



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

**2010-2011
Pre-Budget Submission**

NTCOSS 2010-11 PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

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Introduction

Every year, one of our major tasks at NTCOSS is the production of a Pre-Budget Submission to put to the Northern Territory Government, as the Treasurer works to frame the budget for the following year. We seek to represent the position of organisations and individuals who work to improve the circumstances of low income and disadvantaged Territorians. This document is finalised only after detailed consultation with NTCOSS member organisations and other key players, and we thank all of those who have contributed

This year there are three critical issues which have emerged from these consultations. Firstly, the lack of safe, affordable housing in the NT has now reached crisis point. This has critical implications right across the community sector, where crisis accommodation is increasingly difficult to secure. The crisis extends to stable housing arrangements for vulnerable clients such as those who have recently left alcohol rehabilitation programs, escaped violent relationships, have a mental illness, or have recently been released from prison. In addition the last year has seen the face of homelessness in the NT shift significantly. Now it is not just low income and disadvantaged Territorians who are affected, but also an increasing number of middle-income working families - including a number of people working in the community sector - who are unable to secure housing,

Secondly the absence of an efficient, affordable public transport system means that far too many Territorians are unable to access basic services. Large regional centres like Katherine and Nhulunbuy have no public transport. A reliable transport system is essential for people to access health and education services, and to take part in recreational activities.

Thirdly, our pre-budget submission has again highlighted the difficulty community organisations experience in the recruitment and retention of staff. Wage levels in the community sector are in the order of 20% less than salaries available in government or the private sector. Community organisations have reported difficulty in achieving program outcomes when they are understaffed. This issue has been exacerbated by the difficulty of obtaining suitable and affordable accommodation for staff.

We have included three new sections in this submission - carers, utilities, and gambling. Carers play a key role in helping people who need assistance to remain in their own homes. Utility price increases in the previous budget have significantly increased pressure on low income families. Finally, problem gambling is an emerging issue in the NT, and we know that it often affects those who are in lower socio-economic groups.

Again we encourage government to understand that community organisations are working directly with those who are most disadvantaged in the NT. Their views expressed here in this document have been developed from their considerable experience and knowledge. Too often the sector is left wondering about the basis on which a decision has been made by government, and feeling that their views have been ignored.

Thanks again to all those who have assisted in the development of this document. We believe that it will provide a basis for fruitful conversations with government on the many urgent challenges faced by low income and disadvantaged Territorians and the organisations who work alongside them.

Wendy Morton

Wendy Morton
Executive Director
NT Council of Social Service

Recommendations

1. SECTOR WIDE

- 1.1 Provide sufficient funding to community organisations to enable them to offer equitable wages so that they can compete with government and business to attract quality staff.
- 1.2 Fund a Project Officer to 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.
- 1.3 Address urgently the specific recommendations of NT Shelter's pre-budget submission and those made in the Housing section of this document.
- 1.4 Institute from 1 July 2011, minimum period funding agreements (e.g. 3 years)
- 1.5 Introduce greater transparency in relation to major decision regarding funding and setting of priorities.
- 1.6 Set specific targets to reduce the number of NT households that fall below the national lowest 20% income line. Include specific targets for the most at risk groups including (i) one parent families (ii) Indigenous households of couples with children, and (iii) single person Indigenous households .

2. ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS

- 2.1 Allocate \$200 000 in recurrent funding for an AOD peak body to provide policy advice, analysis, research and sector development for the AOD community sector.
- 2.2 Increase funding for outreach and aftercare services, as well as community-based rehabilitation and treatment services.

3. CARERS

- 3.1 Provide funding for Project Officer to conduct education and training for NTG employees, carers and other stakeholders, to adequately implement the Carer Recognition Act.
- 3.2 Fund a two year pilot program for a community organisation to employ a Carer Resource Officer at the Royal Darwin Hospital with a view to further expanding the program.

4. CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

- 4.1 Increase resources for early intervention and support services such as childcare and respite for families with children at risk, especially on remote communities.
- 4.2 Increase funding for family support initiatives to ensure broader access to appropriate family support for low risk/high needs families across the NT.

5. CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE

- 5.1 Increase the stock of safe, affordable housing to accommodate newly-arrived migrants with limited financial resources.
- 5.2 Provide establishment and recurrent funding for a multicultural women's health service in the Top End.

6. DISABILITY

- 6.1 Allocate substantial further funding to increase the number of supported accommodation, and day-program places available, including respite places.
- 6.2 Allocate funding to programs which build the capacity of families to support family members with a disability. Provide support for Indigenous people with disabilities who have been separated to reconnect with their families where appropriate.

Recommendations

7. EDUCATION AND SCHOOLS

- 7.1 Provide access to a pool of funds for community organisations to foster partnerships with local communities to develop engagement strategies around school attendance, transport and other supports.
- 7.2 Support schools to develop flexible local practices in education, including teaching delivered in first-language.

8. EMPLOYMENT AND ADULT EDUCATION

- 8.1 Improve access to training for residents of rural and remote communities by providing sufficient office space and housing and addressing the lack of access to trainers. Review NT DET's funding formula for provision of these services.
- 8.2 Improve access to support services on remote communities to improve indigenous employment outcomes.

9. GAMBLING

- 9.1 Provide project funding for research and analysis of current client data gathered by relevant organisations across the NT.
- 9.2 Conduct a review of relevant NT legislation in light of the Productivity Commission's Review into Gambling Harm Minimisation.

10. HEALTH

- 10.1 Address renal health issues by:
 - increasing accommodation in renal centres for dialysis patients to match increased demand
 - expanding dialysis options in major remote communities linked to population centres in Health Service Delivery areas under EHSDI
 - investigating reasons for the decline in numbers of Indigenous patients on the transplant list and instigating measures to improve access to transplants.
- 10.2 Develop a comprehensive framework for the NT Aboriginal health workforce which would include:
 - redeveloping and expanding Aboriginal Health Worker training, skills development and retention programs in line with key recommendations of AHW professional review;
 - guaranteeing adequate accommodation for remote area AHW's.

11. HOUSING

- 11.1 Support the development of a strong and sustainable not-for-profit housing sector by transferring housing stock and clients to the this sector, enabling it to build capacity and increase the stock of social and affordable rental housing.
- 11.2 Develop and implement a comprehensive plan with timeframes and targets for reducing overcrowding in urban and remote indigenous communities.

Recommendations

12. INDIGENOUS

- 12.1 Institute widespread cross-cultural training which is designed to assist Aboriginal people to better understand the operation of government and bureaucratic systems.
- 12.2 Address ear disease by funding the Conductive Hearing Loss program to previous levels, and establishing a five year plan for hearing-modified classrooms on all remote schools

13. LAW AND JUSTICE

- 13.1 Reduce the incarceration rates of Indigenous people and provide a higher level of support to prisoners and those who are exiting the system by:
- increasing funding levels to ensure appropriate alternatives to prison – such as community work orders - are available, particularly for Indigenous people.
 - increasing funding for post-release programs to assist prisoners in areas such as housing, Centrelink, employment and rehabilitation services
 - providing more rehabilitation services in prison, for example DV and drink-driver education
- 13.2 Provide a higher level of support—including legal representation—for domestic violence victims and perpetrators by:
- increasing the frequency of DV perpetrator training programs especially in remote communities
 - providing a female police officer or DV/sexual assault advocate in every community
 - providing more assistance to DV perpetrators to ensure that they understand the requirements of court orders made against them

14. MEN'S SERVICES

- 14.1 Establish community-based violence prevention programs, including programs specific to Aboriginal men and healing places for Aboriginal men, and introduce 'half-way' houses, ideally run by Aboriginal men, to facilitate successful reintegration into communities.
- 14.2 Develop strategies on a local community level, to address recommendations arising from the Male Health S Summits held in the Central Australian and Katherine regions in the last 18 months.

15. MENTAL HEALTH

- 15.1 Establish an appropriate accommodation and support model for people with challenging behaviours and complex needs and varying degrees of psychiatric disability
- 15.2 Establish a return-to-work program appropriate for people with mental illness and mental health needs

16. OLDER TERRITORIANS SERVICES

- 16.1 Provide funding for a research officer and establish a steering committee to review and adjust the Pensioner Concession Scheme to ensure that benefits are directed to those most in need.
- 16.2 Develop creative solutions for access to geriatricians, and fund two full-time Indigenous Project Workers.

Recommendations

17. TRANSPORT

- 17.1 Provide a safe, affordable public transport system to link remote communities with major regional centres.
- 17.2 Improve the accessibility and quality of public transport within larger regional centres. Review routes and timetables to facilitate a more effective service. Increase services between Darwin and the growth areas of Palmerston and the planned City of Weddell.

18. UTILITIES

- 18.1 Exempt all Health Care Card Holders from power price increases, and provide funding to community organisations to cover their additional costs.
- 18.2 Develop a more efficient, paperless Power and Water voucher system

19. WOMEN'S SERVICES

- 19.1 Establish a Domestic Fatality Review Committee.
- 19.2 Provide funding for additional domestic and family violence education. The current education associated with mandatory reporting is only a small part of the education needs around DV.

20. YOUTH

- 20.1 Establish and fund a peak youth organisation to develop and co-ordinate policy and practices in the sector, and to provide a single point of reference for government.
- 20.2 Undertake a comprehensive mapping of existing youth services to identify service gaps and provide a transparent basis for policy and planning decisions.

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

The NTG must invest in community sector organisations to enable them to offer competitive wages and conditions to staff. This will allow organisations to maintain a skilled and stable workforce capable of providing quality services to clients. Currently pay and conditions in the community sector are in the order of 20% less than those that apply to comparable positions in the private and government sectors. This substantial salary differential is the largest single barrier to community organisations seeking to recruit and retain staff. Community organisations report that the sector is losing skilled employees to government positions or interstate locations because they can't afford to live in the NT on a community sector wage. Some agencies have also identified the potential for using existing traineeship schemes to address staffing issues across the sector. NTCOSS calls on the NT Government to provide a substantial funding increase to community organisations, which must be quarantined for the paying of wages. Our consultations indicate that all sectors are struggling to find qualified staff. The disability sector and aged care sector have admitted to being unable to carry out some of their programs due to lack of staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1.1 Provide sufficient funding to community organisations to enable them to offer equitable wages so that they 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 NTG 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 key role played by the sector and promote the opportunities available within community organisations for rewarding careers.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1.2 Fund a Project Officer to 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 NT is facing a housing crisis. The critical nature of the housing shortage is such that the lack of affordable housing was raised in all sector consultations, with many agencies identifying the impact of the chronic housing shortage on their clients across the NT. Poor housing conditions and homelessness also have implications for related areas such as health, education and employment. The housing situation in the NT is now at crisis point, with accommodation out of the reach of a growing number of working families and individuals, as well as low-income and disadvantaged groups. The nature of homelessness has changed, with increasing numbers of working families becoming homeless. NTCOSS calls on the NTG to investigate the establishment of a not-for-profit housing sector as a matter of urgency.

Crisis, short, medium, and long-term accommodation is a priority for many disadvantaged groups including seniors, people with a disability, young people, people with a mental illness, Indigenous people, and people escaping domestic and family violence. Short term accommodation options are urgently needed for a range of groups including people visiting urban centres for medical appointments or training needs. CALD groups report difficulty in obtaining long-term housing in Darwin for newly arrived refugees. If these groups are forced to seek housing options in Palmerston and beyond, then a range of new services will need to be established in these locations to meet the needs of this group. If we are committed to providing humanitarian programs, then we should also be providing housing.

Despite the development of Stuart Lodge in Alice Springs and the provision of some additional beds at other facilities, there is an urgent need for further crisis accommodation. NTCOSS is encouraged by recent government announcements of plans to increase the number of beds over the next two years, however, the current shortfall remains critical, particularly in light of the loss of facilities at Ross Smith House in Darwin, and the Anglican Lodge in Alice Springs.

There are few housing options available for those leaving crisis or short-term accommodation, and the impact of this can be disastrous. Women suffering the trauma of domestic violence may be faced with the choice of remaining in a dangerous environment, or becoming homeless with their children. The lack of transitional housing options means that women and children who have obtained crises accommodation may have to stay longer because they have nowhere to move to.

The housing crisis has also made it very difficult for community organisations to recruit and retain staff. NTCOSS recently highlighted the issue of a disability sector worker in Alice Springs living in a tent with her two young children because she was unable to find rental accommodation. Organisations providing assistance in remote areas are also struggling to offer quality services because of the difficulty in providing adequate housing for their employees in these locations. If, as a Territory, we fail to address housing affordability, the consequences will be a deterioration in the skills of our workforce, reduced economic growth, higher unemployment, poorer health and a greater incidence of family breakdown.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1.3 Address urgently the specific recommendations of NT Shelter's pre-budget submission and those made in the Housing section of this document.

FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

Community sector organisations have expressed great concern about the lack of stability associated with one-off funding agreements. Twelve-month contracts in particular, limit the capacity of services to attract and retain skilled staff. Longer term funding arrangements would greatly assist organisations in maximising the continuity and sustainability of services and alleviate arduous six-monthly reporting requirements.

Further, agencies are seeking greater transparency from the NTG about how the government makes decisions on funding priorities within government departments. Some organisations believe that at times funding appears to be reactive, and reflective of a lack of planning. NTCOSS appeals to the NTG to be more transparent in providing evidence for the funding decisions it makes. Community organisations are well-placed to advise the NTG on the most effective use of funding in undertaking service delivery and should be consulted regularly prior to formal decisions being made.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1.4 Institute from 1 July 2011, minimum period funding agreements (e.g. 3 years)

1.5 Introduce greater transparency in relation to major decision regarding funding and setting of priorities.

POVERTY REDUCTION TARGETS

NTCOSS has done some analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics data on 'Equivalized Household Income' to establish baseline data on indicators of poverty levels in the NT, which reveals a number of concerning trends. Overall, NT households have higher income levels than the national average, but for Indigenous Territorians, the inequality is stark. Indigenous sole-person households, one-parent families, and couples with children have significantly lower income level and are therefore are at much greater risk of living in poverty. In addition, across the NT as a whole, people in single-person households and one parent families are also over-represented in the lower income brackets.

In order to achieve more just outcomes for low income Territorians, especially Indigenous Territorians, NTCOSS recommends that clear and specific targets be set for addressing these inequalities. Overseas experience indicates that such targets, when adopted by senior levels of the Government, implemented across portfolios, and backed with public support, have proved successful in reducing social exclusion.

The setting of such targets would be assist the NT Government in implementing its 2030 Strategy, particularly, its key directions and initiatives, as stated in its Draft Strategy, which include:

- All Territory children will succeed at school and training, giving them the tools to be contributors to their community
- Housing will be available and affordable, with levels of home ownership close to the national average

as well as specific aims such as, that:

- More Indigenous Territorians will be employed in our cities, towns and the regions.
- By 2030, the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Territorians will be halved.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1.6 Set specific targets to reduce the number of NT households that fall below the national lowest 20% income line. Include specific targets for the most at risk groups including (i) one parent families (ii) Indigenous households of couples with children, and (iii) single person Indigenous households .

Earlier this year the Chief Minister described alcohol as ‘the greatest single social problem facing the Northern Territory’. Drugs like alcohol, tobacco, cannabis and amphetamines are used at more dangerous levels in the NT than anywhere else in Australia. Territorians drink alcohol at a rate of 1.5 times the national average. The cost of this misuse is borne disproportionately by adolescents, young adults, and Indigenous Australians, who suffer major social, economic and health consequences. NTCOSS endorses the Chief Minister’s assessment and calls on the NT Government to attack the problem of alcohol and drug abuse with renewed vigour.

A critical first step is the establishment of a peak body for ‘alcohol and other drug’ issues, as the Northern Territory is one of only two Australian jurisdictions without a peak body. Such a body could become a key instrument of policy co-ordination and development in the sector. It could also be involved in information provision, advocacy, co-ordination, and workforce development training, as well as a range of other activities which would assist the government in combating the scourge of alcohol misuse. NTCOSS is encouraged by the NT Government’s provision of seed funding to assist in the establishment of such a body, and we trust that the government will continue to support this endeavour.

The most effective ways to reduce alcohol consumption are to increase the price of the cheapest alcohol, limit the number of alcohol outlets and restrict their hours of trading. Alcohol restrictions in Alice Springs over the last three years have seen a reduction across a range of key indicators of harm including homicides, suicides, and hospital admissions. NTCOSS urges the government to continue in this direction and examine opportunities to introduce further measures which would reduce the harm done by alcohol.

In the remote areas, access to alcohol and other drug services are limited. Whilst funding for the remote alcohol and other drug workforce is welcomed, much more needs to be done to improve prevention and treatment pathways for people living in remote areas through the consistent roll-out of youth development preventive programs, and of more capacity in remote health centres to provide clinical treatment.

There is an urgent need for residential beds and outreach service for young people, particularly as the Volatile Substance Abuse legislation has highlighted the need and the complexities of care required for younger alcohol and other drug users. The AOD sector is hit particularly hard by the lack of availability of safe, affordable housing across the Territory. It is critical that a safe and stable environment is provided for those who have undergone detoxification and rehabilitation. Experience suggests that those who do not receive adequate aftercare support are at serious risk of resuming dangerous levels of drinking. A considered investment in aftercare services will assist in maximising the cost-effectiveness of rehabilitation programs.

Finally, we would urge the NTG to involve community sector organisations in the review of the Liquor Act currently underway. It is vitally important to make most effective use of the skills and knowledge of this sector

RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.1 Allocate \$200 000 in recurrent funding for an AOD peak body to provide policy advice, analysis, research and sector development for the AOD community sector.

2.2 Increase funding for outreach and aftercare services, as well as community-based rehabilitation and treatment services.

Carers play a key role in assisting disadvantaged Territorians in our community to remain in their own homes and enjoy a better quality of life. Many people with a disability, and people who are older and in need of need some assistance, benefit enormously from the support of dedicated family members and others who are there to help in a wide variety of ways. Whether it is through intensive support with eating and toileting, or help in getting to medical appointments or going shopping, the contribution made by carers cannot be overstated.

The social value of the work that these people do is obvious, but the economic benefit the community derives from their efforts is less apparent. The dedication of carers across the Territory allows people to stay in their homes rather than move into care facilities, and saves the NTG many millions of dollars. There are around 26,000 carers in the NT, which is a significant proportion of the Territory's population. Demographic projections suggest that in the future we will have a growing number of older people and people with a disability to care for, so the contribution that carers make will become even more important.

The people who undertake this unpaid caring work often find that their own career and social opportunities are reduced as a consequence of the commitment they have made. Their opportunities for paid employment are curtailed, and their career paths limited because of their carers role.

NTCOSS applauds the NTG's acknowledgement of the contribution made by carers in the passage of the *Carer Recognition Act 2006*. The Act enshrines the Northern Territory Carers Charter which requires that carers be treated with respect and dignity and 'acknowledged as individuals with their own needs within and beyond the role of carer'.

It is disappointing that funding has not been provided to inform agencies of their obligations under the Act. Workshops were run initially to inform groups, but there has been no ongoing education, training or promotion. Essentially, this has become an additional unfunded task for carer organisations. Funding is required to ensure that education and training on the legislation is available to NTG employees, carers and other stakeholders.

NTCOSS urges the NTG to consider the appointment of Carer Resource Officers (CRO's) in hospitals, a model which has worked successfully in WA. The CRO's would be employed by community organisations to support, and advocate for carers and to report on the hospital's adherence to the Carers Charter.

Carers are such a cost-effective resource in our community that it makes sense for the NTG to ensure that they have appropriate support.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

3.1 Provide funding for Project Officer to conduct education and training for NTG employees, carers and other stakeholders, to adequately implement the Carer Recognition Act.

3.2 Fund a two year pilot program for a community organisation to employ a Carer Resource Officer at the Royal Darwin Hospital with a view to further expanding the program.

Despite increased spending on the well-being of children and families in recent years, urgent needs remain unmet. In last year's Pre-Budget Submission, NTCOSS recommended the establishment of 'multipurpose hub' services in remote areas. Agencies have again identified hub services as a useful conduit for delivery of crucial programs, particularly where children are at risk in remote areas and town camps. Hubs could also provide an easy way for families to access other services such as domestic violence support, counselling on alcohol and other drugs issues, and primary health promotion.

NTCOSS also recommended an increase in early intervention and support services like childcare, and respite for families with children at risk, especially on remote and town camp communities. While we acknowledge the additional funding provided in the last budget, for 'care and case management', a residential care unit, therapeutic services and more child protection workers, the bulk of this money is going towards services for children who are already in care. Resources must also be directed into a specific funding allocation to prevent children from actually entering the child protection system in the first place, which is a more cost effective option in the long term.

We also welcome additional funding for family-support initiatives like the Targeted Family Support Service (TFSS) for vulnerable families, which targets 'low risk, high needs' families where significant - but not critical - child wellbeing concerns exist. We are also pleased that the TFSS will be expanded to non-Indigenous families (Alice Springs), as well as other regions.

All referrals to TFSS come directly through NT Families and Children (NTFC) following a notification or request for support from a family. While the TFSS model is effective in preventing an escalation in risk to children, and aims to prevent them from (re)entering the Child Protection system, there is currently no capacity to accept referrals from the general community. Consequently, families with significant support needs have limited access to services. More services are needed to build capacity in the sector and provide assistance to all families with identified support needs, and to support referrals from the community sector, as well as the NTFC.

Concerns were again raised about the limited capacity of out-of-home-care teams to service remote communities. Recurrent funding is needed to employ staff to work with families in a more intense way to address the lack of support for families with young children in these locations. The lack of access to child care, transport, and respite services is of great concern. Further, child health services need to be made available on a daily basis. Often the only support families have on a remote community is a health clinic, which is unable to provide a holistic response to social issues, nor offer family support. This lack of services often means that removal of children may be the only viable option.

Concerns were also raised about NTFC case-management practices, where there is a perception that bureaucratic processes can take precedence over addressing the specific needs of children in care. A 'continuum of care' is crucial if education, child care, respite and accommodation needs of children are to be addressed in an orderly manner. Effective child protection requires building partnerships with local organisations using a strengths-based approach. A general lack of family support, counselling, therapy and mediation services for young people continues to be a major concern.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

4.1 Increase resources for early intervention and support services such as childcare and respite for families with children at risk, especially on remote communities.

4.2 Increase funding for family support initiatives to ensure broader access to appropriate family support for low risk/high needs families across the NT.

The Northern Territory is becoming an increasingly multi-cultural community as migrants and refugees continue to arrive. While the NT government provides funding to established groups such as the Greek community, more resources must be directed to newly-emerging communities like the Sudanese, who do not currently have the infrastructure to assist new arrivals in adjusting to life in the Territory. The lack of safe, affordable accommodation is the single biggest problem facing newly-arrived migrants to the Territory. If the NT Government wishes to sponsor humanitarian intake, then the provision of housing is a fundamental component of successful settlement.

There is a growing need for a multi-agency Multicultural Women's Health Project to be located in Darwin's northern suburbs, where culturally appropriate information is available for migrant women in relation to major health issues including contraception and sexually transmitted diseases. Some migrant women live quite isolated lives and a centre of this kind would not only provide confidential advice and information, but would also provide the opportunity for social contact.

We propose that the NTG support this project through funding for bilingual health educators and a part-time project officer, and through a continuation of the short-term Migrant and Women's Health and Wellbeing Project conducted within the Women's Health Strategy Unit. Most other Australian jurisdictions have some kind of multi-cultural women's health network, and there are good reasons for the NT to follow suit.

Services for newly-arrived refugee families such as schools and health services, are currently located in Darwin. As the city expands southwards there will be a need to provide additional services to newly-arrived migrant groups in locations like Palmerston, and the planned City of Weddell. An increase in the level of servicing will also be needed in the larger regional centres of Nhulunbuy, Katherine and Alice Springs.

The NT receives a significant number of 'secondary migrants' - often Sudanese and Nigerian people who move from interstate to locations across the NT, especially Alice Springs, in the hope of gaining employment. Regional centres like Alice Springs must be given additional capacity to support these groups.

The sector is hopeful that new DEEWR employment service contracts will place greater emphasis on employment for newly arrived migrants and address gaps in services in areas like driver training. The acquisition of a drivers licence is a considerable advantage in both finding employment and being able to travel to work.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

5.1 Increase the stock of safe, affordable housing to accommodate newly-arrived migrants with limited financial resources.

5.2 Provide establishment and recurrent funding for a multicultural women's health service in the Top End.

The NTG must do a great deal more to provide an adequate level of service for people with a disability in the Territory. The disability sector continues to express frustration over the ineffectual implementation of the disability review. Organisations report only minimal improvements for their clients or themselves. In Queensland, a Community Resource Unit operates in the sector to promote and strengthen values and provide training. The NT would benefit enormously from the creation of a similar organisation. The sector intends to pursue this strategy, and will provide government with a detailed submission at a later date.

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. At the time of last year's submission, we were aware that a tender was being developed for the provision of extra day-option places in Darwin and Alice Springs. At the time of writing this year's submission, this tender had still not been let, and people with disabilities and their families continue to struggle. NTCOSS remains concerned that the number of places being tendered will not be sufficient to meet the need. Further, while we note a welcome increase in funding for the TIMES Scheme, this is not sufficient to meet the need.

Workforce issues continue to impact heavily on the disability sector, with organisations funded to offer only low wages for challenging work performed in a high-risk environment. Staffing shortages are restricting the capacity of organisations to deliver some services. This issue is dealt with in more detail in the sector-wide section of this document.

The lack of transport options for people with a disability continues to be a major concern across the NT. Issues include the lack of taxis suitable for wheelchair-users, the lack of planning around public bus routes, and the problem of young children with behavioural problems having to spend long periods of time traveling on school buses. Organisations report that they can't fulfill their program requirements with clients because of the unreliability or absence of transport. Employment services struggle to find jobs for people because transport to workplaces is inadequate. In locations where they are available, taxis are costly and unreliable. Large regional communities like Katherine, Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy have very few transport options, particularly for people with a disability. Transport issues are covered in more detail in the transport section of this submission.

The sector would like to see a greater emphasis placed on providing support to families to increase their resilience and capacity to care for family members with a disability. Many Indigenous people with disabilities who come from remote areas have been living in urban centres with little contact with their family. In some cases these families would like to be able to support their family member to live back in the community. While the issue is much broader than Indigenous families, we know that providing quality support and respite options for all families is cost-effective in the long term.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

6.1 Allocate substantial further funding to increase the number of supported accommodation, and day-program places available, including respite places.

6.2 Allocate funding to programs which build the capacity of families to support family members with a disability. Provide support for Indigenous people with disabilities who have been separated to reconnect with their families where appropriate

Improving educational outcomes for young Territorians is crucial to the future of the NT. The NTG has committed a substantial amount of money to improving educational outcomes for young Indigenous people as part of the 'Closing the Gap' strategy. However other critical needs remain unmet. NTCOSS urges the adoption of a social inclusion strategy which encourages families and communities to play an active role in making the decisions which will improve our education system.

NTCOSS welcomes the additional funding in the 2009 NT Budget for a range of measures, including the provision of hostels, mobile preschools, and additional remote teachers. However, we believe that further systemic changes are needed to foster community engagement. NTCOSS commends the NTG's policy of engaging with communities through the 'Community Education Centre' and the 'Remote Learning Partnerships' agreements, and recommends that this practice be made more widespread. Evidence suggests that negotiated agreements between communities and education providers improve student outcomes.

NTCOSS believes that the non-government sector, with its long experience in engaging families, has a key role to play in this process. We believe that the Department of Education should focus on its core business of education, and fund community organisations to undertake the important ancillary work which contributes significantly to the academic success of students. It is therefore concerning that DET did not consult with the NGO sector before developing the "Engaging Urban Students" (EUS) project, which will provide funding to 17 NT schools, and have an emphasis on improving home/school partnerships, enrolment, and attendance and student wellbeing as enablers of student readiness to learn. This type of project clearly lends itself to a collaborative approach with the NGO sector.

Community engagement which connects children and families to learning is especially important in early education. The positive correlation between school attendance and parental engagement was demonstrated by the Alice Springs Town Camp Education Project. There is real value in communities developing their own programs, as this helps families to build their own capacity. This project also identified the benefit of teachers and principals in mainstream schools maintaining ongoing relationships with town camp families. The successful Save the Children program operating in the Darwin town camps employs Cultural Guidance Officers to provide families with practical assistance to ensure that children attend school. NTCOSS recommends that this model be expanded to Alice Springs and other regional centres.

Education is broader than classroom instruction, and must be considered in the wider context of unmet needs in areas like health, housing, and family support - especially in remote communities. More funding is needed to provide an education system which is grounded in the context of local language and culture. Investment in people and social services to make education more relevant to students will produce better results. We must support students and teachers, and place greater focus on developing the social and cognitive skills which increase a student's capacity to learn.

NTCOSS has concerns about the NTG's policy that NT schools conduct the first four hours of lessons each day in English, especially in cases where a Community Education Centre agreement supports a formal bilingual education program. Schools should be encouraged to develop local responses to engage students, and acknowledge local culture, rather than adopt a 'one size fits all model'. There is considerable evidence that the teaching of language and culture facilitates the development of literacy and numeracy. We must strive to improve the standard of education available in all remote communities.

Last year NTCOSS recommended that NTG fund schools on the basis of enrolment, rather than attendance, to ensure that schools have adequate resources to meet the needs of all students. We would again call on the government to implement this critical reform.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

7.1 Provide access to a pool of funds for community organisations to foster partnerships with local communities to develop engagement strategies around school attendance, transport and other supports.

7.2 Support schools to develop flexible local practices in education, including teaching delivered in first-language.

Employment and Adult Education

The desperate shortage of affordable housing in the NT continues to be the single greatest problem facing the adult employment and training sector. Helping an individual to get a job, or enrol in a course of study is extremely difficult if they do not have safe, stable accommodation. The lack of housing has also become a barrier to community services recruiting and retaining quality staff, particularly in the circumstances where wage levels in the sector lag so far behind those on offer in both government and the private sector.

Last year's Pre-Budget Submission identified workplace bullying as a major concern and recommended the NT Government fund an appropriate organisation to investigate complaints of bullying and to run a public education campaign. NTCOSS also recommended a career guidance service be established and made available to all job seekers after they have left the school system. Both areas of need remain unmet. The 2009 NT Budget committed funds for education and training infrastructure in various remote and urban schools, and some homelands. New money has also gone into initiatives to develop Indigenous employment, significantly by replacing CDEP jobs with NT public sector positions.

Registered training organisations and job network providers are making a much greater effort to provide training to people in remote communities, because many of these clients are simply unable to commute to town. However, there are significant barriers for service providers in remote communities. Accessing appropriately qualified trainers is very difficult, and many communities are too small to be financially viable to service. It is critical that remote Indigenous communities have regular access to appropriate literacy and numeracy training, and that the NTG supports them in setting up sustainable industries. The NT DET's current funding formula does not adequately address the cost of delivering service in remote locations, such as travel time, transport, staff costs, and the financial risk of participants not attending scheduled courses.

It is also notable that both territory and federal governments fund urban-based providers to offer employment services to remote communities, yet there is often an absence of accommodation or office space allocated to staff. One organisation, servicing 80 clients in a community, was offered the shade of a tree for office space. Government funding bodies, when awarding contracts to service providers, must ensure office space and staff accommodation is available. Currently if a service provider wishes to purchase a mobile home as a creative response to the necessity for office space as well as accommodation for staff, they would have to fund it from their own limited operating budget.

The lack of transport on remote communities is a further barrier to residents of these communities accessing services, which means people may simply miss out. Many people do not have a driver's licence and a significant number have 'drink-driving' convictions which restrict their ability to gain employment. The lack of job capacity assessors and mental health services in remote communities also creates further obstacles, since people lack the necessary support to progress into work.

The requirement for job seekers to undertake work experience is commendable, but on most remote communities the options are limited to one or two shops, a Shire Council office and a CDEP program. One Central Australian community alone has more than 200 job seekers. Most job seekers, who already face multiple employment disadvantages, would have to leave their community to seek employment. Job Services Australia providers' contracts, require that Indigenous unemployment must be halved in accordance with a federal government plan. This is a laudable aim, but ultimately unrealistic if the jobs are not there.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

8.1 Improve access to training for residents of rural and remote communities by providing sufficient office space and housing and addressing the lack of access to trainers. Review NT DET's funding formula for provision of these services.

8.2 Improve access to support services on remote communities to improve indigenous employment outcomes.

This is the first time we have included Gambling as a sector in the PBS and its inclusion is indicative of it being a developing issue in the NT.

Little research has been completed into the issue of commercial gambling in the NT and its impact on vulnerable groups. What we do know is that those with problems related to gambling are often those who are in the lower socio-economic groups. There is concern from treatment agencies that prevalence is higher than average in several groups including Indigenous people and young people. Evidence suggests that a significant proportion of fraud-related crimes have their genesis in gambling. Financial counselors estimate 30% of the clients presenting have gambling related financial issues.

The 2009 Productivity Commission found that 40% of gambling revenue comes from problem gamblers. Those who are most at risk of gambling-related problems have co-morbidity issues of mental health, alcohol and drug use. However there is little baseline data available for the NT. It is important that counselors are available across the NT who can assist problem gamblers. Organisations need ongoing funding to conduct education targeting younger people, since gambling in this age group appears to be increasing, as people access unregulated online gambling sites.

The Productivity Commission is currently conducting a review into Gambling Harm Minimisation. The outcome of this will provide an ideal opportunity for the NT Government to conduct a review into all current legislation affecting commercial gambling.

It is a concern that gambling currently sits as a responsibility of the Department of Justice yet clearly there are considerable impacts on health and well being.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

9.1 Provide project funding for research and analysis of current client data gathered by relevant organisations across the NT.

9.2 Conduct a review of relevant NT legislation in light of the Productivity Commission's Review into Gambling Harm Minimisation.

The extreme morbidity and mortality rates amongst Indigenous people in the NT are well documented. While NTCOSS acknowledges the commitment of the Federal and NT Governments to 'Closing the Gap' of Indigenous disadvantage, the urgency of this task cannot be overstated. The poverty and disadvantage underlying the chronic disease suffered by many Indigenous people is exacerbated by the lack of access to basic health services, especially on remote communities.

In last year's Pre-Budget Submission, NTCOSS identified an urgent need for Government to improve the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme (PATS) by expanding accommodation options and implementing a pre-payment system for car travel. Reform of PATS is now critical, and measures must be put in place to address the recommendations of the 'Highways to Health' national report on patient travel. Prohibitive accommodation costs prevent many patients from taking advantage of PATS, especially in Darwin and Alice Springs. There are huge unmet needs for accommodation for any patient with a compromised immune system (e.g chemotherapy patients) who requires accommodation of a particular standard to ensure their health is not further threatened. NTCOSS calls on the NTG to ensure that the new accommodation linked to the Radiation Unit in Darwin, is suitable for such patients. Further, in relation to the new radiation unit, we urge the NTG to adopt a borderless approach, adopting patient-centred care principles to maximise referrals from remote WA and Queensland, and allowing people from Central Australia the choice to receive treatment interstate where support networks are available.

NTCOSS also recommended that the Government develop a comprehensive framework for the NT Aboriginal Health workforce. This remains a priority and must include Aboriginal Health Worker (AHW) accommodation commensurate with that provided to nursing staff. We acknowledge provision in the budget of \$2M for teams of midwives and Aboriginal Health Workers (AHWs) to support remote Aboriginal women to access birthing services in major centres.

The Expanding Health Service Delivery Initiative (EHSDI) will increase the amount of health services being provided. However the contracting of professionals on expensive 'fly-in, fly-out' contracts, will not solve workforce issues in the long term. Consideration must be given to the relationship between the roles of newly created Aboriginal Community Development Workers and Aboriginal Health Workers (AHW), to ensure there is role clarity for both groups, as well as for the professionals working with them. The role of AHWs remains pivotal to the development and delivery of health services. A new approach is needed to the training of AHWs to compensate for the ageing population of AHW's and the low numbers of new AHWs coming through.

There has been a 12 per cent annual increase in renal dialysis in the central region alone. The sector welcomes the additional renal chairs with the new private dialysis unit in 2010, but demand for renal places continues to grow. With survival rates for renal patients increasing, more accommodation in larger centres is needed. Providing dialysis in bush locations would relieve pressure on larger centres. NTCOSS is concerned at the fall in the proportion of Aboriginal patients on the transplant list and would encourage the NT government to investigate the reasons for this decline and put in place measures to address this.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

10.1 Address renal health issues by:

- **increasing accommodation in renal centres for dialysis patients to match increased demand**
- **expanding dialysis options in major remote communities linked to population centres in Health Service Delivery areas under EHSDI**
- **investigating reasons for the decline in numbers of Indigenous patients on the transplant list and instigating measures to improve access to transplants.**

10.2 Develop a comprehensive framework for the NT Aboriginal health workforce which would include:

- **redeveloping and expanding Aboriginal Health Worker training, skills development and retention programs in line with key recommendations of AHW professional review;**
- **guaranteeing adequate accommodation for remote area AHW's.**

For several years now, NTCOSS, NT Shelter and many other community organisations have been talking about the housing crisis and warning that it would only get worse unless a massive investment was made. Too little has been done and the crisis continues. High rents, lack of available private housing, increased public housing wait lists and the absence of affordable housing has contributed to the bottleneck in crisis housing and the highest rate of homelessness in the country. There is an urgent need for safe, affordable accommodation for a whole range of low income and disadvantaged groups, including newly-released prisoners, people with mental health problems, renal health patients, and people with a disability.

As stated throughout this document, housing is having an impact on the ability of almost every sector to provide adequate support for their client group. It is also impacting on the ability of community sector organisations to recruit and retain their staff. Low community sector wages make it difficult for staff to afford the cost of accommodation here in the NT and many choose to move interstate or into better paid government positions.

Indigenous people continue to live in overcrowded and sub-standard housing in both remote and urban communities. NTCOSS acknowledges the significant investment in building new houses on 16 remote communities under the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP) and looks forward to new and upgraded houses on the ground in the near future. However, concerns have been expressed about remote communities which will not receive new housing under SIHIP. A comprehensive plan needs to be developed and implemented for all remote communities, with timeframes and targets for reducing overcrowding and sub-standard housing to ensure affordable and safe housing for all Territorians.

Genuine collaboration is required to develop partnerships and build the capacity of Indigenous communities to maximise self-determination and support Indigenous led housing provision. Wherever possible this needs to target employment of Indigenous people in construction and maintenance programs, using both the existing skill base in Indigenous communities and using training and employment programs to expand local skills.

Crisis housing continues to suffer because there are only limited exit points available. A more collaborative working relationship is needed with the NGO sector to address the issues of homelessness. There needs to be a closer link between housing strategies and the strategies about other sector issues such as domestic violence, refugees, AOD, mental health, child protection etc.

NTCOSS considers the establishment of a not-for-profit housing sector as an integral part of a long term solution to the housing crisis. This requires the transfer of public housing stock to the not-for-profit sector, and the establishment of affordable housing companies supported by a strong system of regulation, to enable the sector to grow in capacity and increase the stock of social and affordable rental housing. This will allow the sector the ability to participate in partnerships, leverage private sector funding, take advantage of their charitable tax exemption status and capitalise on Commonwealth Rent Assistance.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

11.1 Support the development of a strong and sustainable not-for-profit housing sector by transferring housing stock and clients to the this sector, enabling it to build capacity and increase the stock of social and affordable rental housing.

11.2 Develop and implement a comprehensive plan with timeframes and targets for reducing overcrowding in urban and remote indigenous communities.

The need to address the disturbing levels of Indigenous disadvantage in the NT cannot be overstated. The Productivity Commission's 2009 Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report makes it clear that a great deal remains to be done. The shortage of safe, affordable housing, poor educational outcomes, and inadequate transport options disproportionately affects Indigenous people. Indigenous Territorians are also grossly over-represented in the criminal justice system. This is a very costly public policy failure, given that it costs around \$62,000 to incarcerate a prisoner for a year. Alternatives to prison such as community service orders must be identified, and supported. Innovative approaches involving education and rehabilitation are needed to improve long term results at a fraction of the cost. Increased counseling and rehabilitation options in prison and post-release are needed to reduce recidivism. NTCOSS calls upon the government to establish targets to reduce the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in prison.

Last year, NTCOSS recommended further funding for cross-cultural education for police, and to encourage Indigenous people to take up policing as a career. In addition we recommended increased funding for cultural awareness training for all non-Indigenous people working in the NT, and for further training in the use of interpreters. It is therefore concerning that organisations report a significant reduction in the hours allocated to Aboriginal cultural awareness training for government workers.

However NTCOSS applauds the NT Government for the April 2009 release of the Language Services Policy. The document aims to establish a whole-of-government approach to language service delivery, and to ensure all Territorians for don't speak English as a first language have fair access to appropriate services. Significantly each agency now must plan and budget for interpreting services, thereby recognising the important role of interpreters and cultural brokers.

Several other key issues not mentioned elsewhere, must also be addressed. While some effort is made to provide cross cultural awareness training to non-Indigenous people, there is also a need to assist Aboriginal people to better understand the 'western' system. The NTG needs to provide education about government systems in a way that can be easily understood by Indigenous people who have grown up with a different world view. Governments must also seek to better understand Indigenous culture to help improve service delivery. This needs to be done on a systemic basis across the spectrum of government services. Critical areas include understanding child protection orders, housing leases and negotiating the education system. This whole issue lends itself to a two-way learning process. Organisations have also emphasised the importance of partnership building with Indigenous people and communities, which requires funding for both the development work and the relationship building that precedes action. The NGO sector can play an important role in this process with its experience in community engagement.

Ear disease has long been identified as a major Indigenous health issue, with the resultant conductive hearing loss a significant educational issue. However, the loss of Commonwealth funds for the Conductive Hearing Loss program based within NT Education, means a significant reduction in services which will disproportionately impact on Indigenous children and increase the gap in educational outcomes. To further address hearing loss and improve educational outcomes, a comprehensive plan for the establishment of hearing-modified classrooms is required. In addition, despite the NT having the worst hearing loss rates in the country, Alice Springs—our second largest population centre - has no permanent audiologist.

More generally, governments must ensure that Indigenous organisations are genuinely consulted in the development of policy which affects Aboriginal people in the Territory.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

12.1 Institute widespread cross-cultural training which is designed to assist Aboriginal people to better understand the operation of government and bureaucratic systems.

12.2 Address ear disease by funding the Conductive Hearing Loss program to previous levels, and establishing a five year plan for hearing-modified classrooms on all remote schools

Indigenous Territorians continue to be incarcerated at a much higher rate than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Aboriginal people make up about 30% of the Territory's population but account for more than 80% of the prison population. It is time to invest significant resources to keep people out of the justice system, and to provide effective rehabilitation programs for those already in prison. The NTG needs to consider greater use of alternatives to prison such as community work orders, particularly for Indigenous prisoners who are seldom given access to this option. 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.

Domestic and family violence has a major impact on the health of our community, and more needs to be done to keep victims safe and to provide rehabilitation for perpetrators. We believe that domestic violence and sexual assault is under-reported in Indigenous communities, due in part to women feeling reluctant to discuss these issues with male police officers. If it is not possible to place a female police officer in communities, then as an alternative, a domestic violence/sexual assault advocate could be placed in these locations. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on providing culturally appropriate support and education to domestic violence and sexual assault perpetrators, with programs offered more frequently and in more locations. Many communities miss out altogether, or have programs only once a year. All male offenders should be required to attend these programs. Some communities already have appropriate infrastructure like men's centres from which to run programs. It is also vital that post-release programs and other supports are available. NTCOSS is concerned that many Indigenous men who enter the court system for DV related matters, are not represented, and do not understand the orders they must comply with.

For many years, the NTCOSS Pre-Budget Submission has highlighted the critical need for more funding to be directed to Community Legal Centres and Domestic Violence Legal Services, but this has not occurred. We have also repeatedly called for a funding program to guarantee ongoing stability for youth court support positions. In Central Australia, this job continues to be funded through alternative short-term means, but it is no longer operating in the Top End. Such positions are essential for identifying needs around mental health, alcohol and other drugs, or family issues and in referring people to family support, mediation and substance-abuse rehabilitation.

While the last NT budget allocated extra resources to courts administration, the sector is disappointed that no resources have been directed to the establishment of youth-specific community courts, or to providing for separate areas for young people facing court. There are examples of good practice of youth community courts in most other areas in Australia, particularly Kalgoorlie.

Despite receiving little or no funding from the NT Government, community legal centres provide a range of free legal services and community legal education. The NT is the most under-funded of all Australian jurisdictions, with domestic violence legal services significantly understaffed and under-funded. Under new NT DV legislation, needs have become broader and more complex. Consequently, services need to be adequately funded to ensure that all Territorians have equitable access to free legal advice in matters relating to tenancy, discrimination, domestic violence, or consumer issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

13.1 Reduce the incarceration rates of Indigenous people and provide a higher level of support to prisoners and those who are exiting the system by:

- increasing funding levels to ensure appropriate alternatives to prison -- such as community work orders - are available, particularly for Indigenous people.
- increasing funding for post-release programs to assist prisoners in areas such as housing, Centrelink, employment and rehabilitation services
- providing more rehabilitation services in prison, for example DV and drink-driver education

13.2 Provide a higher level of support—including legal representation - for domestic violence victims and perpetrators by:

- increasing the frequency of DV perpetrator training programs especially in remote communities
- providing a female police officer or DV/sexual assault advocate in every community
- providing more assistance to DV perpetrators to ensure that they understand the requirements of court orders made against them

In recent years there has been an increase in the prominence of men's issues in public debate in the Northern Territory. A recent Sunrise Aboriginal Male Health Summit (the Banatjarl Summit) highlighted the fact that "the disadvantage of Indigenous males is a case study in the important interface between the psychological, social, physical and cultural world" which modern medicine is only just starting to catch up with. "The symbiotic relationship between depression and heart disease, two of the leading contributors to the burden of disease in Australia, should be a primary target for alleviating health disparity among the most disadvantaged." Current services to men do not adequately address needs, and a re-orientation of services, including comprehensive primary health care, is required, particularly for Indigenous men. Addressing issues for men must be a priority, because the benefits will flow through to their partners and families, and the wider community.

A large number of issues from the Male Health Summit held in Central Australia in July 2008 remain unaddressed. These include recommendations around community-based violence prevention programs, men's shelters, and the long-term rehabilitation of Aboriginal men with alcohol and other drug problems - preferably within their own community.. It is also important that men's shelters be wellbeing centres, rather than merely locations in which to cool off. In addition, outstations, need to be better resourced and supported by 'two-way' education initiatives. These homelands are sometimes the only options for young men who are leaving prison, and it is critical that they receive support to minimise the chances of them re-offending.

In last year's Pre-Budget Submission, NTCOSS identified an urgent need for the establishment of community-based violence prevention programs, including programs specific to Aboriginal men. NTCOSS has noted the additional \$ 0.2 Million under the Closing the Gap initiative, to expand the Indigenous Family Violence Offender Program, as well as the recent announcement of \$245,000 for the NT Strong Men's Council's 'No More' Domestic Violence campaign, but much more is needed. NTCOSS also recommended the establishment of healing places for Aboriginal men, and the introduction of 'half-way' houses to facilitate successful reintegration into communities. These needs remain.

There is a critical need for flexible support services for men who have separated from their families, especially those with child support issues. There is also 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 pressing need for accommodation options, and for employment assistance for prisoners post-release, given their prison history.

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. At the same time, men's sheds can 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.

Issues have also been raised about the health needs of young men from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It is critical that access to health services and information is accessible and available for this group.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

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

14.2 Develop strategies on a local community level, to address recommendations arising from the Male Health Summits held in the Central Australian and Katherine regions in the last 18 months.

While the federal and territory governments are investing in some mental health programs we are still missing some fundamental things that would assist people dealing with mental health issues. There remains a shortage of affordable, appropriate housing for people with mental illness in the Northern Territory. What is critical is the provision of appropriate accommodation in a range of accommodation types that might include a small number of group homes, cluster housing and independent community accommodation. Accommodation must be permanent. This is an urgent need in Alice Springs – in Darwin some housing is already provided but more needs to be made available.

More critical is the need for provision of support at a level which would enable people with mental illness to live independently in the community. There needs to be recognition that the small number of people with severe psychiatric disability are every bit as disabled as people with other disabilities, and people with psychiatric disability should have access to the same levels of funding which are necessary to support independent living.

Long-term accommodation with appropriate levels of support is also needed for people with challenging behaviours and complex needs. High level planning and support for people with complex needs is a far more appropriate and humane outcome than involvement with the criminal justice system. It is of grave concern that a significant proportion of the prison population in the NT are dealing with mental health issues which are not best managed in a prison environment. The NT Chief Justice, the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency and the NT Mental Health Coalition have called for further resources to be invested in this area. NTCOSS applauds the NTG's commitment to provide extra beds and staff in the mental health facilities at the Alice Springs and Royal Darwin hospitals. However, there is a need for a broader framework of accommodation and support in the Northern Territory for people with mental illness.

Finally, there is a need for an effective framework of support services to assist people with mental illness to enter, or re-enter, the workforce, and to gain access to the training which will maximise their employability. Australia's current employment policy settings are making it more difficult for people with a mental illness to find and keep a job. The impact of this policy failure is twofold. At a whole of community level, it means we have a large pool of untapped skills that the Australian economy simply cannot afford to waste. At a more personal level, it denies the right of a person with a mental illness to employment. People with a mental illness need to work so that they can pay the bills, and provide for their families. Work also means that people with a mental illness stay connected to the broader community, which is vital in managing and overcoming illness. But at a time of unprecedented labour force shortages, the data shows that a person with a mental illness is only one-third as likely to be employed as a member of the general community.

Society is more comfortable with the concept of disability employment. Employers themselves have an increasing understanding of the workplace modifications required to facilitate the employment of a person with a particular disability such as blindness. The employment participation rate in Australia for people with a physical disability is around double the rate for people with a mental illness. There is an urgent need for incentives, tools and techniques for employers to make it attractive for them to employ a person with a mental illness. In the circumstances where mainstream employment services lack the capacity and specialist expertise to assist, a specialist service needs to be established to provide employment assistance to people dealing with mental illness.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

15.1 Establish an appropriate accommodation and support model for people with challenging behaviours and complex needs and varying degrees of psychiatric disability

15.2 Establish a return-to-work program appropriate for people with mental illness and mental health needs

The Northern Territory has a growing population of older people, yet little has been done to ensure that adequate services are available, particularly for those with underlying medical conditions. There is an urgent need for the NTG to provide additional services for older Territorians and to facilitate community education so that conditions like dementia are better understood by the general public. If the NTG wishes to encourage Territorians to stay on in the NT after their retirement, then greater attention must be paid to the provision of services. The sector would like to see the NTG adopt a comprehensive, strategic approach to older Territorians, to ensure that service gaps are identified and addressed. There is an increasing level of frustration across community organisations at the lack of consultation with the sector, and the absence of transparency of process around NTG funding decisions. This issue is further discussed in the sector-wide section of this document

The highest priority facing the sector is the need for workforce stability. The inability of organisations to find skilled and experienced staff is the single greatest obstacle to the delivery of quality care. The sector employs people in community-based programs such as those who deliver Community Aged Care Packages, which require staff to work in client's homes. Ideally, these 'positions of trust' should be filled by experienced and highly-trained workers, yet these jobs are often taken by inexperienced staff. There is a clear need for a review of the availability and suitability of training courses for employees in the sector to ensure that all workers have well-developed skills, particularly cross cultural understanding.

While low wages remain the greatest impediment to recruitment and retention of staff, the lack of career paths, and the low value placed on the work are also significant factors. NTCOSS believes that there is an urgent need for a public awareness campaign to raise the profile of work within the community sector. This issue is discussed at length in the 'sector wide' section of this submission.

In our previous two Pre-Budget Submissions, NTCOSS has identified the urgent need for the recruitment of two full-time geriatricians to improve service delivery generally, and two full-time Indigenous Project Workers to promote awareness of dementia in remote Indigenous communities. While funding is available for the geriatrician positions, they remain unfilled. In Alice Springs, a creative short term solution has been found by bringing up a geriatrician from interstate who combines a series of lectures with a role in mentoring GP's and providing assistance with clinical decisions. More creative solutions like this must be found on a more permanent basis to support access to geriatrician services for people across the NT.

There is a critical need for affordable and appropriate housing for older Territorians. Housing continues to be a major priority in the sector, and this issue too is dealt with in more detail in the sector-wide and housing sections of the submission. The transport needs of senior Territorians have also been neglected, with many people using most of their taxi vouchers simply to travel to and from medical appointments. Public transport options, routes and timetables must be reviewed in an effort to better meet the needs of these clients. Transport needs have also been identified in many sectors and are addressed more fully in the Transport section of this document.

NTCOSS applauds the increased funding directed to Pensioner Concessions and the NTG's commitment to freeze power costs for pensioners and carers. However, the Pensioner Concession Scheme is overdue for a major review. Concessions levels for rates relief have not changed since 1979, and there has been no review of the age of access. Currently, home-owners benefit more than renters, and assistance is provided for travel outside the NT, but not within. Additionally, there are many people with a disability, and elderly people living at town camps who do not have adequate access to federal and NT care packages such as Home And Community Care (HACC) and Community Aged Care Packages (CACP). Concerns have been raised about the HACC guidelines. The program is often inflexible, and unresponsive to individual needs. NTCOSS recommends that a review of the program should be undertaken in consultation with NGO's and consumers.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 16.1 Provide funding for a research officer and establish a steering committee to review and adjust the Pensioner Concession Scheme to ensure that benefits are directed to those most in need.**
- 16.2 Develop creative solutions for access to geriatricians, and fund two full-time Indigenous Project Workers.**

The Northern Territory may well be one of the most sparsely populated places on the planet. Roughly 220,000 people occupy an area of 1.3 million square kilometres. These figures give some sense of the massive task of providing services to those living hundreds of kilometres from regional centres in locations accessible only by dirt roads, some of which may become impassible for months at a time during the wet season.

It is obviously impracticable to provide a full range of services in each small, isolated community. Consequently, it is critical that reliable, affordable transport links are in place to ensure that people living in remote locations are to be able to gain access to the services that those living in larger centres take for granted. Residents of the town of Tennant Creek – the NT’s fifth largest population centre – who are required to travel to Alice Springs hospital by bus must wait in a roadhouse for the 3am bus departure. The return service arrives back at 2am.

Residents of larger remote communities like Wadeye and Maningrida – with populations not much smaller than that of Tennant Creek - have even less choice. People living on smaller remote communities, and the 10,000 Territorians who live on outstations, need effective transport links if they are to access medical treatment, shops and services. The population of remote Indigenous townships is increasing at a much greater rate than the larger regional centres, making it imperative that planning for transport infrastructure be afforded the highest priority.

NTCOSS has recently conducted regional transport forums in Alice Springs, Katherine and Tennant Creek and the results of these discussions indicate that transport links are simply inadequate. The NT Government has recently appointed a consultant to begin work on the development of an ‘integrated regional transport strategy’ for the Territory. The tender document notes that “transport to connect remote communities with major regional service centres is critical for the social and economic development of the NT”.

One of the single largest pieces of infrastructure in the Territory is the railway line which runs from Alice Springs to Darwin, but the railway stations in Tennant Creek, Katherine and Darwin are located some distance from the city centre and designed principally as freight terminals. NTCOSS would like to see government explore a range of flexible and innovative options to make better use of the railway line. The NT Government should also explore options for restoration of the air link between Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek, and Alice Springs. Consideration also must be given to the provision of more effective transport links between Darwin and Palmerston, and to thoughtful transport planning for the new City of Weddell.

Those who suffer most from the lack of availability of transport are from already marginalised groups such as those on low incomes, women, the elderly, Indigenous Australians, and people with a disability. Wheel-chair users and people with other disabilities who have special transport requirements, find their mobility severely restricted even in the large regional centres because of the absence of suitably designed vehicles. Lack of access to transport reduces people’s ability to gain access to work, health services, shops and commercial services, and importantly, recreational and social activities. Where affordable public transport is not available, those on low incomes are often forced to use expensive taxi and minibus services for essential travel. New school bus-stops were set up near Alice Springs town camps early in 2009, however intensive support is still required to assist children to access this transport.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

17.1 Provide a safe, affordable public transport system to link remote communities with major regional centres.

17.2 Improve the accessibility and quality of public transport within larger regional centres. Review routes and timetables to facilitate a more effective service. Increase services between Darwin and the growth areas of Palmerston and the planned City of Weddell.

NTCOSS is greatly concerned about the impact power and water price increases are having on low income and disadvantaged Territorians. In the past year the cost of power has increased by as much as 18 per cent, and water by 20 per cent, causing many families further hardship in an environment where they are already paying prohibitive prices for necessities like rent and fuel. Measures must be implemented to ensure that the NT is an affordable place to live, so that we can attract new residents, and ensure that those already living here don't need to consider leaving for more affordable locations.

NTCOSS applauds the NTG's decision to exempt pensioners and carers from the latest round of price increases. However, it is Territorians on Centrelink benefits - such as Newstart Allowance and Youth Allowance - who will feel the impact most, because they are not entitled to Power and Water concessions. Low income earners too will feel the pinch, since power bills are non-discretionary. People cannot go without electricity, clothes still have to be washed and food must be stored and cooked. NTCOSS member organisations are confronted with ever-increasing requests for assistance from working families who can no longer make ends meet. These people cannot afford further price increases.

NTCOSS acknowledges the NTG's initiative in assisting households to introduce energy saving measures like solar-powered hot water systems. However, the savings realised are not sufficient to compensate for the price rises. Further, the substantial costs of the initial outlay often put these measures beyond the reach of low income households. People who are renting seldom gain any benefit from this initiative. NTCOSS believes that concessions for power should be extended to all holders of health-care cards - Newstart, Youth Allowance recipients, as well as qualifying low income families - to ensure that utility price increases do not push people further into poverty. Alternatively, a separate pricing structure for these households needs to be considered. Low income households simply do not have the capacity to absorb price increases of this magnitude, especially with power and water costs set to rise again in each of the next two years. Extending concessions to all holders of health-care cards will provide a measure of protection for Territorians who are most at risk.

Community services organisations that provide housing assistance, emergency relief, and counseling will experience an increase in demand for their services as power costs continue to rise. Unfortunately these organisations will also have to pay the same price increases, reducing the amount of money they can dedicate to actual service delivery. NTCOSS has received reports of organisations expecting their power costs could increase by up to \$70,000 in the present year. The impact of this expected rise on one organisation was so great, that they issued an appeal for further funding from donors to help them meet these costs.

Concerns have also been raised about the time-consuming nature of the Power and Water voucher system administered by a number of NGO's. Other jurisdictions, such as Victoria, have efficient, paperless systems involving financial counselors and electricity providers, which could be explored by the NT.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

18.1 Exempt all Health Care Card Holders from power price increases, and provide funding to community organisations to cover their additional costs.

18.2 Develop a more efficient, paperless Power and Water voucher system

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 cost of such a committee would be similar to that of the Child Fatality Review Committee.

The previous submission also recommended increased funding for public education campaigns designed to identify and promote interventions that will address family violence. This need also remains unmet. Training needs to be provided to staff across the police, judicial, and health systems around working with victims of domestic and family violence. Education is also needed about the impact of 'non-physical' violence. Significant dollars have been allocated to education on the new Mandatory Reporting of Domestic Violence, however this is not considered to be broad enough to cover all the education needs. We need to take a much stronger approach to prevention.

The urgent need for better accommodation options for women escaping violence and other crisis situations continues to be critical. These issues are addressed more fully in both the Sector Wide and Housing sections of this submission. There are very few options for people needing to exit SAAP services and this situation becomes worse each year. There has not been any significant growth in this area. While crisis accommodation is needed, so too are other housing options including community housing models, transitional housing, public housing and supported housing. Clients are facing the impact of being homeless as well as being victims of domestic and family violence.

Previous submissions have also highlighted the need for more resources to be directed toward better support for children of families where domestic violence is occurring. This need continues. Women's services are deeply aware of the critical impacts of domestic and family violence on children, which is being compounded by risks of long term 'couch surfing' homelessness. Also there is a need for more outreach services particularly to support women and children when they have moved out of crisis accommodation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

19.1 Establish a Domestic Fatality Review Committee.

19.2 Provide funding for additional domestic and family violence education. The current education associated with mandatory reporting is only a small part of the education needs around DV.

The Northern Territory has the youngest population of any Australian state or territory. The Territory also has the highest proportion of Indigenous young people in any Australian jurisdiction, many of whom are potentially at risk. Youth issues were highlighted in NTCOSS consultations with representatives from community organisations working in the Alcohol and Other Drugs, Mental Health, and Law and Justice sectors. The youth sector - like other community organisations - suffers from low wage levels, and consequently struggles to attract and retain suitably qualified staff.

There is an immediate need for both short-term crisis accommodation and longer term rehabilitation facilities for young people with drug and alcohol problems. There is also a lack of services for young people with mental health issues. More thoughtful linking of services between remote communities and regional centres would increase the effectiveness of these services without any additional cost. Dedicated police liaison officers located in Darwin and Alice Springs could assist in forging more positive relationships with young people, and could create the preconditions for problems to be solved before they become serious.

It is critical to ensure that adequate planning and preparation is undertaken to meet the escalating demand for new services in the most cost-effective manner. NTCOSS strongly recommends a strategic two-pronged approach involving the creation of a sector peak body, and the undertaking of a detailed mapping of existing services. There is a desperate need for a peak-body to undertake policy co-ordination and development. It would also act as a single point of reference for government and other stakeholders, and could perform other functions that the existing network does not have the capacity to undertake.

NTCOSS has recommended the establishment of a youth sector peak body in its last two pre-budget submissions, but the idea does not appear to have received serious consideration. The Territory lags behind the rest of the country as the only jurisdiction without a peak body, and in our view the quality and effectiveness of service delivery suffers as a result. Media outlets in the NT provide frequent, excitable coverage of anti-social behaviour by youth in Darwin and other regional centres. Suicide rates in remote Indigenous communities continue to cause great concern. Incarceration rates in the NT far exceed those in other Australian jurisdictions. A more progressive and sympathetic approach to young people could be instrumental in addressing these statistics. These issues cannot be resolved without a cohesive whole-of-government response.

Making funding available for specific projects on an ad hoc basis has not been successful in addressing the underlying problems for at-risk young people. The punitive approach to anti-social behaviour on the part of young has not been successful and should be replaced with a more progressive approach involving the provision of safe, friendly places for young people, and the creation of structured activity programs. A comprehensive, independent review of youth services across the NT would be of considerable value in mapping existing services and identifying gaps in service provision. It would also assist in identify existing inefficiencies and duplications, thereby allowing scarce resources to be used most effectively. A review of this kind would provide an evidence-base to ensure that policy making is transparent and governments are fully accountable.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

20.1 Establish and fund a peak youth organisation to develop and co-ordinate policy and practices in the sector, and to provide a single point of reference for government.

20.2 Undertake a comprehensive mapping of existing youth services to identify service gaps and provide a transparent basis for policy and planning decisions.



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