

NCOSS would very much welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission with you in greater depth. Should you have any questions in relation to this matter, please do not hesitate to contact Olivia Wright on [olivia@ncoss.org.au](mailto:olivia@ncoss.org.au) or 8960 7911.

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