

28 September 2020

The Hon Dominic Perrottet MP
NSW Treasurer
52 Martin Place
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Treasurer

NCOSS commends the NSW Government for its effective management of the public health response to the pandemic to date, balanced against the need to mitigate economic impacts. The strong leadership, consistent communication and flexible approach demonstrated by the Government has been appreciated by communities across the state.

As you would be aware, the community sector is a major employer and makes an important contribution to the economy in NSW. We are part of the health care and social assistance industry which is Australia's largest and fastest growing industry. We are also the primary provider of essential community programs that have provided invaluable support during the pandemic.

In the lead-up to the State Budget in November, there is an urgent need for ongoing investment in, and certainty for, these programs so they can continue supporting our communities and providing ongoing employment.

Contracts and funding arrangements under a number of programs overseen by the Department of Communities and Justice come to an end at the end of this year or mid next year. This includes Specialist Homelessness Services, the State Peaks Program and a range of intensive family support services aimed at keeping families together and able to care for their children – such as Intensive Family Preservation, Trauma Treatment Services and Thriving Families.

As you know, Specialist Homelessness Services have worked tirelessly with the relevant Government agencies to ensure that rough sleepers and others in precarious situations have access to safe, secure accommodation and are not exposed to added risks arising from the pandemic. Despite being over capacity and struggling with rising demand prior to the pandemic, these services have risen to the challenge and gone above and beyond to protect the most vulnerable in our communities.

Similarly intensive family support services are a central component of your Government's efforts to place vulnerable children and families at the heart of the service system and to direct investment to where it will deliver the greatest economic and social benefit. The needs of these families are likely to have intensified during the pandemic. Rising unemployment will contribute to ongoing parenting challenges and the risk of poor outcomes for vulnerable children if timely, targeted support is not available.

The community sector has responded quickly and effectively to the challenges presented by the pandemic, continuing to provide essential services and respond to changing need. This has been enabled by having effective peak bodies that have provided leadership for the sector, worked collaboratively with stakeholders to find solutions and acted as a conduit between the sector and government. These peak bodies, funded under the new State Peaks Program, have proved to be an efficient way of supporting and harnessing the strength of the community sector to deliver essential services in very challenging circumstances.

Organisations that deliver these programs now face the distressing prospect of not knowing if there will be funding in the upcoming budget and whether contracts will be renewed. Funding to these programs is overwhelmingly for employee wages; money in the pockets of workers that is spent in local businesses, supporting local economies. Specialist Homelessness Services alone employ around 3,000 people in metropolitan and regional locations across the state.

Given the rising tide of disadvantage that will become more apparent as federal economic stimulus measures are wound back, now is not the time to short change NSW communities and reduce employment opportunities by cutting essential programs. We look forward to your continued commitment to and increased investment in Specialist Homelessness Services, intensive family support services and the State Peaks Program in the upcoming NSW Budget; and to contractual certainty via 5 year terms, adequate indexation and the continued payment of Equal Remuneration Order supplementation via baseline funding as required.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joanna Quilty". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Joanna Quilty
CEO