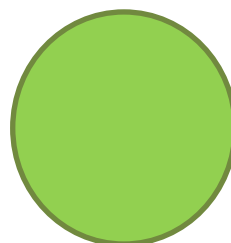
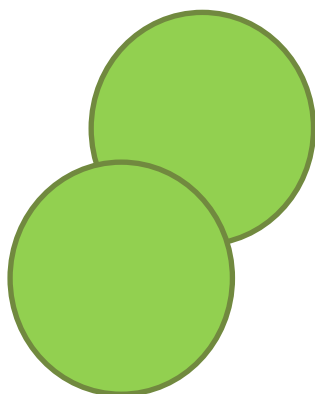




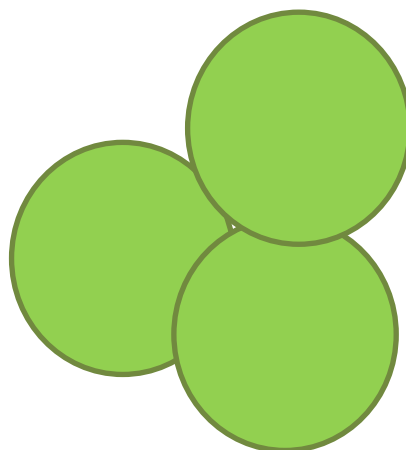
*Growing the NT fairly*



## PRE BUDGET SUBMISSION 2014 - 2015



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Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with the NT Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) Pre Budget Submission for 2014 – 2015.

NTCOSS is keen to ensure that those who are doing it tough in the NT and those who are most vulnerable are prioritised when the NT Government are making difficult budget decisions. This is particularly so when the NT Government has clearly signalled their intent to cut back on spending and reduce the budget deficit. It is most important to ensure that those who can ill afford to lose those services and those who cannot afford to pay more are not the target of budget cuts or revenue raising measures.

Instead we must ensure that there is investment in much needed areas such as housing – including short term, long term, public housing, community and affordable housing. There must also be investment in early intervention and prevention in areas such child protection, youth, family support and justice.

‘Growing the NT fairly’ must be the basis of all government spending and decision making if we are to ensure that we don’t leave behind those who are most vulnerable. This must be done with evidence based approaches in all urban, regional and remote settings. Any changes in policy need to be done in consultation with the NGO sector and focus on long term change as well as meeting short term needs.

We encourage the NT Government to undertake a financial commitment that will allow not for profit community sector organisations to be strong and sustainable. Firstly, independent of any other capacity building activities or engagement, it will be critical that the NT Government actively meet the real cost of delivery. Decisions such as the Department of Health not providing an indexation payment to its funded NGO’s in the 13/14 financial year, mean some organisations need to cut back on the amount of support provided to clients. Secondly, it is vital to provide sustainable and adequate funding for not for profit community sector organisations to meet increasing compliance and reform responsibilities. Finally, NTCOSS believes that developing a skilled local workforce will, in the longer term, provide significant returns for the NT government and the broader community.

Finally, we welcome the commitment to ‘Framing the Future’. The ideas in this pre budget submission should also be considered for inclusion in that document.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. Development of Overarching Strategic Plans**

**NT Government to develop long term overarching strategic frameworks in key policy areas. These must be evidence based and be developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders such as non government organisations and consumers.**

Whilst there are specific funding needs in most sectors, we support the development of overarching, whole of government plans to inform key areas for investment. The plans should articulate clear goals, strategies and funding priorities over time, which, in turn, provide clarity, guidance and a shared understanding of the roles of all stakeholders.

### **2. Non government organisations as valued partners**

**Improve the capacity of not for profit community sector organisations to deliver quality service to disadvantaged Territorians by:**

Not for profit, social and community sector organisations, as valued partners of the NT Government, play a vital role in providing services to the most disadvantaged as the basis of a resilient society. For organisations to deliver services that strengthen individual and community well-being, service contracts must meet the full cost of service provision, including wages, administration, and implementation of reforms and staff recruitment.

## **1 Development of Overarching Strategic Plans**

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Whilst there are specific funding needs in most sectors, we support the development of overarching, whole of government plans to inform key areas for investment. The plans should articulate clear goals, strategies and funding priorities over time, which, in turn, provide clarity, guidance and a shared understanding of the roles of all stakeholders. The following sectors have an identified need for properly developed plans.

### **Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD)**

A plan should be developed by the Department of Health in close consultation with stakeholders, including the AOD sector, Indigenous Territorians, and broader NGO health and community organisations. It should be based on sound research and evidence, and promote the 3 pillars of the National Drug Strategy – Demand reduction, supply reduction and harm minimisation.

The plan should:

- consider and act on the social determinants of health, especially inequalities;
- reflect the need for and effectiveness of a variety of strategies and service types such as services for young people;
- be whole of government;
- value successful community based prevention and early intervention strategies that reduce demand for “downstream” intensive interventions
- take into account workforce planning – through investment in the sustainability and capacity of the sector’s local workforce, rather than continuing to rely on recruitment from outside of the NT;
- promote increased coordination and improved service pathways;
- include issues of multiple morbidities;
- Plan for, and invest in, continued review and evaluation of approaches in the Territory – documenting effective practice and models in the Territory – promoting sector development, standards and improve quality of service based on standards.

## Child Protection

The recommendations from the Growing them Strong Together Inquiry provided a sense of direction over the past 3 years. These recommendations were developed after wide consultation across the NT by a panel of experts. A decision to no longer follow these recommendations late in 2012, without any review or substantive evaluation of the implementation of the recommendations, has meant there is little understanding of a formalised strategy or new direction for reducing harm to children as well as how we respond to children at the crisis end. If the NTG is not going to reintroduce the recommendations, then we call on the NTG to develop a new strategy in consultation with the key stakeholders such as NGO's working with children and families, territory and interstate research bodies, and other relevant groups. Only a collaborative effort will ensure that we can deal effectively with these very challenging issues. The conceptualisation and design of approaches in this critical field requires a framework which is consistent with the cultural, social, economic, remote, political and diverse realities of the Northern Territory.

Furthermore, these approaches need to be inclusive of any national strategies which provide an overarching framework. Approaches should have a strong focus on early intervention and prevention (as well as measures to better support children in care). The delivery of preventative and supportive child and family service delivery, particularly in remote communities, has been very limited, fractured, and without any community involvement in the design and delivery of services provided. The result is that children and families do not have access to appropriate services. NTCOSS stress that the lack of resourcing should not be a reason for leaving or placing children in harmful situations. Ultimately, all players have responsibility for the current 'systems neglect' and 'societal abuse' of children. The 'systems neglect' needs to stop and this can only be done if all stakeholders work in partnership, and are adequately resourced and informed. This includes a well resourced 'out of home care' system inclusive of a kinship system that provides continuity of relationships and high quality care.

Any strategic plan should include measures for improving recruitment and retention of the workforce – for both government and NGO's. It must address the need to build capacity in the sector, particularly in Aboriginal organisations.

## Mental Health

The mental health sector has long called for an overarching strategy to guide their work. This needs to include early intervention, prevention, and recovery, as well as treatment services. It must address the different needs of groups such as youth, Indigenous communities and carers.

There is concern that the current service model has too great a focus on the 'sharp end' of primary health care management. There is a general lack of coordination, and a disconnect, in the continuum of care, especially in remote areas.

NGO's have no structural way of providing systemic input into the NT Government policy agenda. A Territory wide strategic plan for mental health optimises opportunities to provide that structure and assist in determining funding priorities. Underpinned by research that identifies and quantifies the need for various service elements the plan would provide evidence of best practice to achieve successful outcomes. The plan should be developed by the Department of Health in close consultation with stakeholders, including: the mental health sector, the broader NGO sector, health professionals, consumers and carers, and indigenous and other relevant groups, to consider and recognize related issues such as housing, infrastructure, AOD, youth, family support, education, employment and remoteness. Finally, the plan must have strong links with any national mental health plans such as the Fourth Mental Health plan and the 10 year Road Map for mental health.

## Disability

A strategic plan for disability in the NT needs to be aligned with the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. However, it needs to also recognise that the NDIS will not be fully implemented until 2019, and there are significant needs within the disability sector that must be addressed in the meantime. These include areas such as post school options, and the availability of supported accommodation. An overarching plan needs to be developed in consultation with key stakeholders such as people with disabilities, carers, disability service providers, and the broader range of organisations working with people with disabilities such as education.

## Housing

Like most other areas, there are specific funding priorities already identified by the sector and NTCOSS supports the NT Shelter Pre Budget Submission. There is an absence of a broad strategic plan to guide decision making. Housing affordability and the lack of housing affects many Territorians and has the greatest impact on low income earners.

A quality social housing system where government and a range of providers rent affordable housing to low income households remains vital to a fully functioning housing market. NTCOSS recommends greater consultation with housing stakeholders, both for-profit and not-for-profit, regarding social housing issues and instigate partnerships to initiate new ways forward.

Along with the commitment to new 'affordable' housing in the NT housing system, we welcome the redevelopment of public housing assets but emphasise that there should be no net loss of public housing stock numbers. We recommend tenants be provided with, and informed of, options when required to relocate.

The NT Government's 'Framing the Future' blueprint identifies 'developing the community housing sector' as a key objective for a 'strong society'. The NT Not-For-Profit (NFP) housing sector in the NT needs NT Government support to develop as a viable partner in developing and managing social housing.

Well structured and managed community housing providers can provide a diverse and sustainable mix of social housing along with support services to tenants with a range of differing and complex needs.

If the NT Government (like state governments throughout Australia) seeks to reduce housing costs while increasing supply over time, the emergence of a strong, well regulated and resourced NFP housing sector is an essential element in the future of social housing in the NT. It is timely that the NT NFP sector begins to prove its capacity to assist Government by taking on the management of social and community housing.

The creation of a diversified social housing system and housing market involving a range of managers and providers, lower level government subsidies, private and other forms of finance, and public/private and non-government partnerships in the management of housing assets and services, must be explored.

## Homelessness

As the NT has the highest rate of homelessness in Australia, a strategy is required to identify support needs and establish strategies to move people from 'homelessness' into permanent, secure accommodation.

The limited number of low cost, long term housing options lead to 'bed blockage' in 'transitional' and 'homeless accommodation services', with no viable transition from crisis institutional services into longer term housing. It then leaves a high number of people without any crisis accommodation whose only option may be to reside in public places.

Considerably more must be done, and with no indication from the newly elected Federal Government on 'homelessness' policies, we urge the NT Government to lobby the Federal Government for a new Funding Agreement beyond June 2014 with funding based on the reality that the NT homelessness rates are nearly 15 times the national average.

NT Shelter recommends further collaboration between the Minister, the Department and the 'homelessness sector' to determine NT specific targets aimed at ending 'homelessness' in preparation for any renegotiation of 'homelessness' funding beyond the current NPAH. A Homelessness Working Group made up of Government representatives, NT Shelter, and other key 'homelessness service providers', is essential if the NT's homelessness priorities are to be identified for consideration in the next Homelessness Funding Agreement.

'Chronically homeless people' are generally affected by mental health, alcohol and drug abuse issues, and are seriously vulnerable to public violence and police prosecution. An opportunity exists to support other NT alcohol and health strategies to get chronically homeless people off the street and into managed accommodation.

NTCOSS, therefore, strongly urges the NT Government to examine and implement a best practice, 'Housing Plus' approach in response to 'homelessness'. 'Housing Plus' for the chronically homeless is premised on the notion that providing housing in the first instance,

followed by the provision of wrap around services necessary to overcome long term conditions that evolve when people cycle through 'insecure tenure' and 'states of homelessness'. It is a paradigm that is particularly evident in Katherine and Tennant Creek.

## Domestic and Family Violence

There is a need to establish a strategic framework which encompasses the prevention of domestic and family violence as well as the response to victims when an assault has occurred. Part of the framework would also include the establishment of a Domestic and Family Violence Fatality Review Board. A plan would acknowledge the impact of violence on children and also create a cultural shift in community attitude towards violence. The NT has the opportunity to be a leader in our response to domestic and family violence. Any plan will also align with existing national frameworks.

## Justice Reinvestment

Over the last few decades, Australia's prison population has grown at a rate that is faster than population growth. The 'Prisoners in Australia' (ABS, 2012) report indicates that between 2002–2012. NT prisoner numbers increased by 72%. Disadvantaged and vulnerable people are over-represented in the justice system and in the Northern Territory Aboriginal people are incarcerated at desperately high rates, which show no signs of decreasing.

Assuming that these trends continue, prisoner numbers could double by 2017. The new Darwin Prison, due to open in 2014, is foreshadowed to have capacity to house 1000 prisoners, and is being built at a cost of \$495 million. It will not be able to contain the potential explosion in prisoner numbers.

Policymakers must question whether building more prisons is the most effective and sustainable approach to increase public safety or whether addressing imprisonment rates in the Northern Territory requires a new approach. Ultimately, sustainability must have at its centre, a plan to limit the growth of the prison population by investing in programs to reduce criminal behaviour and recidivism.

The Justice Reinvestment approach assists policymakers to identify how spending on corrections can be reduced by investing in programs that can address the underlying causes of crime, prevent offending and reduce the number of people entering the justice system.

At a recent forum in Darwin, participants agreed that Justice in the Northern Territory is in crisis. The burgeoning incarceration rates, overrepresentation of aboriginal people and profound human and economic costs are unacceptable and without serious reform will worsen:



The forum identified four key priority areas:

1. Aboriginal leadership in Justice Reinvestment for Aboriginal people.
2. A strategic campaign for Justice Reinvestment in the Northern Territory.
3. Identifying programs and initiatives that can be recommended to Government as part of Justice Reinvestment.
4. The development of an NT Strategic Plan for Justice Reinvestment so that all bodies, government and non-Government, are working together towards a shared agenda and outcomes.

It is possible to change this situation through effective Justice Reinvestment. In the NT we have the opportunity to be innovative and the development of a strategic plan would form the basis of this work.

## Dementia

There is a strong need for the development of an NT wide Dementia Strategy. Dementia is a chronic fatal disease that by virtue of the aging population will have an increasingly dramatic impact on health and welfare services at a national level, but even more significantly, in the Northern Territory (NT). The abrogation of responsibility for dementia care by the NT government to the Federal government signifies a general ignorance of, and lack of compassion for, the growing number of people living with dementia, and their carers, in the NT. It also disregards the benefits or risk reduction achievable through community education, which has the potential to slow the symptoms of dementia and lessen the impact on the economy.

The NT population over 65 is increasing faster than any other state or territory in Australia. The main contributing factors are potentially linked to new and updated retirement facilities which are encouraging more families to relocate aging parents to the Territory, and more people are remaining in the NT following retirement.

Additionally, the ratio of Aboriginal people to non-Aboriginal people living in the NT is far greater than for any other state or territory in Australia. The 2011 census revealed that 2.5% of the Australian population are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) people whereas 27% of the NT population are ATSI people, which is ten times the national average. A factor that increases the significance of this disparity is that ATSI people are three to eight times more likely to be effected by dementia than non-Aboriginal people, and at a younger age.

Statistically, the number of people currently living with dementia in NT appears to be considerably under reported. Nationally there are approximately 321000 people living with dementia, which, in general terms, represents well over 1% of the Australian population. The number of people reportedly living with dementia in the NT is somewhere between 800-900, which is less than 0.5% of the NT population. If it is accepted that around 226000 people reside in the NT, it is reasonable to assume that the number of people actually living with dementia in the NT is in excess of 2260. This apparent under diagnoses bears testament to lack of government recognition and support for aged related conditions such as dementia.

## **2 Non government organisations as valued partners**

### **Improve the capacity of not for profit community sector organisations to deliver quality service to disadvantaged Territorians by:**

The Framing the Future Blueprint document acknowledges the need for a vibrant non government sector as a partner to strengthen the delivery of services. This is strongly supported by NTCOSS as the sector can often deliver more flexible, quality and cost effective services.

Not for profit, social and community sector organisations, as valued partners of the NT Government, play a vital role in providing services to the most disadvantaged as the basis of a resilient society. For organisations to deliver services that strengthen individual and community well-being, service contracts must meet the full cost of service provision, including wages, administration, and implementation of reforms and staff recruitment. The NT Government's commitment to fairly compensate for the financial impact of the Equal Remuneration Order (ERO) was welcomed as it provides long overdue pay increases to many community sector workers. Unfortunately, the ERO was closely followed by reduced funding from the Department of Health, with no indexation, for organisations to undertake client work during the 2013-14 financial years.

Another area in which improved partnership with the 'not for profit community sector' is required relates to the ever increasing burden of 'reform and compliance'. While effective regulation and processes provide opportunities to improve the structure and outcomes for 'not for profit community sector organisations', it must be recognised that it takes time and investment to realise benefits in terms of real accountability and transparency. The NT Government can assist the sector to implement reforms and compliance measures by funding supports that provide advice, resources and information on a range of reform initiatives, including strategic management, change management, evaluation, standards and policy development. Accreditation and compliance with standards are becoming increasingly common throughout the sector yet the assistance required by organisations to meet these standards is not always recognised through support or additional funding. Facilitating opportunities for leaders and managers to work together and share knowledge with the common goal of securing a stronger community sector relies heavily on the commitment of government and-stakeholders.

'Not for profit community sector organisations' in the NT have a significant number of mature workers who will retire from the workforce in the near future, a transient workforce in a competitive environment, and in a growing economy drawing workers out of lower paid occupations. One way to address this issue is to grow our own local workforce, in particular, an Aboriginal workforce. This will not only improve cultural safety for clients, but increase local ownership of service provision, provide local employment, and support economic independence and emotional wellbeing. Providing support to meet the extra complexities faced by Aboriginal workers, such as trauma, living conditions, and competing loyalties

when working with families, cultural obligations, flexible training, and acknowledgement of professional boundaries requires long term investment and commitment.

NTCOSS believes that a strong NGO sector is vital to achieving a strong society and a prosperous economy as outlined in the Framing the Future Blueprint.