



Annual Report 2022/2023



About NCOSS

The NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS) is the peak body for the social service sector in NSW. With over 400 members and a wider network of organisations and individuals who share our values, we work to make NSW free from poverty and disadvantage.

We advocate, collaborate and connect, as an independent public voice, to build inclusive communities where everyone can thrive, supported by a strong, diverse and effective social service sector.

Our work is driven by the experiences of people affected by poverty and disadvantage, and the community organisations who support them. We take an evidence-informed, consultative and collaborative approach to developing credible solutions that strengthen communities and support the sector. We partner with diverse communities and stakeholders, including government, the private sector and others to maximise impact and achieve results.



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Acknowledgement of Country

NCOSS acknowledges First Nations peoples as the sovereign custodians of Country, which was never ceded. We pay respect to Elders of past, present and future generations. We acknowledge, respect and value the distinct culture, customs and practices present in the many and diverse tribal nations across NSW.

Cover Art

Artwork was created by freelance artist and cultural mentor, proud Gomeroi man, Jakeob D Watson – for the establishment of the Mirrung Project at Ashcroft Public School.

Service: J Watson Art – Dhinewan Mentoring
www.dhinewanmentoring.com.au

Location: Hunter Valley Area –
Central Coast Area

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President's message

In 2022-23, cost-of-living was added to the series of crises that have battered us since 2019. Along with fires, floods, the pandemic. Heading the cost-of-living crisis was a housing availability and affordability crisis – spurred on by decades of underinvestment at NSW and Australian Government levels, and national housing policies that encourage speculative investment rather than seeing housing as an essential service.



It's in these challenging times that the value of a peak body, like NCOSS, comes to the fore, working with the sector to ensure that decision makers are keeping the needs of those who are struggling front of mind, brokering solutions between government and services on the ground, and advocating for more resources in the face of rising demand.

But across our sector, the perennial issue of organisational sustainability looms large.

We're extremely grateful that the new NSW Government committed to boosting our recurrent funding, so that NCOSS receives government contributions that are more in line with what our COSS counterparts receive in other states and territories.

This funding boost better values the work of NCOSS does, and will help ensure more manageable workloads, greater staff wellbeing, and greater impact.

But there is so much more that needs to be done, and urgently. All the signposts are pointing at a sector that's under immense pressure:

- Struggling to keep up with unprecedented demand – with some estimating increases of up to 80 per cent in demand for services such as mental health support, food relief and crisis responses over the past five years
- Struggling to manage its WHS obligations to manage burnout among our underpaid and mostly female workforce

- Struggling to manage the plethora of other risks which keep being foisted upon us, but without additional funding to manage them.

The current contracting and funding model is broken, and we need to be taken seriously as an industry of hard-working professionals who provide a significant contribution to the life of the state and to its economy.

I want to finish up by acknowledging the outstanding work of the NCOSS team – headed by Joanna Quilty – and thank them for their steadfast commitment over the last 12 months.

I'd like to acknowledge my fellow Board members for their active contribution to steering the organisation. In particular, I'd like to acknowledge Beverley Baker, Chair of the Older Women's Network and Jack Whitney, an individual NCOSS member and former President of the NSW Branch of the Australian Association of Social Workers, who are stepping down from the Board at this year's AGM. Thanks, both, for your contributions.

And finally, I'd like to acknowledge – and thank – our members in communities across NSW who, every day, step up to meet the many challenges that face them and are working towards a NSW free from poverty and disadvantage. We see you.

John Robertson
President

Acting CEO's message

2022-23 has been yet another big year for NCOSS and, since joining the organisation as the Director of Policy and Advocacy in 2022, I've been incredibly impressed by what we've achieved under Joanna's leadership. While we have good reason to be proud of all of the work we did, there are a few milestones I wish to highlight.



With the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations and Aboriginal Affairs NSW, we hosted the Non-Government Organisations Roundtable - Ngarala Duba in August 2022 to interrogate Closing the Gap priorities in NSW and the sector's role as a major employer and procurer of goods and services. Ngarala Duba is a Gadigal phrase for thinking about or listening to the ground or country – we use it in reference to the key characteristic of successful change making for First Nations communities – from the ground up. Our report from this work identifies recommendations for action by government, sector peaks and social service organisations informed by the knowledge and experiences shared, issues raised, and robust discussion.

With a coalition of peaks, we engaged the highly respected Dr Angela Jackson of Impact Economics and Policy to prepare the four-part Aftershock series of reports. Released between August and November 2022, these reports detailed the costs to the NSW economy in the aftermath a series of natural disaster. These included impacts on mental health, domestic and family violence, housing and homelessness, and child wellbeing and development.

We launched our Policy Platform 2023 at the 2022 AGM, building on the Aftershock findings and developed in consultation with our members. The first few months of 2023 saw NCOSS advocating for election commitments to address identified priorities.

With the help of the LCSA, we held roundtables in key locations in regional NSW, and West and South-West Sydney, so candidates could hear about local needs from those doing the heavy lifting on the ground. We met with Ministers, Shadow Ministers, members of the cross bench (including minor parties and independents) and senior public servants, to hammer home what we know is most needed.

This work set the tone for priorities for the rest of the year as we focused on the essential role of social infrastructure such as neighbourhood centres, cost-of-living increases, housing affordability, pokies reform, social housing and energy costs.

Hot on the heels of the NSW election, we launched our second Mapping Economic Disadvantage in NSW research, based on the 2021 Census data. This built on the original 2019 report – based on the 2016 Census – and also showed where things had improved (or gone backwards).

It painted a grim picture of growing inequality, particularly in West and South-West Sydney and parts of regional NSW. With more than 100,000 people falling into poverty since the 2019 report, the number of people in NSW living in poverty to the one million mark. A sobering statistic.

In late April, we released the report of another important piece of research – the Cost of Living in NSW – focusing particularly on understanding the impact of changes in cost of living on people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Both reports were extremely well received by NCOSS members, Ministers, MPs and bureaucrats, and got a lot of media coverage. This was especially the case in rural and regional areas, where a lack of robust data makes this work even more important.

Building on the 2022 work in the emergency response and resilience building space, we were awarded a NSW and Australian Government grant to undertake a pilot project in three locations highly impacted by disasters – the Hawkesbury, North Coast, South Coast. This project is aimed at:

- strengthening connections in the emergency management system
- better prioritising vulnerable population groups... and
- taking targeted action to reduce local disaster risks.

LCSA and AbSec are leading this work with us, and project planning and recruitment of local community partners kicked off from January this year.

The philanthropically funded School Gateway Project at Ashcroft Public School continued to evolve with the Mirrung Hub opening in August 2022. Mirrung, fittingly, means belonging in the local Dharug language. While it's early days, using the school as the gateway for families to access the supports they need is already delivering better outcomes for families and their kids.

With member organisations like the Tenants' Union of NSW and Shelter NSW, we contributed to the important debate around rental reforms, including presenting at a Parliamentary Inquiry in to secret rent bidding.



Ben McAlpine gives a presentation on the Mapping Disadvantage in NSW research to Members of the NSW Parliament at Parliament House

All of this shows that NCOSS and the sector consistently outperform, and that we are stronger together.

For many years, we have struggled in the face of immense growth in community need, while receiving limited, if any, funding increase. We have been expected to absorb the additional work or simply turn people away. And yet, through consecutive disasters, the vital role played by the sector has never been clearer, and never more important.

It is in this context that our sector cannot adequately attract and retain a workforce with the necessary qualifications; cannot sufficiently invest in their organisation; and cannot get by without piecing together an unsustainable patchwork of grants, donations and volunteers.

Despite this, I am optimistic for the future. The entire NCOSS team is committed to supporting all of our members get a better deal, so that together we can make an even greater impact as we strive towards eradicating poverty and disadvantage in NSW.

A critical opportunity will be the Government's Secure Jobs and Funding Certainty Taskforce, which is set to launch shortly. NCOSS, alongside all our fellow peaks, will be doing all we can to ensure that this opportunity is not missed.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the NCOSS team for all their incredible hard work through the year. They are a dedicated, passionate, highly capable group of people. A particular thank you to Joanna for her inspiring leadership, not just in the past 12 months but over the course of her time as CEO. Thank you too to the Board, for their impressive stewardship of the organisation.

Finally, thank you to all of our members. You are critical to why we exist, and we could not do this work without you; we could not do it without your support, your stories and your passion.

Ben McAlpine
Acting CEO



Ben McAlpine and Brave Foundation

Our Vision

A NSW free from poverty and disadvantage.

Purpose

We are an independent public voice collaborating, advising and advocating for a better deal for people experiencing poverty or disadvantage, and the social service sector that supports them.

Stakeholders

- Not for Profit organisations that make up the NSW social service sector
- Other Peaks and Councils of Social Service
- Individuals and private sector entities who share our values and mission
- Government agencies, Members of Parliament, decision makers, philanthropists, people with lived experience of poverty and disadvantage, academics and researchers.

Values



Courage

We have the courage to advocate and act for those who are voiceless and those who support them.



Integrity

We act, speak and support with integrity and honesty as an independent public voice for the disadvantaged.



Fairness

We strive for a state free from poverty, where everyone can prosper no matter their background.



Inclusion

We believe that a more equitable society starts with a more inclusive society where people's differences are valued and their needs recognised.

2022-2023 Highlights

Putting economic disadvantage on the map

We launched our latest *Mapping Economic Disadvantage in NSW* report in March 2023. Mapped across geographies and demographics, it draws on the 2021 Census and provides a visual representation of how poverty in NSW has changed since the 2016 Census. Alongside detailed reports, we launched two data tools to improve access and use. The research created a huge amount of interest from media and decision makers, helping us elevate the needs of the disadvantaged in the minds of politicians and the people.



Mapping Economic Disadvantage forum



Wesley Easter Breakfast Joanna Quilty panellist re gambling reform

Influencing pokies reform

With poker machines and problem gambling causing the most harm to those experiencing disadvantage, reform and change have been a big part of our advocacy in recent years. This led to an invitation to join the Independent Panel on Gaming Reform as a foundation member, advising on and overseeing the cashless gaming trial and reform roadmap.

Connecting as a sector at the Vision, Voice, Value Symposium

Our symposium in October 2022 was a huge success, bringing members together from all over NSW to share, reflect, and discuss. Panel sessions and keynote addresses sparked interesting and engaging discussion, and the chance to connect was a highlight for our members.



Mariam Veiszadeh, Tu Le, Paul Gray.

Exposing the real cost of living for those doing it tough

Our annual cost of living in NSW research was more important than ever this year, with the analysis highlighting that low-income households and those below the poverty line are in distress and taking extreme steps to get by. Accompanied by a supplementary recommendations paper, the report garnered media attention and led to meetings with the senior government officials to discuss combatting the growing divide.

Charting the aftershocks of the pandemic and natural disasters

Across four targeted reports we examined the economic and social costs of the pandemic and natural disasters. Presented during Anti-Poverty Week, the reports revealed the impacts on our wellbeing and the potential long-term mark that could have on the economy if not addressed. We advocated for an increase in social housing, more funding for mental health to match the national average spent and accessible place-based approaches that connect families with timely support.

Bringing government, leaders and Aboriginal peaks together to address Closing the Gap



The social service sector plays a vital role in progressing the Closing the Gap priorities in NSW and we were proud to host the *Non-Government Organisations Roundtable - Ngarala Duba*, alongside Aboriginal Affairs NSW and the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (CAPO). The panels discussed growing ACCOs as key leaders in social service practice and Aboriginal employment and leadership in the social service sector and the discussions, recommendations and insights were shared in a follow up report for the government and the sector.



NCOSS CEO Joanna Quilty at the Canterbury City Community Centre roundtable with Esta Paschalidis-Chilas, MP Jihad Dib and community members

Helping the Northern Rivers with flood recovery

The Building Resilience in Emergency Responses Project began in August 2021 in response to the COVID emergency and proved to be a highly successful 'ground up' approach during the delta outbreak. We replicated it in March 2022, following the devastating Northern Rivers floods. The project brought together Northern Rivers NGO services and linked them with government and other agencies to address immediate and ongoing flood recovery needs. It connected frontline NGOs to enable information sharing and provided a ground-up perspective to government. It's an ongoing resource to better plan for emergency response.



*Building Resilience for Emergency Responses
Grant Seeker Workshop in Lismore*

Improving the disaster capability of the sector

When disaster strikes the disadvantaged are the worst hit. To combat this, we secured funding for the Community Sector Disaster Capability (CSDC) project to further strengthen the sector and the support it provides to these populations in emergencies. The CSDC project supports local service organisations in four locations to develop their capacity to identify, assess and mitigate risks and strengthen connections with local disaster agencies and systems so they can bring their expert knowledge and connections into play.

Commitment to increase NCOSS core funding by \$1.3 million

Following extensive advocacy work, our President and CEO secured a \$1.3 million increase to our recurrent core funding from the new NSW Government. Recognising our impact and vital role in supporting the sector, the Government saw the need to further our mission to help people facing disadvantage in NSW.

GOAL 1

Amplify the experience of people affected by poverty or disadvantage to inform inclusive and equitable policy and decision making

A new government, same people in need

In the lead-up to the state election, NCOSS developed our NSW Policy Platform for both sides of politics, illustrating that kids, families and communities thrive when governments invest in fundamentals like housing and important social infrastructure. Drawing on key evidence and our research, we highlighted three categories for action and investment: cost of living relief, targeted support for the most vulnerable, and social sector sustainability.

Consultation with members, meetings with MPs

The platform was developed in consultation with the NSW Forum of Non-Government Agencies (FONGA), Health Equity Alliance, regional members, First Nations members and friends, the Northern Rivers Floods Working Group and the Multicultural Services Working Group.

We promoted the platform widely and received 41 endorsements from the non-government sector, ranging from front line service providers to fellow peaks. After sending it to all MPs, we undertook in-person briefings with a broad spectrum of politicians and offices encouraging them to make commitments, not just give support:

- Key Ministers, Shadow Ministers, and relevant portfolio spokespeople from the Greens
- Members of the cross-bench
- Senior policy advisors from their offices
- Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries of key NSW Government agencies.



**NCOSS Policy
Platform 2023:**
Working together
for a fairer NSW



Neighbourhood Centre Roundtables

In cooperation with the Local Community Services Association (LCSA) we organised roundtable discussions at neighbourhood centres before the election. The Neighbourhood Centre Roundtables saw local candidates and sitting MPs meet with staff, families and community members at six key locations: Penrith, Tweed, Lismore, Ballina, Wyong and Bankstown. They heard first-hand how vital the centres are to their communities and the need for core funding. The meetings laid the groundwork for ongoing advocacy for this important social infrastructure.



Mullumbimby Neighbourhood Centre



Yerin Eleanor Duncan Wyong.

Helping members advocate

We also empowered our members to engage with candidates and advocate for change with an election toolkit, factsheets and our *NCOSS Policy Tracker*. The Policy Tracker was a simple webpage that tracked policies connected to our platform, so that our members could quickly understand what was announced by different parties and candidates and be armed with up-to-date information in their advocacy.

In December we held an advocacy toolkit workshop to help members use it to optimise advocacy. Participants heard from Nick Trainor (then Director, Australian Public Affairs) and Mohita Kapoor (then NSW State Coordinator, CREATE Foundation) on how to best advocate for 'asks' with key decision makers. Resources and recordings were made available online for all members to access.

“Magnificent tools - thank you for developing these! I do some independent advocacy and these are useful for self-advocacy as well as organisational level advocacy.”

Workshop attendee.

Being a voice for the disadvantaged with decision makers

ClubGRANTS review and pokies reform

We've spent years advocating for an overhaul of the ClubGRANTS Scheme so that it manages conflicts of interest appropriately and meets community standards for where and how money is spent in the community. And now those efforts are starting to turn the tide. In March our CEO was part of a Four Corners program that examined the power of the Clubs industry in NSW. It was an opportunity to highlight the findings of our ClubGRANTS review and call for the scheme to be run with more integrity and transparency. That call was answered, with the government committing to reviewing the ClubGRANTS Scheme in its entirety.

Alongside the review of ClubGRANTS, the government is now examining pokies reform with the formation of the Independent Panel on Gaming Reform, with NCOSS a foundation member.

“ NCOSS’ role on this Independent Panel will ensure that the needs and interests of our most disadvantaged communities are front and centre. We know that pokies do their most harm within our disadvantaged communities – and it’s incumbent upon us all to address this issue.”

Joanna Quilty, NCOSS CEO

We will provide oversight and advice to the pilot program so that it can support proven harm reduction measures that give people more control over their behaviour, preventing the devastation that gambling wreaks on everyone in the community.



Avoiding a rental bidding war

In response to the growing rental crisis the government proposed legislation aimed at outlawing secret bidding. It required real estate agents to notify all applicants if a bid was submitted that was higher than the listed price. We were concerned this would backfire and lead to a 'rental auction', driving prices up instead of curbing them.

“ Having to disclose a higher offer to every applicant may result in a bidding war that knocks out candidates who otherwise would have had a chance. Silent rental auctions may result in unfair rental outcomes.”

Acting NCOSS CEO Ben McAlpine

We brought these concerns to the government alongside the Tenants' Union, Shelter NSW and Homelessness NSW, with our Acting CEO appearing at the Select Committee into the Bill. Our combined advocacy and media appearances led to the government removing those provisions and empowering the Rental Commissioner to investigate alternatives.

Bus Industry Taskforce

In May the NSW Transport Minister, Jo Haylen, launched the Bus Industry Taskforce with NCOSS given an important seat on the panel. Tasked with determining how to deliver more efficient and reliable bus services, our contribution is focused on equity of access to services and the poor coverage in more disadvantaged areas.

We drew on our *Mapping Economic Disadvantage* data to highlight that those areas with few public transport alternatives relative to other locations – especially Western Sydney and rural and regional NSW – have disproportionately higher levels of poverty, with the divide widening between 2016 and 2021.

We've already contributed to recommendations to the Minister and are consulting our member organisations about the needs of their communities, the adequacy and impacts of current bus service arrangements and priorities for improvement.

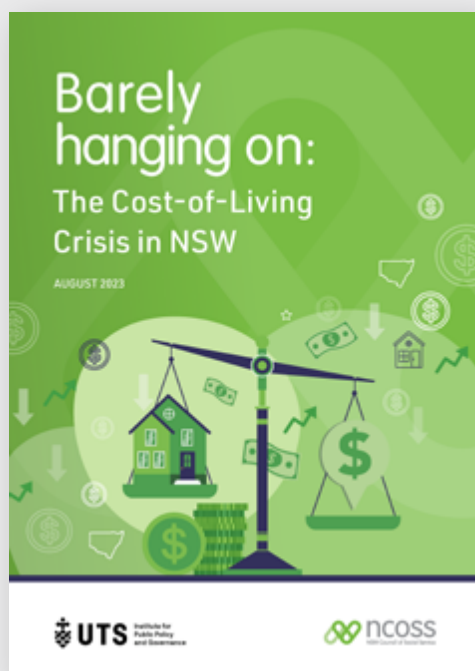
Shining a light on poverty and disadvantage through evidence

Cost of Living in NSW (CoLiN)

In July 2022 we released our annual cost of living in NSW research titled [*Tough Times, Hard Choices*](#). The report explores housing, employment, income and financial hardship experiences for NSW residents living on low incomes and those below the poverty line. Undertaken by the Institute of Public Policy and Governance from the University of Technology, the research engaged 1,025 through an online survey with 22 respondents also participating in focus groups and interviews. The report analyses their experiences by demographic group including household type, income group and location, drilling down to regional areas and regions within Sydney.

This research highlights that across NSW, low-income households and those below the poverty line are at breaking point. It gives an indication of the distress that the rapid increase in everyday living costs is causing, and the extreme steps households are taking. Alongside the report, we released a [*supplementary paper*](#) of recommendations, developed in consultation with members to urge the government into action.

The report garnered a lot of media interest, including a feature article in the Daily Telegraph and radio and print coverage from regional outlets due to the specifics of the regional data. It also led to our policy team meeting with the Cost of Living team at the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the economic and fiscal policy director in the Premier's office.



Mapping Economic Disadvantage 2023

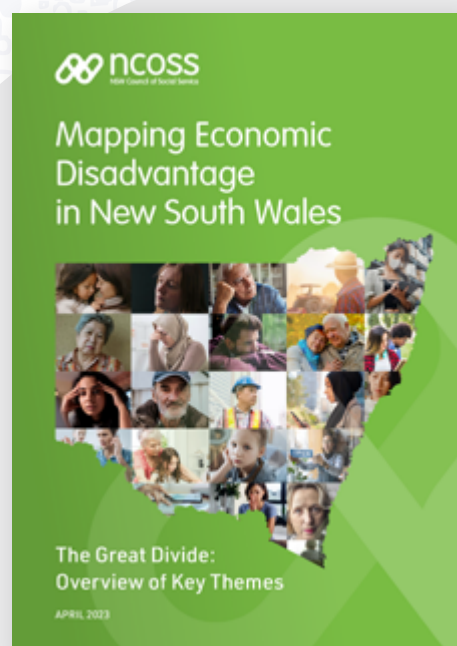
In March, we delivered two reports and two data tools as part of our *Mapping Economic Disadvantage in NSW* research. Drawing on the 2021 Census, it provides a picture of how poverty in NSW has changed since the 2016 Census. The University of Canberra's National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) used 2021 Census data to model rates of economic disadvantage in geographic areas, which anyone can view online and compare visually to the data from 2016.

The two reports we released – the Research Report from NATSEM (incorporating detailed analysis and results) and a Key Themes report, drew out critical insights (and recommendations), including:

- NSW has close to one million people living in poverty – a concerning milestone that demonstrates what we are doing is not working.
- Sydney has a significant and worsening poverty divide – poverty is highly concentrated in Sydney's Western and South-Western suburbs, with far lower rates in the city's East. In more disadvantaged areas poverty has deepened since 2016, while it has improved in more affluent areas.
- While the poverty rate across rural and regional NSW is slightly higher, impacts are markedly different. Youth poverty is 25% more in rural and regional NSW, the rate of those unemployed is 86% higher outside Sydney, while for single parents it is 39% higher than in the capital city.

- Older people have experienced an alarming growth in poverty – across NSW almost 50,000 more people over the age of 65 fell into poverty in the five years since 2016.
- Public housing is no longer the safety net it used to be – people living in public housing have the highest rate of poverty for any demographic group (almost 60%) and it saw the largest percentage point increase since 2016, especially those living in Greater Sydney.

As well as the reports and online mapping tool we provided a suite of online dashboards to help decision makers delve into the issues of economic disadvantage. The reports and online tools created a huge amount of interest from media and decision makers with 22 interviews and 45 MPs and staffers attending our briefing at Parliament House, helping us elevate the needs of the disadvantaged in the minds of politicians and the people.



Aftershock: Addressing the Economic and Social Costs of the Pandemic and Natural Disasters

As NSW recovered from the 2019-20 Summer Bushfires and the first case of COVID-19 was detected in Australia in February 2020, there was no indication of the upheaval and sacrifices that lay ahead. In the lead-up to Anti-Poverty Week 2022 we took stock of the recent past releasing a report series that explored the impacts of the pandemic and natural disasters across several key domains of wellbeing – domestic violence, mental health, child welfare and development, and housing security. We set out to document the huge personal and economic impacts which, if left unaddressed, will leave a long-term mark on the economy of NSW and its people.

The results were sobering and the need for targeted action more important than ever.

Mental health

- Between 2018 and 2021 there was a 46% increase in the number of 12-17-year-old females presenting for self-harm or suicidal thoughts.
- In 2021 there was an estimated increase of 171,615, or 21% more people with self-reported mental health consistent with depression or anxiety.

Domestic and family violence

- 60,000 women in NSW experienced family and domestic violence for the first time in the first year of the pandemic.
- 46,000 experienced an escalation in violence in the first year of the pandemic.



Housing security

- An additional 22,000 households in regional NSW are experiencing extreme rental stress, where they spend more than 50% of their income on rent, a 52% increase from March 2020.
- Since the start of the pandemic there's been a 10% increase in the number of clients of Specialist Homelessness Services currently experiencing homelessness.

Children's wellbeing and development

- A 13.4% increase in the number of children from low socio-economic areas developmentally vulnerable at the start of school.
- A 36.6% increase in the number of contacts to the Kids Helpline, including increases in the number of children seeking counselling for abuse and suicide prevention.

Alongside these reports we advocated for an increase in social housing, more funding for mental health to match the national average spent and accessible place-based approaches that connect families with timely support. All of these measures will contribute to Anti-Poverty Week's goal of halving child poverty by 2030.

Virtual care and telehealth barriers and experiences

With the need for quarantine during the pandemic, virtual and telehealth options were rapidly developed. We wanted to understand the experience of virtual care for the disadvantaged of our community and how it could be improved to better serve them.

In partnership with the Neighbourhood Research Hub from the University of Sydney, we conducted a research project that explored barriers to access and lived experience of people in rural and regional areas in NSW and those of western Sydney. Preliminary findings have been presented and we'll be publishing recommendations in the coming months to improve the experience for everyone.



GOAL 2

Identify and advocate for the foundations of a sustainable, connected, strong and diverse social service sector.

Supporting the frontline and recognising their efforts

Impact of COVID-19 on Staff Wellbeing in the Social Service Sector in NSW

From the very first moments of the pandemic the social service sector has been at the forefront of the response. Working tirelessly in emotionally charged and difficult environments, their resilience was pushed to the limit by the constantly evolving global health crisis. Together with Social Equity Works we set out to measure and understand the impact of COVID-19 on the wellbeing of social service workers in NSW and how we could better serve them.

“There was a huge increased mental load from having to obtain PPE, prepare, review and adhere to COVID safety plans, frequently changing restrictions and health advice, distracted by checking COVID daily numbers.”

Survey respondent

When it came to overall wellbeing, our respondents scored less than the national average across the four selected domains of the Personal Wellbeing Index: community connectedness, personal safety, future security and personal health. Future security scored the lowest in our survey (6.06), while respondents reported most satisfaction with their personal safety. Other key findings included:

- Over a third said workplace wellbeing has worsened, and more so for staff in large organisations.
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and Child and Family services were most likely to report decreased workplace wellbeing.
- Youth services reported the highest rates of improved wellbeing.

Across the sector, increased general uncertainty, a more complex work environment, and worry about family and vulnerable community members have taken a toll. Loss of connection to colleagues has been keenly felt, while working from home has been a plus for most.

The report listed recommendations for the government involving funding and measures to address job security. For social service organisations it recommended increasing support for their staff by understanding the added pressures they had experienced and making financial, operational and strategic plans to address them.

Closing the Gap Ministerial Roundtable

Together with Aboriginal Affairs NSW and the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (CAPO) we hosted the Non-Government Organisations Roundtable – Ngarala Duba* on Tuesday 16 August at Redfern Community Centre. The roundtable interrogated Closing the Gap priorities in NSW which the social service sector plays a vital role in progressing. Alongside our staff, Minister Ben Franklin and Minister Natasha McLaren-Jones (and their staff), 35 non-Aboriginal NGOs and 14 Aboriginal organisations attended. Participants included CEOs, COOs, and State Directors from some larger organisations including Mission Australia, Life Without Barriers, Barnardo's, St Vincent de Paul, The Burdekin Association, Anglicare and The Benevolent Society, along with peak bodies, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and others.

“I've seen the impact that NGOs have in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and how this impact can be maximised when they work in partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.”

Robert Skeen, Co Chair, NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations

With a growing awareness of the importance of self-determination leading to better outcomes for Aboriginal communities, the panels discussed growing ACCOs as key leaders in social service practice and Aboriginal employment and leadership in the social service sector.

“It's a credit to all our community organisations - what they are actually achieving and working through in community, because... what our organisations have signed up to, is place based, community driven. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations - we have the solutions, we have the processes and we need Government to meet us halfway...”

Audience member

We delivered the follow up report *Closing the Gap: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership and Employment in the Social Service Sector* on behalf of Aboriginal Affairs NSW and the Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (CAPO) sharing the inputs, discussions and findings of the roundtable. The collective recommendations included:

- Honouring the value of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and getting out of their way so they can support Aboriginal communities in the best ways possible.
- Transforming commissioning processes and systems that aren't supporting Aboriginal communities as well as they should.
- Building cultural safety and employment pathways for Aboriginal people.

**Ngarala Duba is a Gadigal phrase for thinking about or listening to the ground or country – we use it in reference to the key characteristic of successful change making for First Nations communities – from the ground up.*

Parliamentary inquiries workshop series

Together with the NSW Legislative Council Committees Secretariat, we presented in-person sessions designed for people working in policy, advocacy or management in the NSW community sector, to develop practical skills for effective advocacy and participation in parliamentary inquiries.

The workshops helped attendees understand parliamentary inquiries, write effective submissions and appear as a witness at hearings. They were incredibly well received with 100% satisfaction (16 responses) and a reported increase in confidence from participants.

“As someone who has never written a submission, the task seemed very daunting. I thought everything (discussed) was so necessary, I am now more confident and informed”.

Workshop participant



Bringing members together to share knowledge and build a stronger sector

NGO Researchers Forum

Our ongoing forum to showcase and learn from Community-Led Research (CLR) continued this year with a wide variety of presentations from NGO researchers. We held meetings in August, March and June with around 40 online attendees and even more viewing the recordings on YouTube later. Topics ranged from long term homelessness to support system for survivors of institutional child sexual abuse and frameworks such as nudge theory and codesigning and meaningful process for mental health research. Organisations that presented included:

- Bridge Housing
- Health Consumers NSW
- WESTIR Ltd
- Sydney Policy Lab
- Recovery Camp
- Carers NSW
- Pacific Link Housing
- Flourish Australia.

Regional Members Meetings

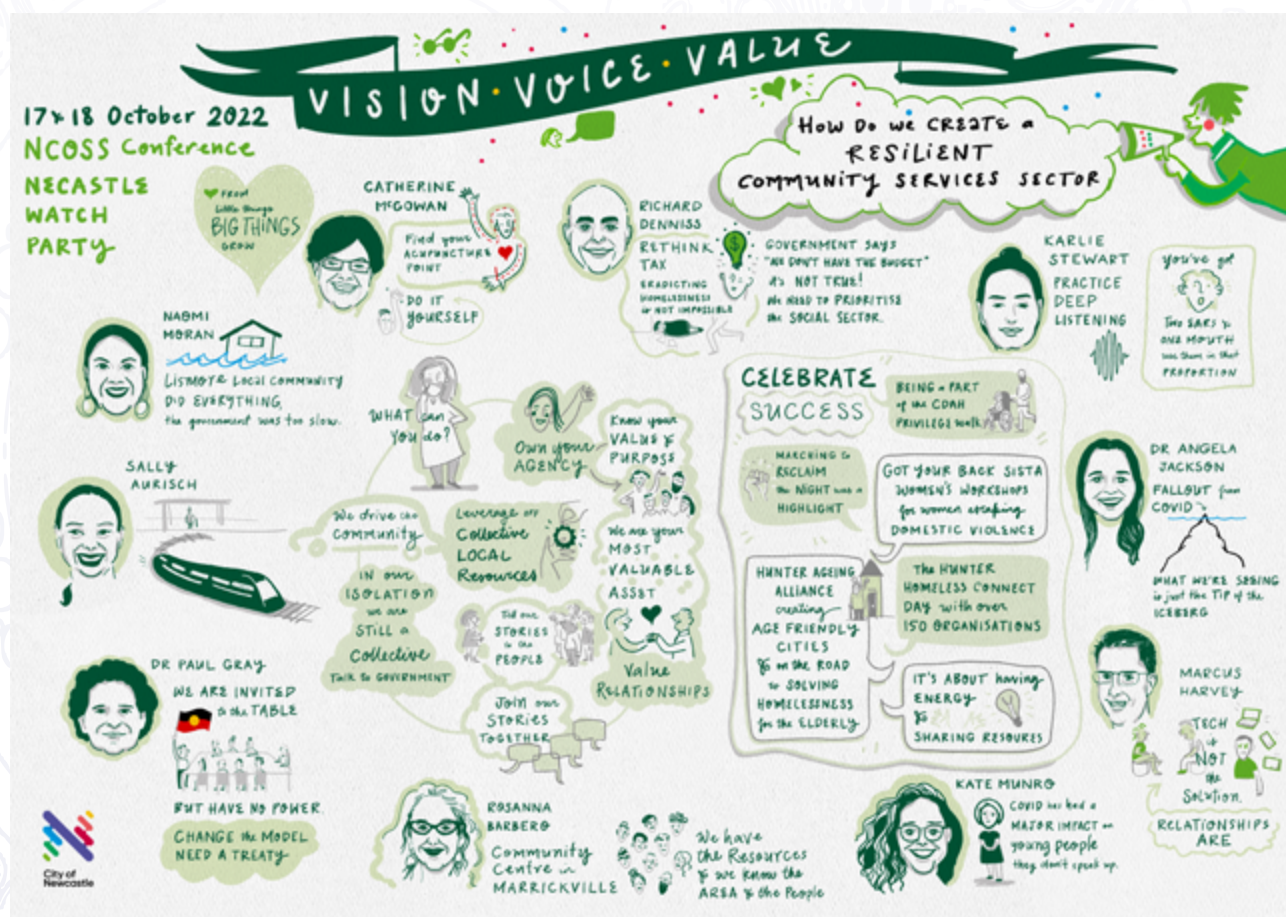
This year saw us organise and facilitate three meetings for our regional members in July, December and May. The meetings each saw 20-30 services attend and gave us an opportunity to further understand issues for regional members by hearing from consultants and speakers as well as those on the ground. Highlights included hearing from:

- Anita Tang, Organising Director of the Centre for Australian Progress and member of the 'Caz for Cowper' campaign, about getting traction on regional issues and lessons from the Federal election for the upcoming NSW state election.
- Dr Ryan Van den Nouwelant from City Futures Research Centre, UNSW on his recent report, *The impact of housing vulnerability on climate disaster recovery: The 2022 Northern Rivers Floods*.

Vision, Voice, Value – Social Sector Transformation Symposium

Our symposium was a huge success bringing members together from all over NSW to share, reflect, discuss and connect. Held at the Australian Theatre for Young People's *Rebel Wilson Theatre*, 319 people participated with 186 in person, 93 online and 40 at various watch parties in five locations around NSW. Dee Madigan moderated and keynote speakers included Cathy McGowan, Angela Jackson, Naomi Moran and Richard Denniss.

The panel sessions showcased the home-grown talents of our sector including strong representation from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders. The panels sparked interesting and engaging discussion and NCOSS President, John Robertson, participated on a panel on sector sustainability before providing the closing remarks on day one. Beyond the formal sessions the opportunities for members to come together were highly valued, with the dinner at the Sydney Theatre Company's *The Theatre Bar* at the End of the Wharf being another highlight.



Forum of Non Government Agencies (FONGA)

Three FONGA meetings were held this year with a high level of engagement, attendance and positive feedback at each. In February, Kate Washington, the then Shadow Minister for Family and Communities, joined the session to talk about the NSW Labor Party's approach to the sector and key areas of focus, with core themes covering:

- Rebuilding the foundations of communities, going back to basics on education, health and housing
- The need to shift our collective focus from crisis to early intervention
- Her desire to work closely with the sector
- A particular focus on child protection and the need to significantly improve the system.

In March we heard from Jim Wackett (Wesley Mission) on the next steps in gambling reform and had a panel discussion with John Robertson and Rosie Hodson (Social Ventures Australia) on the 2023 election. In June the agenda focused on the Voice to Parliament, with a presentation from Kate Sinclair (PIAC) giving us background on the Voice followed by a panel discussion.

Cultural Safety in Times of Change

In the lead-up to the referendum on the Voice we held two online discussion sessions for members regarding cultural safety. Designed to provide a safe space for conversations around cultural safety for First Nations staff and communities in the current environment, the sessions were facilitated by Rowena Lawrie from Yamurrah (and NCOSS RAP Consultant) and Belinda Field, CEO Yerin Eleanor Duncan Aboriginal Health Services (and co-chair of the NCOSS First Nations Partners and Advisors Group). As well as exploring cultural safety in member organisations we explored some of the key findings from *Gari Yala, Speak the Truth: Centering the Work Experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians 2020*. The discussion was well received, with feedback from one participant stating,

“ Thank you so much for this session. Has been very informative and looking forward to taking these learnings back to my team and other social networks.”

Helping the sector help the most vulnerable

Building Resilience in Emergency Responses Project helps Northern Rivers

The COVID emergency highlighted the lack of connection, support, collaboration and information sharing between frontline NGOs in times of emergency response. To address this and the need to provide a ground-up perspective to government, the Building Resilience in Emergency Responses Project began in August 2021. The success of this 'ground up' approach during the COVID Delta outbreak led to it being replicated, in March 2022, following the devastating Northern Rivers floods.

Through the project, we brought together Northern Rivers NGO services and linked them with government and other agencies to address immediate and ongoing flood recovery needs, such as strengthening connections to District Police to improve outcomes for women and children experiencing FDV, connecting services with Southern Cross University student placements, and, advocating with the Reconstruction Authority and DCJ to improve disparate emergency and temporary accommodation allocation processes. NCOSS also provided submissions to a number of inquiries highlighting the need for more effective inclusion of the NGO sector in emergency management systems.

Resources developed by the project continue to be of value to the sector with the NCOSS Flood Assistance Resources webpage seeing a 600% increase in page views from December 2021 to December 2022. In addition to the flood response, in September we also released a report *The Other Frontline: The essential role of place-based NGOs during the Delta and Omicron COVID-19 outbreaks in NSW*, which detailed the findings of Phase 1 of the project and the need for more support of the sector during pandemics and health emergencies.

Community Sector Disaster Capability Program

The pandemic and recent floods highlighted that low-income renters, people who are homeless, First Nations peoples, people with a disability, older people and those who are frail or socially isolated are more vulnerable and most impacted when disasters strike. Following our *Building Resilience for Emergency Responses Project* we secured funding for the Community Sector Disaster Capability (CSDC) project to further strengthen the sector and the support it provides to these populations, in the face of disasters. In partnership with the [Local Community Services Association](#) (LCSA) and AbSec, we're working to reduce the impacts of disasters, particularly on our most vulnerable communities.

When disaster strikes it's trusted on-the-ground community services that people turn to for support. The CSDC project is helping local services be even better prepared and capable of disaster risk reduction. The objectives of the project include:

- Increasing awareness of the nature and extent of disadvantage and vulnerability in the community, and the role of community service organisations in reducing disaster risk for these people.
- Equipping local community service organisations with tools, resources, training and access to expertise to support vulnerable population groups to reduce risk.
- Building ongoing relationships between the social services sector and government/ non-government disaster management agencies, so that the strengths and needs of vulnerable population groups are understood from the outset and can be considered to help reduce risk.

NCOSS in collaboration with the Local Community Services Association (LCSA) and the NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation (AbSec) was awarded a Disaster Risk Reduction Fund Grant of \$1.5 million to deliver the Community Sector Disaster Capability and Resilience (CSDC) Project. The Disaster Risk Reduction Fund is jointly funded by the NSW and Australian Governments.

The CSDC Project aims build a more collaborative, networked approach to disaster risk reduction, working with vulnerable communities and the NGOs that support them. The Project takes a place-based to building disaster resilience, tapping into the local NGOs' knowledge and understanding of the community to build local disaster capability. It also seeks to strengthen connections between social service NGOs and emergency management systems and agencies. The Project is being delivered in the Northern Rivers, Hawkesbury and Southern NSW/South Coast.

In 2022-23, NCOSS entered into a tripartite agreement with the LCSA and AbSec to deliver the project, established a Project Reference Group to oversight and advise on the Project, and undertook an Expression of Interest process to identify suitable place-based organisations to lead the project in each location. The project is due to be completed in 2024.

GOAL 3

Focus NCOSS on core priorities for impact and sustainability

Creating impact through partnerships and frameworks

NCOSS School Gateway Project – *Mirrung*

The Mirrung Hub is an initiative that we've co-developed in partnership with Ashcroft Public School through the philanthropically funded School Gateway Project. Taking inspiration from the Victorian *Our Place* program, the school serves as the central hub for the local community, to enable long lasting change in locations experiencing high rates of disadvantage. It uses the physical and social infrastructure of the school not only for learning but also to address health and wellbeing needs for the whole family. By helping the family, it helps children overcome the educational barriers they face.

Our Mirrung Hub is continuing to evolve as a welcoming, school-based focal point for families to engage with a range of services and support, and where they can seek information, assistance, connection and involvement in their child's learning. The project is also assisting the school to navigate complex and disparate service systems like social services, housing and health. It's helping the school to understand and coordinate across systems more efficiently so that families facing complex challenges are better supported.



Significant achievements for the project this year included:

- A visit by NSW Health's mobile dental clinic at the school saw large numbers of children access dental care (many for the first time) and receive follow-up work.
- We furthered our integrated health model, with all students receiving eyesight tests and, where required, a free pair of glasses through a partnership with Straight Sights.
- We convened a 'coalition of the willing' meeting of relevant health providers from South West Sydney to look at opportunities and challenges for providing other health services in the school.
- Morning teas with Arabic-speaking parents and carers were held to engage with the community in late 2022. Engaging with these parents helped us understand their needs and hear their requests for English-language classes which we delivered in 2023.
- We launched an Afternoon Clubs program running five days per week: two days catering for High Performing and Gifted (HPGE) students with programs funded and run by Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre and the remaining three days for an outside school hours pilot program run through the Department of Education (DoE). The Department's pilot has enabled the school to develop the model and run after hours offerings at the school for the first time in its history.
- Building the project team by engaging a Community Hub Facilitator, two Community Liaison Officers (one Arabic-speaking and one Aboriginal) and a Deputy Principal, Mirrung, employed by Department of Education.

GOAL 3

Through Mirrung, we've gained a much deeper understanding of the disjointed nature of the service system and the barriers to engagement between school and family, the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) and community services. Armed with this knowledge we've become an unofficial advisor to DCJ and associated child and family service systems alongside Mirrung. In September 2022, the school presented a case study to DCJ workers and service providers to highlight one family's less than optimal experience and the missed opportunities to prevent worsening outcomes. The school has hosted two cross-sector case conferences regarding families at the school and we've participated in a variety of roundtable meetings exploring what constitutes best practice when working across education and community services.

As the Mirrung program evolves, a broad range of stakeholders from across sectors are gaining interest in the approach and its progress at the school. Mirrung has hosted visits from Labor MP, Member for Liverpool Charishma Kaliyanda and Dept of Education Deputy Secretary Leanne Nixon and other ministers and politicians have voiced interest in visiting. We're finalising an agreement with consultants Social Outcomes to develop an advocacy document that succinctly sets out the model, its evolution, and early indicators of impact to promote the program.



Reconciliation Action Plan

The first year of our Reconciliation Action Plan saw the First Nations Partners and Advisors Group (PAG) and the RAP Working Group (comprising staff and RAP consultant, Rowena Lawrie) identify priorities and provide oversight for key initiatives on top of our ongoing work in collaboration with First Nations peaks and organisations.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart and the Referendum on the Voice was a major point of focus and after consultation we released a statement of support for the Yes campaign, acknowledging the complexities for First Nations colleagues, partners and communities. Alongside our support we held workshops and webinars to foster cultural safety for First Nations staff and communities when issues were being played out in the media.

We also made great progress on key priorities:

- **Staff training:** in discussion with PAG we are developing an approach for training for NCOSS staff including Cultural Learning and understanding the lands on which we work; Cultural Safety in the workplace; and Anti-racism training.
- **First Nations involvement on the NCOSS Board:** with the election of John Leha and Karlie Stewart to the Board, along with existing member Jenni Beetson-Mortimer, First Nations perspectives and voices are embedded at the heart of the organisation.
- **Reciprocity:** Developing a lobbying workshop for First Nations members and friends in partnership with AbSec.



Implementation of the NCOSS Lived Experience Framework

Last year we developed our Lived Experience Framework, aimed at ensuring that NCOSS incorporates voices of lived experience into our ways of working in a transparent, respectful, consistent and supportive way. This year saw us begin to implement the framework in partnership with a Lived Experience Advocate.

We've developed an Implementation Plan with two simultaneous streams to implementation:

1. Establishing a Lived Experience Advocacy Panel (LEAP).
2. Identifying and developing necessary staff capability training and supporting internal policies to reflect the principles and practices in the Framework.

We've begun a staged recruitment approach for LEAP with trusted members approached to give recommendations of potential advocates. Next year will see us finalising the panel and conducting internal staff briefings to embed the Lived Experience Framework in everything we do.

Building a more sustainable sector through funding

Indexation

Following successful advocacy regarding indexation of Department of Communities and Justice-funded services, NCOSS took up the cause on behalf of services funded through NSW Fair Trading. Our advocacy was once again successful with Tenants Advice Services and financial counsellors also receiving 5.5%.

We also worked with the Australian Services Union to advocate for workers in identified contracted services. Meeting with the Treasurer at the end of June, we were pleased to secure a 5.75% 2023/24 indexation for these workers effective from 1 July. While it's a good result and a better rate than other states (ranging from 5.64% in Qld to 3.5% in Vic) we recognise that there are contracted services that have missed out on this rate, and some are arguing that this does not reflect current high rate of inflation. This underscores the need for a consistent and transparent, evidence-based approach to setting annual indexation, which we continue to advocate strongly for.

Commitment to increase NCOSS core funding by \$1.3 million

Following extensive advocacy work, our President and CEO met with then Shadow Treasurer, Daniel Mookhey, on 23 February to discuss our resourcing constraints. Recognising our impact and vital role in supporting the sector he made the commitment that, if elected, a Minns' Labor Government would increase NCOSS core funding by \$1.3 million. As well as helping us further our mission and outcomes the new government's commitments have laid the foundation for a strong working relationship to help people facing disadvantage in NSW.

State Peaks Program

In December the DCJ extended our State Peaks Program (SPP) contract to 30 June 2025. We submitted our draft Service Plan for the two-year extension of the SPP on 5 May 2023.

NCOSS in the media

Media Mentions

2021-22

1,398

media mentions

2022-23

1,922

media mentions



37.48%

increase

Our digital footprint

Facebook



2,867

followers on
30 June 2022

3,167

followers on
30 June 2023



10.46%

growth

LinkedIn



1,355

followers on
30 June 2022

3,125

followers on
30 June 2023



130%

growth

X (formerly Twitter)



4,564

followers on
30 June 2022

4,723

followers on
30 June 2023



3.48%

growth

NCOSS Board Members 2022-23



Beverly Baker
Chair, NSW Older Women's
Network and Executive
Officer, Aboriginal Education
Council



Brad Webb
CEO, Castle
NCOSS Treasurer



David Fisher
CEO,
HousingPlus



Elfa Moraitakis
CEO, SydWest
Multicultural Services



Jack Whitney
Associate Director,
Health and Human Services,
Policy, Economics and
Public Engagement, KPMG



Jenni Beetson-Mortimer
CEO, Northern Rivers
Community Gateway Director,
Homelessness Australia



John Robertson
CEO, Foodbank,
NSW & ACT Limited
NCOSS President



Katherine McKernan
Executive Director,
National Legal Aid



Wendy Foote
Associate Professor,
School of Humanities,
Creative Industries, and
Social Sciences, University
of Newcastle



John Leha
CEO, AbSec
Chairperson, BlaQ Aboriginal
Corporation
Director, Gadigal Information
Service (Koori Radio)



Karlie Stewart
Lecturer, School of Social
Work, University of Wollongong
Program Manager, Aboriginal
Healing Program, Weave Youth
and Community Services

Statement of Comprehensive Income

For the year ended 30 June 2023

	Note	2023 \$	2022 \$
Revenue			
Revenue	2	2,863,114	2,881,784
Interest revenue calculated using the effective interest rate method		20,114	4,281
Net realised and unrealised gains/(losses) on financial assets held at fair value through profit or loss		125,976	(369,215)
Expenses:			
Administration expenses		(41,072)	(39,284)
Brokerage and sponsorships expense		(17,500)	(60,455)
Conference expenses		(204,840)	(48,116)
Consultants expenses		(360,548)	(307,357)
Depreciation and amortisation expense		(8,129)	(163,216)
Employee benefits expense		(1,888,123)	(1,806,414)
Finance costs		-	(4,006)
Insurance expense		(20,075)	(18,269)
Office overheads expense		(2,093)	(12,635)
Premises expenses		(100,766)	(91,816)
Travel expenses		(38,325)	(16,018)
Other expenses		(138,382)	(110,689)
Surplus / (loss) for the year		189,351	(161,425)
Other comprehensive income			-
Total comprehensive income for the year		189,351	(161,425)

Statement of Financial Position

As at 30 June 2023

	Note	2023 \$	2022 \$
Assets			
Current assets			
Cash and cash equivalents	4	791,460	798,447
Trade and other receivables	5	43,142	97,822
Financial assets	7	3,044,715	2,614,816
Other current assets	6	20,392	27,704
Total current assets		3,899,709	3,538,789
Non-current assets			
Plant and equipment	8	9,379	17,508
Other assets	6	57,086	56,270
Total non-current assets		66,465	73,778
Total assets		3,966,174	3,612,567
Liabilities			
Current liabilities			
Trade and other payables	9	1,395,384	1,241,752
Provisions	10	22,120	17,555
Total current liabilities		1,417,504	1,259,307
Non-current liabilities			
Provisions	10	33,345	27,286
Total non-current liabilities		33,345	27,286
Total liabilities		1,450,849	1,286,593
Net assets		2,515,325	2,325,974
Equity			
Accumulated surplus		2,515,325	2,325,974
Total equity		2,515,325	2,325,974



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