

NCOSS PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2024 – 2025

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Urgent and targeted cost-of-living support for communities barely hanging on

1. Improve NSW Government cost-of-living schemes for low-income households:

- a. Simplify the application and approval process for available rebates and vouchers. *Estimated cost: Budget neutral.*
- b. Create partnerships between Service NSW and local, place-based services such as neighbourhood and community centres, to better promote the schemes and make them more accessible. *Estimated cost: Budget neutral.*
- c. Make the Low Income Household Rebate a fixed percentage of a person's energy bill, not a flat rate. *Estimated cost: NSW Government to advise.*
- d. Permanently increase the annual value of Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) vouchers to \$2,000. *Estimated cost: NSW Government to advise.*

2. Address transport affordability for groups whose participation in employment, education and other opportunities is most at risk:

- a. Expand public transport concessions to better support people on low incomes, including allowing all Commonwealth Health Care Card holders to access concessional fares, and extending the \$2.50 per day capped fare to income support recipients. *Estimated cost: NSW Government to advise.*
- b. Expand community-based learner driver programs to 40 additional sites, with a particular focus on regional areas, to support young people to obtain their learner and provisional licences. *Estimated cost: \$12 million per annum plus indexation.*
- c. Increase public transport options for our regional and rural communities through better bus networks to improve their connections to education, employment and services. *Estimated cost: NSW Government to advise.*

3. Ensure that NSW's food relief system is fit for purpose, supports households most in need, and represents the best use of available resources and skills:

- a. Release the report of the Review of Food Relief Provision undertaken in 2021. *Estimated cost: Budget neutral.*
- b. Convene a taskforce of NGO experts to lead an assessment and, where appropriate, a redesign of the system to ensure clarity of roles and responsibilities, effective resourcing, and coordination at the local level. *Estimated cost: Budget neutral.*

Invest in the housing system to address decades of neglect

4. Address the current housing crisis to make renting fair, and a viable long-term option for all people in NSW:

- a. Introduce urgent rental reform including constraints on rental increases so they are fair and reasonable, a complete ban on rent bidding, and eliminate no-grounds terminations across all tenancy types, including fixed and periodic agreements. *Estimated cost: Budget neutral.*

- b. Set legally enforceable energy efficiency standards for all rental housing to protect against heat, cold, mould, and pollution. *Estimated cost: Budget neutral.*
- c. Improve access to free advice, assistance, and advocacy with appropriate increases in funding for tenancy advice services to meet rising demand. *Estimated cost: \$9.5m per annum plus indexation.*

5. Improve specialist homelessness services and social housing allocations to support young people, and people and families with complex needs:

- a. Properly fund the design and delivery of the upcoming NSW standalone Child and Youth Homelessness and Housing Action Plan. *Estimated cost: NSW Government to advise.*
- b. Improve services for the 40% of Specialist Homelessness Services clients, including families, who have complex needs through the expansion of Together Home as a permanent supportive housing (PSH) or housing first program providing long term secure housing and support for as long as is needed. *Estimated cost: \$60m over 3 years.*

6. Invest in a long-term plan to re-invigorate the social and affordable housing sectors to provide affordable, safe and healthy homes for low-income households:

- a. Immediately address critical housing shortages for those most in need by building/acquiring/renewing an additional 5,000 social housing dwellings per annum with appropriate allocations for women and children escaping domestic and family violence, young people (15%), people with disability including psycho-social disability, First Nations people (30%), and older people over the age of 55 facing homelessness (20%), particularly the growing number of older women who are experiencing homelessness. *Estimated cost: Up to \$2.5bn* per annum plus indexation. The initial capital outlay can be substantially reduced by including Social Housing Accelerator Funds and Housing Australia Future Funds allocations and through debt financing.*
- b. Develop a long-term plan to build towards 10% of all housing as social and affordable housing, over a 20-year time frame. *Estimated cost: NSW Government to advise.*
- c. Establish whole of government agreement on measures of housing need in line with current research, and develop a consistent definition of affordable housing so that it is truly affordable for lower income households. *Estimated cost: Budget neutral.*

7. Value First Nations ways of knowing, being, doing and support self-determination and the right to do things differently. Apply these principles across all aspects of housing and homelessness services and supply for First Nations communities:

- a. In partnership with Aboriginal Peak organisations, including ACHIA NSW, NSW Aboriginal Land Council and the Aboriginal Community Controlled sector, review and streamline existing legislative controls and arrangements for funding and commissioning of housing and homelessness services and supply to ensure genuine place-based leadership and decision-making by First Nations communities. *Estimated cost: Budget neutral.*
- b. Immediately allocate 30% of housing funding including Social Housing Accelerator Funds and Housing Australia Future Fund investments for housing developed and designed by First Nations communities in collaboration with the Aboriginal Community Housing sector, the Aboriginal Housing Office, and Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs). *Estimated cost: Budget neutral.*

* Based on Housing Australia (formerly NHFC) estimates of land and construction costs of \$500,000 per dwelling in [State of the Nation's Housing 2022–23](#).

- 8. Provide better housing options for people with disability, mobility issues, families and older people and mandate minimum accessibility standards (Silver Level Livable Design) for new builds (and major refurbishments) in NSW in line with the National Construction Code. *Estimated cost: Budget neutral***

Invest in children, young people, and families so they can thrive

- 9. Invest in children and young people's safety, social development and educational outcomes:**
- Increase investment in early intervention and family preservation by 25%, prioritising funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. *Estimated cost: \$86 million per annum plus indexation.*
 - Implement the Family is Culture blueprint, including establishing an Aboriginal Child and Family Commissioner, through shared decision-making with Aboriginal leaders, Community Controlled Organisations and communities. *Estimated cost: NSW Government to advise.*
 - Raise the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 and invest to strengthen models that better support children to thrive outside of the criminal justice system. *Estimated cost: to be determined.*
 - Improve access to health and social services for children and their families by investing in 20 Linker roles in regions with the highest concentrations of disadvantage in NSW. *Estimated cost: \$3.5 million per annum plus indexation.*

Enable self-determination for First Nations communities

- 10. Prioritise the promised treaty process to strengthen human rights and self-determination for First Nations people and communities, starting with the establishment of an independent treaty commission.**

Strengthen the social service sector so that essential support reaches those most in need

- 11. Strengthen sustainability of the NSW social service sector so that essential support reaches those in need:**
- Provide core funding for all neighbourhood centres and similar local services that connect people to specialist services and programs and provide emergency relief and opportunities for social connection. *Estimated cost: \$31 million per annum.*
 - Immediately increase recurrent baseline funding for essential social services by 20% to reflect the real costs of service delivery across the sector. *Estimated cost: NSW Government to advise.*
 - Introduce an evidence-based, data-informed funding model that is linked to demand indicators, population growth and demographics, economic and workforce conditions and the real cost of service provision for the sector, including a consistent, transparent and evidence-based approach to indexation. Any such model must support Indigenous Data Sovereignty. *Estimated cost: NSW Government to advise.*