

**Northern Territory Council of
Social Service Inc.**



**2009-2010 Pre-Budget
Submission**

NTCOSS 2009-10 PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

Published and Printed by
NT Council of Social Service Inc
November 2008

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Acknowledgements

We wish to acknowledge the contribution of the many people who assisted with the development of this report:

- o Aged and Disability Rights Team [DCLS]
- o Alice Springs Women's Shelter
- o Alice Springs Youth Accommodation and Support Services
- o Alzheimer's NT
- o Amity Community Services
- o Anyinginyi Health
- o Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory [AMSANT]
- o Australian Education Union (AEU)
- o BANYAN
- o Barkly Region Alcohol & Drug Abuse Advisory Group [BRADAAG]
- o Bosum Buddies NT Inc
- o Bush Mob
- o CAAPS
- o Carer Respite (Frontier Services)
- o Centacare
- o Centacare Employment
- o Central Australian Aboriginal Congress
- o Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit [CAAFLU]
- o Central Australian Supported Accommodation
- o Central Land Council
- o Central Australian Women's Legal Service
- o Central Australian Youth Link Up Service
- o Council of Government Schools Organisations [COGSO]
- o Council on the Aging
- o Darwin City Council
- o Darwin Community Legal Service
- o Dawn House
- o Domestic Violence Legal Service
- o Foster Care NT
- o Headspace
- o Integrated Disability Action
- o Julalikari Council
- o Meleleuca Refugee Centre
- o Mission Australia
- o Moira McCreesh
- o Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia
- o Multicultural Council NT
- o North Australian Aboriginal Family Violence Legal Service
- o NPY Women's Council
- o NT Legal Aid Commission
- o NT Mental Health Coalition
- o NT Shelter
- o NTCOSS staff and board
- o Pulka Pulka Kari Nursing Home [Frontier Services]
- o Relationships Australia
- o Save the Children
- o Somerville Community Services
- o Tangentyere Council
- o Tennant Creek Womens Refuge
- o Western Aranda Health Area Corporation
- o Working Women's Centre NT
- o Yipirinya School
- o YMCA
- o YWCA
- o All those who attended sector meetings at the NTCOSS Conference in April 2008.

Introduction

In the course of developing this Pre-Budget Submission NTCOSS met with many different sectors and organisations across the Northern Territory. The similarities in the kinds of issues raised is notable not just within particular sectors but across sectors. There are a range of issues which have been highlighted over many years by all sectors, yet, priorities remain unaddressed. Community sector agencies report feeling undervalued by those in Government. Given the continued high social needs across the Northern Territory, the challenge remains for the community sector to seek out innovative ways to alert Government and the broader community to the needs of low income and disadvantaged people, and the vital role our sector plays in addressing these needs.

Recruitment and retention remains a major concern for community organisations. A recent survey undertaken by NTCOSS indicated that the average annual turnover rate of staff in community organisations was greater than 35 per cent. The ageing of the community sector workforce was also identified as a serious concern, with one-third of the survey respondents over 51 years old and only 14% under the age of thirty.

Previous NTCOSS Pre-Budget Submissions have highlighted the need for Government to work with the community sector to address recruitment and retention issues, and with each passing year the issue grows ever more urgent. This problem must be approached from several different angles. There is a pressing need for an improvement in wages and conditions in the sector, as well as the development of a portable long-service-leave scheme. A marketing campaign to improve the profile of the sector is also long overdue. The key message is that Government needs to work in co-operation with the sector on these issues, and that this work needs to commence immediately.

Concerns about the lack of available and affordable housing have been raised repeatedly through this Pre-Budget Submission process over many years, yet little progress has been made in addressing the issue. The situation is now at crisis point. Every sector has identified housing as a major concern requiring urgent attention. The impact is most significant for people needing to move on from supported accommodation services and into affordable private rental or public housing.

Rental costs in the NT are now so high that welfare organisations are reporting an increase in working families approaching their services for assistance. A clear message from all the sectors was the importance of Government addressing the issue of housing shortages and overcrowding in conjunction with the closely related priorities of getting children to school and reducing antisocial behaviour. These issues should not be considered in isolation.

Organisations report that their clients are presenting with ever more complex issues which demand the provision of flexible services designed to meet widely varying individual needs. In this climate of increased demand for services and ongoing funding constraints for many organisations, the challenge remains to deliver quality services to the many Territorians in need. Many of the recommendations in this submission are again informed by the principles of prevention, early intervention, rehabilitation and support. NTCOSS recommends approaches based on sound evidence which is likely to provide long term solutions to deeply entrenched problems.

NTCOSS wishes to acknowledge the NT Government for this year providing sufficient funding for the Aboriginal Interpreter Service to be made available without cost to all community organisations. NTCOSS has long called for this initiative and we applaud the Government for taking action.

Finally, NTCOSS thanks everyone who has been involved in developing this Pre-Budget Submission. We look forward to genuine and fruitful discussions with Government about the many urgent challenges which face the community sector.

Wendy Morton

Wendy Morton
Executive Officer NTCOSS

Recommendations

1. Sector Wide

- 1.1 Establish a portable long-service leave scheme across the community sector.
- 1.2 Provide a substantial pay increase to community sector workers so that the sector can compete with government and business to attract quality staff.
- 1.3 Initiate a public-awareness campaign to raise the profile of the community sector and thereby improve the capacity of the sector to recruit and retain staff.
- 1.4 Address the specifics of the recommendations in the Housing sector, to increase the supply of public housing as matter of urgency.
- 1.5 Establish an independent anti-corruption investigative agency with powers to conduct a primary investigation of complaints against police.
- 1.6 Adopt safeguards and guidelines around provision of information about police powers.

2. Aged Care

- 2.1 Provide funding for two full-time geriatricians and two full-time Indigenous Project Workers.
- 2.2 Review and adjust the Pensioner Concession Scheme to ensure that benefits are directed to those most in need.

3. Alcohol and Other Drugs

- 3.1 Fund an AOD peak body to provide policy advice, analysis, research and sector development for the AOD community sector.
- 3.2 Increase funding for outreach and aftercare services, as well as community-based rehabilitation and treatment services, including detox beds.

4. Children and Families

- 4.1 Fund 'multipurpose hub' services in remote communities with a co-ordinator, male and female caseworkers, and additional capacity to broker in other services.
- 4.2 Increase early intervention and support services such as child care and respite for families with children at risk, especially on remote communities.

Recommendations

5. Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

- 5.1 Introduce a subsidised driver-training and licensing program to assist CALD background people to obtain drivers licences so that they can maximise their contribution to the economy.
- 5.2 Create a specialist job referral agency for CALD background people to assist with recognition of qualifications, and to ensure that their skills are most effectively utilised.

6. Disability

- 6.1 Provide additional vocational and all-day program services, including post-school options, to ensure greater choice for consumers and guarantee coverage across the whole of the NT.
- 6.2 Allocate substantial further funding to the TIMES scheme to meet increasing demand, and increase funding for the NTTSS to reduce client contribution to 25% of the fare.

7. Education

- 7.1 Provide funding to schools on the basis of enrolment rather than attendance so that they can meet the needs of all enrolled students.
- 7.2 Provide a pool of funds for NGO's to develop partnerships with local communities to address school attendance, and support issues for disengaged students.

8. Employment and Adult Education

- 8.1 Fund an appropriate organisation to investigate complaints of bullying and to run a public education campaign on the issue.
- 8.2 Establish a career guidance service which can be accessed by all job-seekers, once they have left the school system.

9. Health

- 9.1 Improve patient transport options by (i) expanding accommodation options for people using the PATS scheme to attend medical appointments, and (ii) introducing a pre-payment system for people traveling to appointments in their own vehicle.
- 9.2 Develop a comprehensive framework for the NT Aboriginal health workforce to include adequate workforce numbers and effective recruitment and retention strategies for Aboriginal health workers, allied health staff, GPs and other health professionals.

Recommendations

10. Housing

- 10.1 Increase the supply of public and community housing for all client groups. We also ask for a commitment from Government to developing a close working relationship with the non-government sector to achieve desired outcomes for these disadvantaged groups.
- 10.2 Establish a protocol whereby future land releases by the NT Government mandate 20% for affordable rental and social housing, to be offered for joint ventures between government, the private sector and not-for-profit organisations.

11. Indigenous

- 11.1 Increase funding to provide more cross-cultural education for police, and to encourage Indigenous people to take up policing as a career.
- 11.2 Increase funding for cultural awareness training for all non-Indigenous people working in the NT, and provide further training in the use of interpreters.

12. Law and Justice

- 12.1 Provide adequate recurrent funding for youth court support programs.
- 12.2 Increase NT Government funding to community legal centres and domestic violence legal services so that they can operate effectively across the NT.

13. Men's Services

- 13.1 Establish community-based violence prevention programs, including programs specific to Aboriginal men.
- 13.2 Establish healing places for Aboriginal men, and introduce 'half-way' houses, ideally run by Aboriginal men, to facilitate successful reintegration into communities.

14. Mental Health

- 14.1 Allocate funding to the development of a case-management service for people with a dual 'mental health' and 'alcohol and other drug' diagnosis.
- 14.2 Allocate funding to the development of a specialist employment service for people with mental health problems.

Recommendations

15. Transport

- 15.1 Expand existing public bus timetables and routes to make the system more accessible to low-income and disadvantaged people.
- 15.2 Establish community bus models in regional areas, and increase the frequency of services and the number of routes.

16. Women's Services

- 16.1 Establish a Domestic Fatality Review Committee.
- 16.2 Increase funding for education campaigns and training to be delivered throughout the NT, including remote communities.

17. Youth

- 17.1 Establish two full-time project officer positions, based in Darwin and Alice Springs to enable NTYAN to provide comprehensive support to the workers in the sector across the whole NT.
- 17.2 Provide funding for an independent mapping and evaluation of youth services in the NT to identify service gaps.

Sector Wide

A number of key issues were raised so frequently during the consultations with community organisations that inform this Pre-Budget Submission that they warrant identification in a sector-wide context. The specific issues highlighted across the range of sectors this year include:

* COMMUNITY SECTOR WAGES AND CONDITIONS

Pay and conditions in the community sector are very much inferior to those for comparable positions in the private and government sectors. This makes it enormously difficult to attract and retain staff. The largest single barrier facing community organisations in the recruitment and retention of staff is the inability of organisations to offer remuneration which is competitive with the private and government sectors. NTCOSS calls on the NT Government to provide a funding increase of 20% to community organisations which would be quarantined for the paying of wages.

In order to deliver a quality service to clients, organisations must be able to employ skilled staff, and provide them with regular and relevant training. The low rates of pay and poor employment conditions that exist in many organisations have resulted in all-time high job-vacancy rates, and a consequent decline in the standard of service that can be provided.

A recent community sector survey by NTCOSS identified two key initiatives which would assist in keeping people working in the community sector, one of which was the provision of portability of long service leave. The development of a portable long service leave scheme would allow workers the flexibility of moving between community sector organisations while retaining their long service leave entitlements. For a sector facing enormous difficulty in attracting and retaining staff, the legislative and financial support of government is needed urgently.

Our consultations indicate that all sectors are struggling to find qualified staff. The disability sector, for example, has identified that low rates of pay and a high-risk work environment make it very difficult to recruit and retain appropriately qualified staff to manage clients with complex behaviours. The KPMG review of the disability sector makes a number of recommendations on Workforce Strategy issues but NTCOSS are not aware of any NT Government response to date.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1.1 Establish a portable long service leave scheme across the community sector.**
- 1.2 Provide a substantial pay increase to community sector workers so that the sector can compete with government and business to attract quality staff.**

* PROFILE OF THE SECTOR

The critical role played by the community sector is not well understood in the broader community. This reduces the sector's capacity to attract quality staff and to perform at an optimal level for the benefit of Territorians generally. There is a need for the NT Government to work together with the community sector to raise the profile of the sector in the general community. A joint marketing campaign would raise awareness of the importance of the sector both for the role it fulfils and the opportunities it provides for rewarding careers.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1.3 Initiate a public-awareness campaign to raise the profile of the community sector and thereby improve the capacity of the sector to recruit and retain staff.**

Sector Wide

* HOUSING ISSUES

The critical nature of housing issues is such that the lack of affordable housing was raised in all of the sector meetings held. Agencies have identified the impact of the chronic housing shortage on clients and, in some instances, employees. Poor housing conditions and homelessness have implications for related areas such as health, education and employment as well as recruitment and retention of workers across the NT. The housing situation in the NT is now at crisis point, with accommodation now out of the reach of a growing number of working families and individuals, as well as low-income and disadvantaged groups.

The housing crisis has a major impact on community organisations. NTCOSS has received reports of staff leaving their employment because they can no longer afford to rent property on a community sector wage. Organisations providing services in remote areas are also struggling to offer quality services because of the difficulty in providing adequate housing for their employees. If, as a Territory, we fail to address housing affordability, we will bear the consequences in the future, in the form of reduced health outcomes, higher unemployment and greater incidence of family breakdown.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1.4 Address the specifics of the recommendations in the Housing sector, to increase the supply of public housing as matter of urgency.**

* POLICE RELATIONS IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

NTCOSS has increasing concerns about the deterioration in relationships between police and community members, particularly Indigenous Territorians. The establishment of an independent body for conducting primary investigation into complaints against police would provide renewed public confidence in the operation of the police force.

The responsibilities of police in exercising law enforcement powers should be clearly prescribed in legislation, as a further safeguard against misuse of power. For example, the NSW *Law Enforcement (Powers & Responsibilities) Act* requires police - where practicable - to identify themselves, and to explain the powers they are exercising and the reasons. This action helps citizens to better understand the law, and usually results in greater co-operation with police.

In the NT, police have extraordinary powers under the NT Liquor Act, to search Indigenous people, enter their homes and seize their possessions - even in circumstances where they would not normally lay a charge or may only issue an on-the-spot fine. Police should be required to provide receipts for goods seized, keep records of the discretionary acts of search, entry and seizure, and report to senior officers immediately after exercising this power. The Central Australian Youth Justice Committee will provide Government with a more detailed proposal in relation to these matters in the near future

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1.5 Establish an independent anti-corruption investigative agency with powers to conduct a primary investigation of complaints against police.**
- 1.6 Adopt safeguards and guidelines around provision of information about police powers.**

Aged Care

The 2006 census indicates a 27% growth in the NT's over 65 population. As the country's population continues to age, governments must make greater provision for the care of the frail aged. Currently, the ability of services to recruit and retain staff in the sector is seriously hampered by historically low rates of pay.

In last year's Pre-Budget Submission, NTCOSS identified an urgent need for the recruitment of two full-time geriatricians and two full-time Indigenous Project Workers, the latter to promote awareness of dementia in remote Indigenous communities. We also called for the development of a range of affordable housing options suitable for seniors, and an improvement in the quality and quantity of public housing stock, but no funding was provided for these initiatives.

NTCOSS notes with approval the provision of substantial funding for support services for the frail aged, and the recently commenced dementia assessment service to Katherine. However, while we are aware that the NT Government is currently exploring options for the development of gerontology services in the NT, the need for geriatricians has become even more acute.

Alzheimer's Australia has described dementia as the 'health epidemic of the 21st century'. Each week one thousand Australians are diagnosed with dementia and nearly one million Australians are involved in caring for a family member or a friend suffering from the disease.

A 2005 Access Economics report predicted that the NT would see the fastest growth in the number of dementia diagnoses across Australia, with a projected six-fold increase between 2000 and 2050. Government must respond early and thoughtfully to these projections to ensure that Northern Territorians have access to the services they will require into the future.

There is an immediate need to identify and rectify the inequities in the operation of the Pensioner Concession Scheme. Currently, home-owners benefit more than renters, and assistance is provided for travel outside the NT, but not within. Consideration should be given to allowing Aboriginal people to access the scheme at a younger age, thereby recognising their lower life expectancy.

There is also a critical requirement for more accommodation options for the aged. Transitional care services are needed, along with supported accommodation options, particularly in the regional areas. Alice Springs has an urgent need for accessible, affordable, short-term accommodation which will provide respite for carers. We acknowledge the Government's initial steps to improve access to public housing for seniors and we look forward to further action in this regard.

The transport needs of the elderly have also been neglected, with many people using most of their taxi vouchers simply to travel to and from medical appointments. Public transport routes and timetables must be reviewed in an effort to better meet the needs of these clients.

The acute issues of accommodation and transport have been identified across many sectors and these issues will be addressed more fully in the sector-wide section of this document.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 Provide funding for two full-time geriatricians and two full-time Indigenous Project Workers.**
- 2.2 Review and adjust the Pensioner Concession Scheme to ensure that benefits are directed to those most in need.**

Alcohol and Other Drugs

The past few years have seen significant public policy changes in the management of ‘alcohol and other drugs’ (AOD). Restrictions on the sale and consumption of alcohol have been imposed, and a number of ‘dry towns’ have been established. An identification system to purchase alcohol has been introduced and alcohol courts have been established. The NT Emergency Response has also seen further alcohol bans introduced on remote Aboriginal communities. This unprecedented range of interventions highlights the desperate need for an expansion of rehabilitation and treatment services across the Territory.

In last year’s pre-budget submission, NTCOSS identified a critical need for improved residential and non-residential treatment options for young people, women, people with mental health problems, and those in prison. We also called for the development of a range of after-care options for clients who have left prison or rehabilitation services, particularly those returning to remote communities. Finally, we also restated the call from previous NTCOSS Pre-Budget Submissions for the funding of a peak body for the AOD Sector.

NTCOSS notes with approval the allocation of funding in the 2008 NT Budget for additional clinical resources in Darwin and Alice Springs to support community-based and residential AOD withdrawal services. We also acknowledge the injection of funding to develop alcohol management plans, fund awareness campaigns, institute regional alcohol licensing identification systems, and upgrade existing infrastructure at the Tennant Creek and Katherine Sobering-up Shelters.

However, the need for a peak body to provide NT-wide policy analysis, research, and sector development remains critical. Properly resourced, a new peak body could provide these services to better inform Government and the sector in addressing the problems of substance misuse. Such a body could also undertake a co-ordination role, providing a single point of contact for the Government, and assisting with information dissemination and media inquiries. Empowering the sector to contribute in a coherent and coordinated manner will assist Government in the introduction of new policy measures, and the review of the NT Liquor Act. The AOD sector will provide Government with a more detailed submission on the need for a peak body in the near future.

There also remains a pressing need to improve and expand community-based aftercare services, particularly post-prison, on most remote communities. Further, there is an urgent need for more withdrawal beds, because delays in getting people into detox often result in a failure to attend appropriate treatment when it is available at a later date.

A Territory-wide, community-based approach to service provision needs requires Social Health Teams within Primary Health Care Services. These teams could be equipped to offer pharmacotherapy and therapeutic services including cognitive behaviour therapy, and narrative therapy, as well as general counselling, and support.

Many gaps in service provision for young people across the NT have also been identified – with the need for youth-specific residential treatment services a priority. In particular the need for better funding of outstation rehabilitation programs - particularly for services capable of taking clients mandated to treatment under volatile substance abuse legislation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 3.1 Fund an AOD peak body to provide policy advice, analysis, research and sector development for the AOD community sector.**
- 3.2 Increase funding for outreach and aftercare services, as well as community-based rehabilitation and treatment services, including detox beds.**

Children and Families

The well-being of children and families has received much attention in the past 12 months and NTCOSS welcomes the additional spending in this area, especially the appointment of a Children's Commissioner. However the Commissioner's role could usefully be broadened to monitor Government policy and legislation to ensure the human rights of all those under 18 years are protected, not just those in the care of the Minister. A sustained increase in funding is still urgently required for this sector, to bring it up to the expenditure benchmarks set by the Commonwealth Grants Commission.

In last year's NTCOSS Pre-Budget Submission, we recommended an increase in funding to Indigenous managed, out-of-home-care support services, and we acknowledge the additional funding provided for these purposes in the 2008 NT Budget. NTCOSS expects some funding to go to NGO's to provide these services under tender, and we look forward to the sector working with Government in developing these services.

NTCOSS also recommended an increase in the number of counselors, social workers and psychologists, as well as more training for counselors, and we again acknowledge the provision of additional funding in this area. In addition, resources have been put into the introduction of an NT wide Mobile Child Protection Team which NGO's report is working well as well as a new out-of-home-care reunification team within NTFC, although questions remain about appropriate resourcing for this.

NTCOSS also called for support for the Child and Family Welfare Association of Australia's "Call to Action for Australia's Children" with its emphasis on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Support and Parenting Programs, as well as funding for 'multipurpose hub' services in remote communities. We acknowledge there has been some progress - through additional integrated early childhood and family services, and mobile preschools - but the issues have not been directly addressed and there is uncertainty about ongoing funding for some communities. Guaranteed funding levels are urgently required.

Concerns have been raised that out-of-home-care teams have limited capacity to visit remote communities. Given this, NTCOSS applauds the creation of five new remote NTFC workers for Central Australia. However, the lack of support for families with young children on remote communities and town camps must be addressed. The lack of access to child care, transport and respite services is of great concern, and child health services need to be available on a daily basis. Often the only support families have on a community is a health centre, which is unable to provide a holistic response to social issues, nor offer family support. A lack of services often means that the removal of children is the only option. Housing issues are noted elsewhere, but there are concerns that some children could be removed due to poor living conditions rather than specific parenting issues.

Addressing child protection entails building partnerships with local Indigenous organisations. NTCOSS supports strength-based parenting support approaches, rather than more punitive approaches, such as the loss of Centrelink income if children don't attend school. Agencies again identified the development of multipurpose hub services as a way of delivering such programs, particularly where children are at risk. Such hubs could also provide a 'soft entry' for families to access other services to address issues such as domestic violence or alcohol and other drugs, and take a role in primary health promotion in areas like nutrition and smoking.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 4.1 Fund 'multipurpose hub' services in remote communities with a co-ordinator, male and female caseworkers, and additional capacity to broker in other services.**
- 4.2 Increase early intervention and support services such as child care and respite for families with children at risk, especially on remote communities.**

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

The NT has a growing and diverse population, with many migrants and refugees arriving to make their contribution to the burgeoning economy of the Territory. The last 12 months has seen the arrival of increasing numbers of ethnic Karin Burmese refugees to join the range of people from various backgrounds who make Darwin, in particular, a multicultural society. People from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds living in small isolated townships like Humpty Doo, also face a range of challenges which much be addressed.

In last year's Pre-Budget Submission, NTCOSS recommended that the NT Government fund the development of a primary health care clinic for refugees and migrants, and provide incentives to GPs to make bulk-billing available for refugees. Additionally, we called for an early intervention 'positive parenting' program for newly arrived refugees. We applaud the Government's decision to commit significant funding to these new initiatives. NTCOSS also applauds additional funding for the Interpreting and Translation Service of the NT to conduct interpreter training.

A key issue for migrant and refugee communities in Darwin is the complexity and expense involved in gaining a driver's licence. In the NT, the lack of a driver's licence is often a major barrier to employment. Many jobs require employees to hold a licence, even though they may be only rarely required to drive. Shift workers often need to drive themselves to work because there is no public transport available outside normal working hours.

While many clients can obtain their 'L-plates' without too much trouble, their lack of familiarity with Australian road rules means that their L-plates expire before they can get their P-plates. Additionally, driving lessons priced at \$60 an hour are often beyond the reach of migrants and refugees. The NT Government's Driver Training and Licensing Program provides 16 to 18 year old students with road-user awareness and preliminary practical skills, using a subsidised lesson voucher scheme. NTCOSS recommends the introduction of a similar scheme for newly arrived migrants and refugees.

People from CALD backgrounds face a range of barriers to gaining employment, notably the lack of recognition of professional qualifications gained overseas. NTCOSS calls for the creation of a specialist job referral agency to ensure that the skills of newly arrived CALD settlers are used to the maximum benefit of the people of the NT.

The CALD sector is particularly disadvantaged by the scarcity of affordable, safe, long-term housing across the Northern Territory. Refugees settling in the NT under the humanitarian program managed by Department of Immigration and Citizenship are at extreme risk of homelessness. Factors such as low income, absence of rental history, limited understanding of tenancy obligations, and lack of fluency in English combine to make it almost impossible for these people to find accommodation through the private rental market. The increasing numbers of anecdotal accounts of prospective tenants engaging in 'bidding wars' to win leases underscores the extent of the problem. Shelter, safety, and privacy are fundamental human rights, and NTCOSS urges governments to address this acute need, which is discussed more fully in the housing component of this Pre-Budget Submission.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 5.1 Introduce a subsidised driver-training and licensing program to assist CALD background people to obtain drivers licences so that they can maximise their contribution to the economy.**
- 5.2 Create a specialist job referral agency for CALD background people to assist with recognition of qualifications, and to ensure that their skills are most effectively utilised.**

Disability

The disability sector, historically a low-paid, high-risk work environment, has expressed immense frustration over delays in implementation of the KPMG Disability Services Review. The perception in the sector is that capacity has continued to decline in the last year. The relocation of disability policy to the health portfolio is of great concern, because the sector may struggle to maintain existing levels of funding and recognition, competing for attention with high-profile needs such as acute care funding. While there has been a name change of Disability Services to the Office of Disability, and the creation of a single front-door service for the Territory, the sector is disappointed that this appears to be a change in telephone number and not a fully staffed office, equipped to offer significant improvement in service delivery. Transport and accommodation remain critical issues and are addressed in Sector Wide.

NTCOSS previously applauded the Government's endorsement of the general thrust of the KPMG Review and is aware of the strain placed on the resources of the Department of Community Services in the past year by other high profile competing interests. NTCOSS also notes the additional \$3.7 million announced in the 2008 NT Budget, however, the sector cannot see where this is being spent in terms of improved service delivery on the ground. NTCOSS is therefore looking forward to the promise of further funding for specialist disability services, once the new Commonwealth, State and Territory Disability Agreement is finalised.

In last year's Pre-Budget Submission, NTCOSS identified the urgent need for the provision of vocational and all-day programs, including post-school options. We are aware that a tender is being developed for the provision of extra day option places in Darwin and Alice Springs, however nothing has changed on the ground. We also do not believe the number of places being tendered is adequate. Children in high school, people in supported accommodation, and people living in the community all experience great difficulty in gaining access to these programs. For example, the KPMG Review reported that in Alice Springs, there are approximately 1200 people with a severe disability, yet there are only 17 day places currently available. Local agencies estimate the unmet need to be approximately 200 places. The situation is even worse in smaller centres like Tennant Creek, where no day programs are available.

Previously, supported accommodation houses were able to close during the day, but now they must stay open 24 hours due to limited access to day programs, yet they receive no additional funding. In any case, they are designed to provide accommodation and support rather than day programs. The KPMG Review identified an urgent need to better fund local organisations to respond to these needs.

In last year's Pre-Budget Submission, NTCOSS also recommended an increase in funding for the NT Taxi Subsidy Scheme to make taxis more readily available. The 2008 NT Budget identified an additional \$240,000 for the NT Taxi Subsidy Scheme (NTTSS) and the Territory Independence and Mobility Equipment Scheme (TIMES), which will mean that all clients of the NTTSS will receive a 25% increase in taxi vouchers. The TIMES scheme will also have access to a larger pool of money to purchase equipment for clients, which reflects the escalating equipment costs. NTCOSS acknowledges the increased funding for the NTTSS, but agencies believe a further increase is needed to enable clients to pay 25% of the fare instead of 50%, and thereby offset the increasing costs of traveling by taxi. In addition, agencies report that people are also waiting longer for assistance under the TIMES scheme, and the level of service has deteriorated, with some people still waiting years for a wheelchair. The TIMES scheme needs to be redesigned to direct existing funds more efficiently.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 6.1 Provide additional vocational and all-day program services, including post-school options, to ensure greater choice for consumers and guarantee coverage across the whole of the NT.**
- 6.2 Allocate substantial further funding to the TIMES scheme to meet increasing demand, and increase funding for the NTTSS to reduce client contribution to 25% of the fare.**

Education – Schools

Addressing the education needs of young Territorians is critical to the future of the NT, and remains a key element in the ‘Closing the Gap’ strategy to overcome Indigenous disadvantage. NTCOSS acknowledges additional funding through ‘Closing the Gap’ to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous Territorians, notably school upgrades on remote communities and additional staff and classrooms, but many critical needs remain unaddressed. It is crucial that education is not viewed in isolation from the vital needs in health, housing and family support services and is seen as broader than classroom instruction, especially in remote communities. Currently, a range of successful programs operate which employ a holistic approach to education and support for families, including breakfast or transport programs, which engage children in school, and involve families in learning.

Last year, NTCOSS identified an urgent need for early childhood education and for mobile preschools in Indigenous communities. We acknowledge the additional funding provided for mobile preschools, but have concerns that not all communities will have a classroom available for this purpose. We also acknowledge the creation of the Early Childhood Services Division within the Education Department, and note the commitment to cater for children of various cultural backgrounds. The challenge is considerable, given that around 70 communities in the NT have no early childhood education.

NTCOSS also recommended the provision of hearing-modified classrooms, and the expansion of support services to allow organisations to work with the families of non-attending children. However no further funding appears to have been allocated for these needs, despite 60% of Indigenous children having hearing loss, which contributes to poor learning outcomes and disengagement from school. Support organisations lack specific funds to support children and families around education issues, and to put in place creative projects which will meet identified needs, for example, responses to transport or attendance issues.

NTCOSS also called for NT schools to be funded on the basis of enrolment figures, rather than attendance, to ensure adequate resources to meet the needs of all students. We note the current practice of schools receiving annual grant funding, including a per capita amount for the number of enrolled students. However, there are concerns this system may particularly disadvantage Indigenous students. The formula of schools being staffed on enrolment, moderated by attendance, allocated on a term-by-term basis, means schools can potentially lose teachers each term. This has massive implications for the learning environment of Territory children and teacher job security. NTCOSS supports a more flexible arrangement when attendance is down, which might allow for better teacher-student ratios for a period, or the use of ‘excess’ teachers to engage with non-attendees, or do program development to help improve outcomes. This might improve teacher retention, and enable the building of relationships to maximise student learning outcomes, and increase support for remote students.

NTCOSS notes with concern the Government’s recent policy decision requiring all NT schools to conduct the first four hours of education each day in English. While the intention to improve standards of literacy and numeracy in remote Indigenous schools is laudable, NTCOSS is concerned that a ‘one size fits all’ approach may not be the best solution. We believe that schools should be allowed to develop local responses which acknowledge local Indigenous cultures, and enable educational institutions to engage effectively with their students.

NTCOSS also notes additional funding in the 2008 NT Budget for assistance to students with special needs, however the situation for many students remains critical. Inclusion Support Assistants continue to be employed on a casual basis when they should be funded as permanent full-time positions.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 7.1 Provide funding to schools on the basis of enrolment rather than attendance so that they can meet the needs of all enrolled students.**
- 7.2 Provide a pool of funds for NGO’s to develop partnerships with local communities to address school attendance, and support issues for disengaged students.**

Employment and Adult Education

The desperate shortage of affordable housing in the NT is the single greatest problem facing the adult employment and training sector: It is difficult to support an individual into employment or education if they are not in safe, long term accommodation. Further, the low level of literacy and numeracy amongst employment-disadvantaged groups continues to be a major barrier to them finding fulltime employment.

Major changes to the operation of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) Scheme announced by the Federal Government will also have far reaching effects. The loss of CDEP positions has had a significant impact on many communities, and Indigenous community-based organisations. NTCOSS understands that there are many people on CDEP who are doing highly skilled jobs and in some cases managing other staff, yet they are still being paid CDEP wages. These workers feel devalued and disrespected.

Last year's Pre-Budget Submission also highlighted CDEP issues including the intention to transition CDEP workers to public sector employment. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the conversion of CDEP positions into mainstream paid positions has not been anywhere near as successful as was hoped.

The NTCOSS Submission also recommended the establishment of a career guidance service which could be accessed by all job seekers after they have left the school system. Ideally, such a service would be made available to students prior to them actually leaving the system, so that they could be most effectively linked to employment services. Additionally, NTCOSS called for the creation of community-based adult education services to deliver training, particularly in the area of tailored literacy and numeracy programs. These needs remain unmet. We look forward to the results of the two pilot programs currently operating to assist employment disadvantaged people in the NT.

Workplace bullying was identified last year as a major concern, particularly as this behaviour is a significant problem in the community sector. NTCOSS recommends that NT Worksafe, or another appropriate authority be adequately resourced to provide education about these issues and to investigate allegations of bullying. There is a growing need for complaints of workplace bullying to be fully investigated, and for assistance to be provided to individuals who make these complaints.

Last year's Submission also recommended the development of a preferential tendering system which requires businesses to employ local Indigenous people, and encourages the development of Indigenous-owned businesses. NTCOSS believes that such a system would make a significant contribution to reducing the unacceptable levels of unemployment amongst Indigenous Territorians. We note the Government's positive steps in training and mentoring of Indigenous employees, but feel that more needs to be done.

Finally, there is widespread confusion in the sector about current industrial relations laws. Community organisations often have only limited access to IR support, and more needs to be done to ensure that correct information and adequate support are available.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 8.1 Fund an appropriate organisation to investigate complaints of bullying and to run a public education campaign on the issue.**
- 8.2 Establish a career guidance service which can be accessed by all job-seekers, once they have left the school system.**

Health

The distressingly high morbidity and mortality rates amongst Aboriginal people in the NT are well-documented. In this context, NTCOSS acknowledges the commitment of the Federal and NT Governments to ‘Closing the Gap of Indigenous Disadvantage’ in seeking to address the entrenched disadvantage faced by many Indigenous Territorians. The poverty and disadvantage which underlies the chronic disease suffered by many Indigenous Territorians is exacerbated by the lack of access to basic health services, particularly for residents of remote communities.

In last year’s Pre-Budget Submission, NTCOSS identified an urgent need for the NT Government to provide more resources to increase the number of skilled Indigenous Health Workers. We also called for extra funding for self-care trainers to enable dialysis patients to be trained in home dialysis. In these circumstances, we welcome the provision of an extra \$1.1 million for more haemodialysis facilities in remote communities. However, there remains a serious need for more chairs for renal patients across the NT.

We also identified the need to address recruitment and retention issues for health workers on remote Aboriginal communities, and recommended that the NT Government work with the community sector and other relevant bodies to address this need. NTCOSS also recommends that greater focus be given to recruiting Indigenous staff. Lack of services are most notable in regional and remote areas, with Tennant Creek agencies reporting that allied health services are virtually non-existent, and that children who require weekly speech therapy receive it only at six week intervals. While no additional funding was allocated to these areas, we acknowledge, at least, the additional funding for antenatal care, maternal health and Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARC).

The Patient Assistance Travel Scheme (PATS) was again identified as needing critical attention – particularly in relation to accommodation. NTCOSS welcomes the additional PATS funding for escorts on interstate trips, and the reimbursement of some travel costs for interstate trips, and calls upon the NT Government to make similar provision for trips within the NT. However, the reality is that for many health consumers, there are very few realistic accommodation options which allow them to take advantage of the PATS scheme.

In addition, services report that an increasing number of people are choosing not to have treatment and thus compromising their health because they are not in a financial position to cover up-front costs. A prepayment system for people driving their own vehicles to appointments would help overcome this issue. Extra Bush Bus services have been established in some areas, however agencies report that the infrequency of services still involves long delays for clients waiting to return home after treatment. This factor may contribute to a decision not to attend an appointment.

Finally, NTCOSS suggests that careful consideration be given to the merits of sending specialists out to remote communities to see patients on location. The *Highway to Health* report into the PATS scheme has identified alarmingly high rates of non-attendance at outpatient clinics in regional centres amongst residents of remote communities. Taking services to the community may ultimately be more effective.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 9.1 Improve patient transport options by (i) expanding accommodation options for people using the PATS scheme to attend medical appointments and (ii) introducing a pre-payment system for people traveling to appointments in their own vehicle.**
- 9.2 Develop a comprehensive framework for the NT Aboriginal health workforce to include adequate workforce numbers and effective recruitment and retention strategies for Aboriginal health workers, allied health staff, GPs and other health professionals.**

Housing in the Territory is at crisis point. The private rental market is experiencing high demand, soaring rents, a lack of investment in new supply, and record low vacancy rates. A lack of affordable rental accommodation means more than 36% of private renters are in housing stress, paying more than one-third of household income in rent. Housing is now out of the reach of a growing number of working families and individuals, as well as low-income and disadvantaged groups who are at high risk of homelessness. Public housing stock has decreased while waiting times have increased, causing a bottleneck in crisis and short-term accommodation, with few exit points into long term housing.

The Northern Territory continues to have the highest rate of homelessness in the country at 248 per 10,000 (2006 Census), approximately 5,000 people. NTCOSS urges the Government to match the Federal Government's commitment to addressing homelessness in the next 10 years. Housing in a range of forms is crucial to address homelessness, as are well-funded services in crisis accommodation services, outreach and mainstream services. All areas require an urgent injection of funds.

In last year's Pre Budget Submission, NTCOSS recommended that governments at all levels work in partnership with the non-government and private sectors to address the chronic lack of affordable housing supply for those most in need. To date there has been no real movement in this area.

NTCOSS also called for an Indigenous Housing Strategy in the NT which incorporates effective and appropriate consultation to address the needs of housing and infrastructure in Indigenous remote and urban communities. This has begun to be addressed by the 5 year \$793 million Strategic Indigenous Housing Infrastructure Program, coupled with the rollout of a public housing system in remote communities. However, at this stage communities have not been critically engaged in the new system and new construction has not commenced.

In addition, NTCOSS recommended the establishment of a Housing Association sector in the NT as an integral part of the social housing system, which could offer an important and complimentary service to that of the public housing sector and the private market. We are encouraged to see the NT Government's support for the establishment of the Central Australian Affordable Housing company, but much work is still required to improve housing affordability.

NTCOSS also recommended a new capital grant program to begin an urgently needed increase in the supply of social housing by government and non-profit housing providers. This will enable public and non-profit housing providers to set and maintain rents at levels affordable to lower income households and meet the requirements of a range of special needs groups in the community.

While a number of housing programs received increased funding in the 2008 NT Budget, there was very little provision for an increase in the supply of housing. The \$1.31 million for new public housing stock still leaves significant numbers of people in housing stress. Housing strategies do not target people struggling at the bottom end of the market. While concessions for first home-buyers are welcome, they do not assist the most vulnerable, who simply cannot afford to purchase housing.

NTCOSS believes a new dynamic is needed to enable the creation of a suite of new housing products to include new public housing stock, shared equity products, rent to buy schemes, first home owner entry opportunities, and affordable rental properties suitable for people on low and fixed incomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 10.1 Increase the supply of public and community housing for all client groups. We also ask for a commitment from Government to developing a close working relationship with the non-government sector to achieve desired outcomes for these disadvantaged groups.**
- 10.2 Establish a protocol whereby future land releases by the NT Government mandate 20% for affordable rental and social housing, to be offered for joint ventures between government, the private sector and not-for-profit organisations.**

Priorities related to Indigenous Territorians are identified throughout this document. However, several key issues not mentioned elsewhere, must be addressed to help reduce the extent of Indigenous disadvantage in the NT. While NTCOSS supports 'Closing the Gap', it is clear that a far more substantial investment by Government is needed, and it is crucial that all funding allocated to Indigenous spending by the Commonwealth Grants Commission, is actually spent in this area. NTCOSS applauds the additional funding for the Aboriginal Interpreter Service.

Last year, NTCOSS recommended the NT Government provide funding to support Aboriginal networks performing secretariat functions, and institute transparent evaluation methods to assess the impact of the Federal Intervention and the Closing the Gap response. Further, NTCOSS proposed that all NT Government departments be resourced adequately to ensure that information about government services like pension concessions is provided to all Indigenous people, including those in remote areas. These recommendations have not been addressed.

We also recommended investment in Indigenous economic development, including preferential tendering for local Indigenous Business and adequate resourcing for Indigenous governance, capacity building and economic development. NTCOSS notes the funding allocated for the development of Indigenous business and regional economic development support. However, onerous reporting processes associated with government grants, such as quarterly reporting requirements for 12-month contracts, must be simplified to improve efficiency. NTCOSS also notes the significant resources being put into the induction process and ongoing governance training for new shire councillors in remote areas. The need for a cross-sector Governance Training Unit to support people in the community sector was also identified in NTCOSS consultations. NTCOSS also recommended further investment in roads, and acknowledged the \$131m allocated in the 2008 NT Budget, but enormous needs remain.

NTCOSS is very concerned about reports from organisations describing policing practices in Central Australia, at times, as 'policing against, rather than for, Aboriginal people'. With increased contact between police and community members since the NTER began, and an associated increase in police powers, concerns exist that relationships have deteriorated with reports of people being treated disrespectfully by police. In addition, case-workers, teachers and young people themselves, have talked of an increasing fear of police. In the context of the protection of children, this is a serious problem. Measures must be established to provide police with adequate cross-cultural education, and to encourage Indigenous people to take up a policing career, and for the development of further career options for Aboriginal Community Police Officers. The longstanding need for an independent body to examine complaints against police by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people still remains.

Issues have been raised regarding the importance of cultural security. Many overseas and interstate staff are employed across the NT in Government and non-Government positions in a range of areas. These staff often have only a limited understanding of the operating environment in the NT, particularly regarding remote areas. They receive only limited cultural training, which can make it unsafe for them and their clients. More resources are essential to ensure adequate up-front training, and to ensure cultural awareness is seen as an ongoing learning and development process. In addition, all workers across the NT need more training in the use of interpreters. The extensive training programs which exist in Darwin should be extended to the whole of the NT.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 11.1 Increase funding to provide more cross-cultural education for police, and to encourage Indigenous people to take up policing as a career.**
- 11.2 Increase funding for cultural awareness training for all non-Indigenous people working in the NT, and provide further training in the use of interpreters.**

Law and justice must be seen in the broad context of general community well-being, rather than merely from the perspective of the criminal justice system. Undue focus on punishment and incarceration of offenders is a short term response which does not serve the community well, and is contrary to evidence-based research. The Law and Justice sector continues to be significantly under-funded by the NT Government, to the detriment of all Territorians.

Recent legislative reform has seen further complexities develop around tenancy issues. The NT Emergency Response has seen Territory Housing taking over responsibility for remote housing. There have also been changes to the Land Rights Act. These issues highlight the need for further funding for the community sector, to accompany major legislative changes, to help minimise adverse impacts for clients. Another growing concern is the inability of the legal system to meet the needs of clients with mental health issues during criminal court proceedings, which can be a critical time to identify support needs.

Last year, the NTCOSS Pre-Budget Submission highlighted the critical need for increased funding to be directed to Community Legal Centres and Domestic Violence Legal Services. We also called for a funding program to guarantee ongoing stability for youth court support positions. Additionally, the NTCOSS Submission highlighted the need for supported accommodation for people leaving prison or people on bail. However, no further funding was directed to these priorities in the 2008 NT Budget.

Youth Court Support positions are essential because they assist in identifying needs around mental health, alcohol and other drugs, or family issues, and can offer assistance such as family support, mediation and substance-abuse rehabilitation. These programs should not be viewed as pilot programs, and it is inappropriate for agencies to continually seek 12 month funding from different sources. A long term commitment from Government is required to ensure effective court-support programs.

Community Legal Centres provide a range of free legal services and community legal education, despite receiving little or no funding from the NT Government. The NT is the most under-funded of all Australian jurisdictions. Domestic violence legal services remain significantly understaffed and under-funded. Under new DV legislation, needs have become broader and more complex. The Government must ensure that in areas where DV orders are being made, that legal services are available to assist people. Services need to be adequately funded so all Territorians have equitable access to free legal advice in matters relating to tenancy, discrimination, domestic violence or consumer issues. It is particularly important that legal services receive sufficient funding to ensure that Indigenous women - who are grossly over-represented in victims-of-crime statistics - receive information and support to pursue their rights under victims-of-crime legislation.

In addition there is a need for all police stations in the NT to include a female member to build relations, take reports and provide a culturally appropriate response to women. The sector has also identified a need for court support programs to be expanded to perpetrators of domestic violence (such as happens in Victoria) to support long term behaviour change.

A long-term focus on support, prevention, and education in all areas is needed to reduce rates of offending and build community safety and trust. There is still no access to programs for people in prison for less than six months or on remand. Where programs are available, programs need to be more relevant post-release, such as drink-driver education. Currently there is a significant prison population in Central Australia who receive only minimal support post-release. These needs must be addressed, to minimise recidivism rates and thereby reduce the burden on the taxpayer.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

12.1 Provide adequate recurrent funding for youth court support programs.

12.2 Increase NT Government funding to community legal centres and domestic violence legal services so that they can operate effectively across the NT.

The *Little Children are Sacred* report and the *Northern Territory Emergency Response* served to highlight the increasing prominence of men's issues in public debate in the Northern Territory. As a result, NTCOSS has developed a specific Men's section in this year's pre-budget submission. A greater focus on issues in this sector will result in benefits for men, their partners and families, and the wider community.

The 2008 NTCOSS Conference hosted a "men's issues" forum which identified a critical need for flexible support service for men who have separated from their families, especially those with child support issues. The forum also noted the difficulties that men in particular face in developing leadership skills, and called for further assistance to be provided in this area. Additionally, the forum identified an urgent need for prison-based, family-wellbeing programs to provide personal development opportunities in group settings. Evidence suggests that such programs are instrumental in reducing recidivism, especially if supported by well-designed post-release plans to smooth the return of former prisoners to their communities. There is also a critical need for accommodation options and employment assistance for prisoners post-release, given their prison history.

Other issues identified included the need for the development of further alcohol and drug treatment programs for ex-prisoners, and the need for men's wellbeing centres, rather than just 'cooling off' centres. In addition, outstations, which are sometimes the only options for young people leaving prison, need to be better resourced and supported by 'two-way' education initiatives.

Men's sheds have been suggested as one practical way of addressing issues such as depression, isolation and loneliness, and for providing a focus for work which uses the skills and knowledge of their members. For a relatively small outlay, men's sheds can play a significant role in helping to connect men with their communities and mainstream society, and lead to improved health and wellbeing, and at the same time act as a catalyst in stimulating a community's economic activities. Men's sheds on communities and town camps could complement community centres - which currently tend to be aimed at providing safe spaces for delivery of services to women and young people - by offering a discrete space for men.

A number of issues were also raised at the Male Health Summit held in Central Australia in July 2008, which recommended (in summary):

- * Establishing community-based violence prevention programs, including programs specific to Aboriginal men, and establishing men's shelters to support a successful reintegration into community.

- * Resourcing the long-term rehabilitation of Aboriginal men with alcohol and other drug problems, preferably within their own community (see also Alcohol and Other Drugs Sector).

- * Granting tax-free status for three years to identified communities to assist them in attracting health-care professionals, teachers and police.

- * Skilling Aboriginal men in literacy and numeracy to assist them in gaining locally-based jobs

The Health Summit also identified the need for safe places for Aboriginal men to work on their health issues. These centres should be staffed by males, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, who wish to work within a community-development health-care framework.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

13.1 Establish community-based violence prevention programs, including programs specific to Aboriginal men.

13.2 Establish healing places for Aboriginal men, and introduce 'half-way' houses, ideally run by Aboriginal men, to facilitate successful reintegration into communities.

Mental Health

The mental health sector, like all other sectors, has struggled over the past 12 months to recruit and retain skilled and qualified staff because the wages and conditions on offer are simply not competitive with those available in private or government employment. This problem has been exacerbated by the serious lack of public housing and the unaffordable rent levels in the private rental market which make it increasingly difficult for prospective employees to find accommodation. Needless to say, these same conditions make it almost impossible for mental-health clients to access safe and suitable housing .

Last year's NTCOSS Pre-Budget Submission identified three key priority areas. We noted that consumer groups desperately needed increased funding and assistance in order to properly support their members. While it appears that no extra funding was allocated in the budget, we understand that the Top End Mental Health Consumer Organisation (TEMHCO) has received some funding to employ a part-time consumer advocate.

NTCOSS also identified a critical need for the funding of a case-management service for people with a dual mental-health and AOD diagnosis. Such a service could provide a crucial linkage between existing mental health services and AOD services across the NT, and focus on the particular needs of young people. NTCOSS acknowledges the establishment of Headspace offices in the Top End and in Central Australia as a positive beginning to addressing this critical need.

In last year's submission, NTCOSS also identified the urgent need for more efficient medical transport services, and an expansion of the taxi-voucher scheme to better meet the needs of people with mental health issues. While the NT Taxi Subsidy Scheme (NTTSS) eligibility criteria allows for the provision of assistance to people with a significant psychiatric disability, agencies report that very few people with mental health issues actually access the scheme. NTCOSS suggests that the Mental Health sector work with the NT Government to formulate more flexible guidelines to make the NTTSS more accessible for people with a broader range of mental health issues.

There is an emerging need in the sector for better mental health care to be provided to older people, and those who are homeless. Little research has been done to ascertain the level of support required, however anecdotal evidence suggests that it is growing. NTCOSS believes that there is an increasing need to establish a dedicated mental health geriatric-care facility.

Finally, there are not enough support services in place to assist people with mental health problems to enter - or in some cases re-enter - the workforce, and to access much-needed training to maximise their employability. In the circumstances where mainstream employment services may lack the capacity and specialist expertise to assist, NTCOSS believes that a specialist service needs to be established to provide employment assistance to people with mental health problems.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 14.1 Allocate funding to the development of a case-management service for people with a dual 'mental health' and 'alcohol and other drug' diagnosis.**
- 14.2 Allocate funding to the development of a specialist employment service for people with mental health problems.**

Transport continues to be a major issue for people in urban, regional, and remote areas of the NT. There is no public transport system outside of the two major centres of Darwin and Alice Springs. Transport options to and from remote communities are minimal, with residents often forced to rely on expensive taxis and minibuses to meet basic needs. These services are often slow to respond and unsuitable for people with disabilities. Some NGO's are left with no option other than to purchase buses to transport clients.

Last year's NTCOSS Pre-Budget Submission recommended a review of public bus timetables and routes in Darwin and Alice Springs, to make them more accessible for seniors and people with disabilities. However, while a scoping work on the NT public bus system has occurred in the last two years, the system continues to be constrained by limited hours of operation, long periods between buses and large distances between stops. NTCOSS applauds the recent announcement by the NT Government of the expansion of routes around Darwin, and the provision of free public bus services across the NT for all seniors and students from 2009. While we understand that a proposal is under consideration to improve public transport in Alice Springs, NTCOSS believes that urgent action is required. The provision of public transport in locations like Katherine and Tennant Creek, which currently have no service, must also be addressed.

NTCOSS also recommend the establishment of a 'community bus' model for seniors and people with disabilities to get to medical appointments in towns, particularly in regional locations where there is a lack of public transport. This issue remains a priority. An in-town service could revolve around regular service points such as hospitals, NGOs, and government services, and could be aligned for efficiency with existing NGO bus services. There is also a need to address transport requirements for people traveling between major centres within the Territory.

While Bush Bus in Central Australia now provides some additional services, many remote communities still have no public or commercial transport options. Bush Bus services are infrequent, and often won't take a client without a carer, which doubles the cost of the transport. Transport for people in wheelchairs is also very limited as transport services are often unable or unwilling to cater for them. In addition, the NT Emergency Response, has led to residents of remote communities to make more frequent, expensive trips into regional centres to access store cards and do shopping. A bus service offering day trips to and from communities for essential journeys and major events is urgently required. Such a service could also reduce pressure on extended family members to provide accommodation – which is already at a premium - for visitors.

The lack of transport options greatly affects people visiting town and potentially places their safety at risk. For example, women may be at greater risk of domestic violence. Despite funding for safe-houses in many remote communities, no vehicles - or sometimes staff - have been provided to transport clients to safe environments, after domestic violence has occurred.

NTCOSS also recommended a review of the PATS scheme to ensure maximum equity and flexibility for people living in rural and remote locations. We acknowledge the 2008 NT Budget allocation of \$2 million for PATS to help Territorians traveling interstate for health care. However PATS must also provide more support for people living in regional and remote centres to travel to other locations within the NT for treatment. Seniors and people with disabilities are currently experiencing major difficulties with transport.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 15.1 Expand existing public bus timetables and routes to make the system more accessible to low-income and disadvantaged people.**
- 15.2 Establish community bus models in regional areas, and increase the frequency of services and the number of routes.**

NTCOSS urges the NT Government to take a strong public stand in relation to women's issues and women's services. Indigenous women continue to be grossly over-represented amongst victims of violent crime, and there are very few support options available, particularly for women in remote areas. This situation is unacceptable, and much more must be done.

In last year's Pre-Budget Submission, NTCOSS recommended the establishment of a Domestic Fatality Review Board. Such a committee would be charged with examining the chain of events which occurred prior to any domestic homicide. International experience has shown a reduction in DV related deaths after systemic issues were identified, and subsequent recommendations implemented. Evidence suggests that domestic homicides are almost always preceded by circumstances which, if identified and acted upon, may have prevented the fatality. Statistics show that Indigenous women are more likely than men or non-Indigenous women to suffer severe injuries requiring hospitalisation as a result of violent partners. This need has not been addressed and continues to be a major priority.

The previous submission also recommended increased funding for public education campaigns designed to identify and promote interventions that will address family violence. This need remains unmet. Training also needs to be made available to staff across the police, judicial, and health system around working with victims of domestic and family violence. Education is also needed about the impact of 'non-physical' violence.

The urgent need for better accommodation and transport options for women escaping violence and other crisis situations is critical. These issues are addressed more fully in both the Sector Wide and Housing sections of this submission. Agencies report an increase in the number of women accessing housing services with their children. There are very few options for people needing to exit SAAP services and this situation has become worse in the last year. One shelter has reported that in the past 12 months, they have not succeeded in getting any clients into public housing.

There is also a need to increase the level of support to mothers who are experiencing violence but who are not in contact with the child protection system. Support services such as respite options could assist in preventing further crisis situations from occurring. Funding for women's centres is now focussed on the delivery of services such as aged care and 'meals on wheels'. NTCOSS is concerned that these services are no longer resourced to play a key role in providing information to women and their families or in providing a safe place. Many communities do not have a 'safe' house or crisis accommodation, and those that do often lack paid staff, access to training, or a safe environment for volunteers. NTCOSS recommends that the Government examine this apparent lack of co-ordination.

Women's legal services and other advice services have an increased workload as a result of the raft of recent legislative changes including the NT Government's *Care and Protection of Children Act*, and *Youth Justice Act*, and the Federal Government's Northern Territory Emergency Response legislation. NTCOSS urges the NT Government to recognise the importance of providing these agencies with additional support so they have sufficient resources to manage the impact these changes have on their client base.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

16.1 Establish a Domestic Fatality Review Committee.

16.2 Increase funding for education campaigns and training to be delivered throughout the NT, including remote communities.

The Territory has the youngest population of any Australian jurisdiction and the highest proportion of Indigenous young people. Youth issues are highlighted in several other areas of this submission, including Law and Justice, Mental Health, and Alcohol and Other Drugs. This bears out the fact that young people in the NT are among the most disadvantaged in Australia.

In last year's Pre-Budget Submission, NTCOSS recommended the establishment of two full-time project officer positions to enable the Northern Territory Youth Affairs Network (NTYAN) to provide a comprehensive support service for NT youth sector workers, including those in rural and remote areas. In September 2008, the NT Government put out a tender for the provision of this service for a period of 36 months. The tender was valued at \$55,000 with an additional one-off grant for relocation costs and web page development. NTCOSS regards this figure as being grossly insufficient to successfully allow NTYAN to employ staff, support the sector, and run a conference. Given the level of funding, it could only realistically operate in the Darwin region. We also note with concern the lack of consultation with the youth sector in relation to this tender.

No mechanism currently exists for youth agencies to meet on a regional and territory-wide basis. NTCOSS calls on the Government to commit to funding NTYAN at a level which will allow it to service the whole of the NT in a comprehensive manner, rather than merely as an information network. An adequately funded NTYAN will be of benefit to both the youth sector and the Government in developing policy, collaborating on issues and improving service delivery.

NTCOSS acknowledges the additional funding from the 2008 NT Budget for measures including the creation of Government Family Responsibility Centres in Darwin and Alice Springs, as places to engage with young people at a service level. It is not yet clear how the parental responsibility initiatives will impact on the sector and where the funding will specifically be directed. While additional money has also been allocated to support programs for youth justice, outreach and diversionary services, the youth justice system still requires improvement to emulate evidence-based best practice occurring in other jurisdictions.

Youth agencies have identified a critical need for an independent evaluation of youth services across the NT to map existing services and identify service gaps. Current gaps in service provision for young people, include a shortage of supported independent living programs and accommodation services as well as a lack of case-management support. There remains a huge unmet need in this area, particularly for families regularly involved in the criminal justice system. There is a lack of workers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds to service the 25% of young Territorians from these backgrounds, particularly as there are no Police Youth Liaison Officer positions in the NT.

NTCOSS believes that there will be an ultimate cost to the Territory if young people are not well catered for. Over-representation of Indigenous people in prison and in the justice system, and the poor health outcomes of this demographic impose substantial costs on the taxpayer. The punitive approach to anti-social behaviour in the NT belies the lack of safe and friendly places for young people, and structured activity programs. Further funding for infrastructure and program development is urgently required in remote areas. It is critical that Government continues to maintain existing funding levels for the Remote Area Alcohol Substance Strategy (R.A.A.S.S.) grants which support holiday programs and youth projects on remote communities, because they can provide a timely response to address local community needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 17.1 Establish two full-time project officer positions, based in Darwin and Alice Springs to enable NTYAN to provide comprehensive support to the workers in the sector across the whole NT.**
- 17.2 Provide funding for an independent mapping and evaluation of youth services in the NT to identify service gaps.**

