



NTCOSS Pre-Budget Submission 2020-21

November 2019

Northern Territory Council of Social Service INC (NTCOSS)

The Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) welcomes the opportunity to present information and perspectives relevant to the formulation of the Northern Territory Government's (NTG) 2020 – 21 Budget.

NTCOSS is a peak body for the social and community service sector in the Northern Territory (NT), and an advocate for social justice on behalf of the people and communities who may be affected by poverty and disadvantage. The community sector in the NT is made up of community managed, non-government, not for profit organisations and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) that work in social and community service delivery, sector development and advocacy. The community sector plays a vital role in creating social wellbeing for all Northern Territorians and in building safe and healthy communities by providing services that enable people to access and participate in health services, education, employment, economic development, and family and community life. The charity sector employs more than 8,000 employees across the NT.

NTCOSS' vision is for a 'fair, inclusive and sustainable NT where all individuals and communities can participate in and benefit from all aspects of social, cultural and economic life'. NTCOSS' mission is to 'promote an awareness and understanding of social issues through the NT community and to strive towards the development of an equitable and just society.'

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1. Child and Youth Policy

ISSUE

NTCOSS acknowledges the progress made by the Northern Territory Government (NTG) towards implementing recommendations by the Royal Commission on Child Protection and Youth Justice in the NT. In particular, NTCOSS congratulates the NTG on changes to the *Care and Protection of Children Act*, including the introduction of legal recognition of the importance of Aboriginal families and culture; improvements to youth justice and related legislation, including changes to the application of bail and offence to breach bail; introduction of supported bail in Darwin and Alice Springs; initial work to expand youth justice conferencing; and the introduction of the new Aboriginal family and kin care service model.

Despite these changes, there are still a number of significant reforms that have not yet been implemented, and we call on the NTG to act on these as a matter of urgency. The Royal Commission laid out a comprehensive roadmap to reshape the youth justice and child protection systems in the NT, and it is imperative that the NTG make significant progress in fully implementing its recommendations.

In conjunction with investment in implementing the Royal Commission's recommendations, it is essential that the NTG increase investment in primary prevention and early intervention service delivery, prioritising funding for ACCOs (proportionate to the engagement of Aboriginal families within the child protection system). The recently released Family Matters Report¹ highlighted that there are limited roles and resources for ACCO service delivery and participation in the NT, with just 2.4% of funding spent on child protection, out-of-home care and family support services going to ACCOs.

ACTIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

Raising the age of criminal responsibility to at least 12, as per Recommendation 27.1 of the Royal Commission report. Raising the age of criminal responsibility is central to the reform process, and a crucial component in reducing the number of children and young people entering the youth justice system. This requires an increased investment in targeted and integrated support services for the small number of children exhibiting harmful behaviour, and their families, to address the root causes of the behaviour.

Increased investment in primary prevention and early intervention programs to strengthen families, with prioritised funding for ACCOs. In keeping with the five key priorities identified by the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) for addressing the rising numbers of Aboriginal children being removed from their families, any new funding framework should focus on:

- Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community participation in decisions for the care of their children, supported by increased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled service design and delivery;
- Re-orienting service delivery to early intervention and family support to build on the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to care for and protect their own children;

¹ SNAICC 2019, The Family Matters Report 2019 https://www.familymatters.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/1097_F.M-2019_LR.%C6%92.pdf

- Reflecting in funding and policy directions that holistic and integrated family support and child protection services that are accessible and appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is crucial;
- Recognising the importance of supporting and maintaining cultural connection in the best interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children;
- Facilitating and supporting partnerships that build capacity and cultural competence for effective service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.²

Appropriate funding to adopt a therapeutic and rehabilitative design approach in redeveloping the Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre. While the NTG has undertaken refurbishments at the Centre and has committed to continued improvements, it remains unfit for purpose and is not conducive to supporting young people with complex needs. NTCOSS urges that appropriate levels of funding are allocated to ensure that the infrastructure supports rehabilitation programs, and to ensure that the developmental needs of children and young people are at the forefront.

² SNAICC 2014, Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Out of Home Care, https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/002949_dcac.pdf

2. Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence

ISSUE

Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV) continues to have a significant impact on the lives of Northern Territorians. In the NT, there were 1,730 victims per 100,000 residents of DFSV in 2015, three times higher than any other jurisdiction in Australia.³ While NTCOSS commends the NTG on the introduction of Action Plan 1: Changing Attitudes, Intervening Earlier of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction Framework (the Framework), as well as initiating the development of the Gender Equity Framework and Sexual Violence Prevention Framework, DFSV is still an issue severely impacting communities and people across the Territory.

Both Government and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) across the NT operate beyond capacity due to the high rates and severity of violence across the region, including the associated trauma and social impacts. The accumulated cost of managing this is an enormous expense to the NTG and the universal and specialist DFSV services that operate in this space.

There are complex root causes of DFSV in the NT, and addressing these causes requires NT designed, evidence-based responses and a skilled workforce to make culturally appropriate and strategic interventions to reduce rates of violence. In a tight fiscal environment, strategic investment that focuses on building workforce capacity and effectually linking the multifaceted response systems that currently exist to address DFSV will achieve effective NT wide results.

In accordance with the Framework, it is critical to build the capacity of the workforce, so that all workers are skilled in identifying and responding to DFSV. This entails the provision of DFSV training that specifically responds to the needs of the Sector (including Government departments) and clients, delivered by trainers with specialist expertise.

Training should be culturally appropriate and trauma informed and address the complexity and multiplicity of violence in the NT. Ensuring equal access to training opportunities across the NT, particularly for staff operating in remote contexts, is of crucial importance. DFSV training should be built around best practice models and grounded in the NT experience. While NTCOSS acknowledges that training does currently exist regarding DFSV across the NT, altering current models to ensure that they reflect the above will not only better equip the workforce, but positively influence client outcomes.

Regional differences regarding service provision, community differences and geography all contribute to the intricacies of delivering appropriate services and understanding community needs. While various networks and working groups exist across the NT, the ability of these structures to effectively contribute and provide strategic input to the NTG is limited by the capacity of member organisations and priorities of those involved.

No services in the DFSV Sector are specifically funded to lead the development of strategy, with the main purpose of existing networks and groups largely operational and information and resource sharing focussed. NTCOSS notes that the Cross Agency Working Group (CAWG) has individuals from these specific networks and DFSV service providers attend meetings, however these people are limited in how they can represent the Sector due to the confidential nature of CAWG.

Frontline service providers are overwhelmed with demands on their services and often have limitations regarding their ability to contribute to larger policy debates and requests for input on

³ Northern Territory Government, Territory Families, 'Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction Framework 2018 – 2028', accessed at https://territoryfamilies.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/464775/Domestic,-Family-and-Sexual-Violence-Reduction-Framework.pdf

proposed changes to NTG policy and legislation, as well as engage in consultations. Funding a specialist DFSV peak policy unit would enable Government to hear strategic conversations and positions from within the Sector, while providing an official avenue for organisations to engage with the various legislative and policy changes that impact the Sector and relate to DFSV. In order to implement the NTG's ambitious reform agenda it is critical that the sector is part of the journey and in our view the funding of a peak is the best way to achieve this outcome.

ACTIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

Adequately resource the First Action Plan of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction Framework (the Framework), with a particular focus on workforce development and improving capacity across the Government and NGO service system in the NT to effectively respond to DFSV and identify and manage associated risks.

Resource a specialist peak policy unit to connect and support a multifaceted and complex service response system, and build and maintain pathways between the NTG and the Sector. The specialist peak policy unit could exist as part of any organisation that has Northern Territory wide jurisdiction and the ability to provide strategic advocacy.

3. Aboriginal Justice Agreement (AJA)

ISSUE

The establishment of an Aboriginal Justice Agreement (AJA) has long been sought after in the NT and NTCOSS commend the NTG for releasing the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Justice Agreement 2019 – 2025: Draft Agreement for Consultation*.

It is essential to have a document that guides the way Government, Aboriginal communities and all relevant stakeholders can work together to improve justice outcomes.

Many of the 23 strategies, actions and outcomes identified under the three main aims have been described and outlined, but the path to making progress on many of these remains unclear.

The level of consultation that has so far occurred as part of producing the AJA is commendable, and while discussions continue in some parts of remote NT, the establishment of partnerships that will facilitate the implementation of the AJA is still unclear. The Sector now call on the NTG to create an implementation plan in accordance with the AJA's principles to achieve all 23 strategies, actions and outcomes, and commit resources to enable the NTG to carry out this plan. As the AJA is not legally enforceable it is critical that the implementation measures form part of the NTG's agenda.

ACTIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

Publish or table in a timely and accessible manner in Parliament the annual progress report (2019) for the implementation of the AJA as per the Stage One Governance Structure of the AJA.

Provide adequate and additional resources to the Aboriginal Justice Unit to continue its work bringing the NTG and ACCOs together to collaborate and work towards the strategies, actions and outcomes identified in the AJA.

Partner with peak bodies and NGOs to act quickly and effectively to increase the number of ACCOs delivering services to Aboriginal participants.

4. Cost of Living

ISSUE

Healthy food in remote Northern Territory

Healthy food is 60 per cent more expensive to purchase at a remote store in the NT than in a major supermarket, with a healthy basket of food on average costing \$854 in a remote store compared to \$535 in a major supermarket.⁴ This widening gap – in 2012 the gap was only 22 per cent – is exacerbating poverty, poor health outcomes and disadvantage in remote NT.

Households in the lowest 20 per cent of incomes are spending approximately one quarter of their income on food, and to purchase a healthy basket of food from an NT Remote Store will require 34 per cent of the household income of a family of six.⁵

ACTIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

Continue to increase the number of licenced stores under the Stronger Futures Act and use the Stronger Futures investment fund to increase the number of licences in remote NT stores, ensure compliance and focus on programs and activities that subsidise the cost of fresh food in remote areas.

Identify ways for residents in regional and remote areas to access inexpensive transport to shops that are not within walking distance of where they live, including capped subsidies for NT Concession Scheme recipients and subsidised transport services (e.g. Bush Bus and Bodhi Bus).

Extend MVR Concessions under the NT Concessions Scheme to all Centrelink Health Care Card Holders to facilitate increased transportation options and affordability to obtain food items.

Explore the introduction of freight subsidies to cut the price of food in remote areas by targeting freight costs.

ISSUE

NT Concession Scheme

Access to Concession Schemes in the NT have improved significantly with the introduction of the NT Concession Scheme, and we commend the NTG for its introduction and the relief it provides to individuals and families as they pay water, power and transport bills that constitute a large proportion of their incomes.

There are, however, many additional cohorts that would benefit greatly from access to the NT Concession Scheme. These cohorts (including those who hold the Low Income Healthcare Card, those individuals on Newstart and those who hold the Centrelink Pensioner Concession Card) are not eligible for the NT Concession Scheme despite experiencing some of the highest rates of poverty and disadvantage within our community. Extending the NT Concessions Scheme to these cohorts would significantly reduce poverty and disadvantage in the NT and provide relief to households who are finding it extremely difficult to access constant electricity, clean water, healthy food and basic transport.

⁴ Northern Territory Council of Social Services, 2019, 'Cost of Living Report Issue 24: Food Costs in the Northern Territory', accessed at <https://mk0ntcoss2rx2i6x3dbk.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/NTCOSS-Col-Report-No.24-July2019-Food-Costs.pdf>

⁵ Ibid.

Additionally, the NT is the only jurisdiction in Australia that does not offer electricity concessions to all Centrelink Health Care Card holders, which should be addressed immediately.

ACTIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

Extend the NT Concession Scheme to all Newstart recipients, Centrelink Pensioner Concession Card holders and Low Income Healthcare Card holders.

Extend electricity concessions to all Centrelink Health Care Card holders.

ISSUE

Public Housing Solar Investment

Residents living in public housing are unable to join many Territorians in choosing to install solar panels on their houses and enjoy a cheaper, cleaner energy supply. In line with a commitment to lead the transition to a clean energy future, the NTG should use its existing stock of housing to drive a cheaper, cleaner energy future for public housing residents.

NTCOSS has conducted modelling based on a gradual solar investment in public housing over a 10 year period sees householders' reliance on concessions diminishing and passing savings back to the NTG to continue to invest further. An initial annual investment of \$3 million would see solar installed in 411 houses and as these homeowners no longer receive the power concession, a saving of \$213,288 would be realised. A continuation of this core investment of \$3 million plus additional investment of power concession returns would see the NTG save \$11,664,517 over 10 years and reduce the number of households receiving power concessions (previously 13,332 by 5,707).

ACTIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

Conduct detailed modelling building on NTCOSS modelling of a public housing solar investment project and, once completed, commit at least \$3 million annually over a 10 year period.

5. Social and Community Sector Support

ISSUE

The social and community sector (the Sector) in the NT is large, diverse and provides vital services to the community. The Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) shows that there are more than 450 charities in the NT. Based on Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data, it is estimated that there are approximately 550 additional economically significant not-for-profits with their head office in the NT. There are also many more interstate-based not-for-profits operating in NT. While there is no detailed information on the whole not-for-profits sector, the ACNC data provides accurate information on the sub-set of Not-for-profits that are registered charities. NT's charities alone:

- Employ approximately 7,600 full-time and part-time staff or 8 per cent of the NT workforce. This compares to manufacturing (3,940 people or 4 per cent), agriculture, forestry and fishing (1,871 people or 2 per cent) and mining (2,660 or 3 per cent) as a proportion of NT's workforce;
- Have an estimated \$914 million in net assets, equivalent to 9 per cent of the NT Government's net assets (reported as \$9.8bn);
- Recorded total annual revenue of \$952 million and expenditure of \$860 million. In comparison, total mining income from the NT was \$3 billion and sales from agricultural production were \$580 million;
- Generated over half (51 per cent) of their income from operations and donations (i.e. sources other than governments) and just under half (49 per cent) from government contracts and grants; and
- Paid employee expenses of approximately \$417 million (48 per cent of expenditure), which is fed back into the NT economy.⁶

In recent decades the Sector has experienced major opportunities and disruptions including the outsourcing by governments of human services, competition from commercial companies, the development of outcomes measurement and the introduction of consumer directed care services and the use of new technologies. More than ever, the sector is in a period of significant transformation, associated with major NTG and Australian Government social policy reforms, including:

- The National Disability Insurance Scheme;
- The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse;
- The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability;
- The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety; and
- The NT Royal Commission into Youth Justice.

These changes will have major impacts on the future of the sector and how community social service organisations will need to operate.

In meeting challenges the Sector is going to see increased pressure to be more strategic, and for organisations to be clearer about what they do and how they measure their impact. It is important for government and the community, that charities and not-for-profits are able to perform in competitive markets as their visions, missions and values commonly focus on providing quality of care and other services for our most disadvantaged and vulnerable citizens. These services are frequently provided by way of cross subsidisation to market segments that are not profitable for commercial companies.⁷

⁶ Gilchrist, D. J. and P. A. Knight, (2017), Value of the Not-for-profit Sector 2017: An Examination of the Economic Contribution of the Not-for-profit Human Services Sector in the Northern Territory. A Report for the Northern Territory Council of Social Service, Darwin, Australia.

⁷ Commonwealth of Australia (2018), Strengthening For Purpose: Australian Charities and Not-For-Profits Commission Legislation Review 2018

Data collection and impact measures development will be vital. The *Institute of Community Directors Australia (ICDA): Spotlight Report* presents a snapshot of results relating to impact evaluation and data collection and management. The survey of nearly 1,900 not-for-profit leaders showed that:

- 13 per cent of organisations don't measure success in any way;
- Only 38 per cent of all organisations collect outcomes data; and
- Most not-for-profits rank themselves as no better than average when it comes to managing data collection, analysis and use.⁸

Good data is critical for understanding the health and vibrancy of the sector as a whole. Stakeholders can use this data to promote or challenge policy changes, and illustrate their consequences. Ultimately this should lead to better policy outcomes.⁹ The *Value of the Not-for-profit Sector 2017: An Examination of the Economic Contribution of the Not-for-profit Human Services Sector in the Northern Territory* was the first of this data collected and is due for an update.

Also critical is a plan for the Sector. This work has commenced and the Sector itself will set a vision for human services for the coming 10 years. The themes, priorities and initiatives identified in the plan will provide a foundation for ongoing planning and development. The human services industry plan is about connecting the industry to build capacity, capability and collective strengths; it identifies priority areas that need to be addressed, and desired outcomes that the industry wish to achieve. Achieving these outcomes will help the industry maximise growth and workforce opportunities whilst delivering quality services. It will highlight the significant role that the industry plays in the lives and well-being of all Territorians and the communities in which they live; placing the industry in a sustainable position against ongoing reform and change.

What we inherently know is that the Sector plays a major role in building and maintaining community cohesion and providing opportunities for engagement, volunteering and relationship building. Information about their real impact on the NT economy and the community is not clearly understood. The Sector needs to be able to understand itself, measure impact and plan for the future.

ACTIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

The NTG to provide funding to support the study and development of a subsequent "Value of the Sector" Report, under the auspice of NTCOSS and inclusive of the recommended Human Services Economic Impact Analysis.

The NTG to assist in better data collection about the sector and support sector organisations to become more confident in tracking their impact by providing funding for measurement creation and evaluation in funding agreements.

The NTG and NGO Partnership Group (NNPG) to take on the governance of the Human Services Industry Plan (including the Initiatives Action Plan and Future-Proofing the Industry Framework).

⁸ Institute of Community Directors Australia (2019), NFP Governance Survey 2019 ICDA Spotlight Report: NFP Impact & Data.

⁹ Gilchrist, D. J. and P. A. Knight, (2017), Value of the Not-for-profit Sector 2017: An Examination of the Economic Contribution of the Not-for-profit Human Services Sector in the Northern Territory. A Report for the Northern Territory Council of Social Service, Darwin, Australia.

6. Climate Justice

ISSUE

Climate change is already affecting people experiencing poverty and disadvantage and its effects will increase each year. There are a number of impacts from climate change, including an increase in extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, fires and cyclones, increases in extremes of temperature, including hotter mean average temperatures and a higher number of hotter days. Each of these climate change impacts affects people experiencing poverty and disadvantage disproportionately.

People experiencing poverty and disadvantage are the most likely to be first affected by climate change and are much less likely to have the resources available to them to mitigate these effects. For example, they may be unable to run air-conditioning, lack the financial resources to move to an area less affected by a form of climate change, be unable to take out insurance, improve building efficiency or afford to install solar energy to obtain cheaper power.

They are also more likely to experience personal circumstances such as homelessness, remoteness and poverty that make them the most vulnerable to climate change.

As a result, we must prioritise equity and reducing disadvantage as a priority as we undertake mitigation and transition planning.

ACTIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

NTCOSS calls on the NTG to*:

- **Provide incentives for private, public housing and social landlords to improve energy and water efficiency, including NTG investment in retrofitting housing and providing access to information, education and workshops that support smarter energy and water usage.**
- **Implement, through cross-sector engagement, a clear climate policy that focuses on the NTG leading adaptation planning, transition planning for workers and communities and community resilience building with respect to the impacts of climate change effects and the shift to a renewable economy.**
- **Legislate targets to achieve 100 per cent renewables and net zero emissions.**

*Refer to NTCOSS's submission to the draft *NTG Climate Change Response: Towards 2050* for full details of NTCOSS's 12 recommendations to meet these broad recommendations.

7. Housing and Homelessness

ISSUE

The NT has the highest rate of people experiencing homelessness than anywhere else in the country, with more than 13,500 Territorians experiencing homelessness at a rate that is 12 times the national rate.¹⁰

NTCOSS supports the policy positions of NT Shelter, the peak body for affordable housing and homelessness. NTCOSS supports actions from their pre-budget submissions past and present to be undertaken, including:

- **Maintaining expenditure on social services** to ensure that disadvantage across the community does not rise. Cuts to specialist homelessness services and social services risks causing significant social distress, such as increasing rates of homelessness, domestic violence and decreased wellbeing generally.
- **Negotiating a fairer deal with the Commonwealth Government** to reflect the disproportionate need of Northern Territorians for homelessness and housing funding.
- **Greater collaboration between NTG agencies** in relation to housing to incorporate decision makers across multiple departments whose decisions affect housing.

ACTIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

Review and adopt NT Shelter's policy positions and pre-budget submission asks on affordable housing and homelessness in the NT.

ISSUE

NTCOSS supports the work led by a coalition of social and community services organisations to make renting fairer for Northern Territorians.

The NT has the highest proportion of renters of any State or Territory, with conservative estimates pointing to 42 per cent of Territorians renting and some organisations claiming this statistic to be more than 50 per cent.¹¹¹² Renting laws in the NT have not changed significantly in more than 20 years and need to be updated to include standards and safeguards that are commonplace in other Australian jurisdictions. The high proportion of the population affected by these laws and their vulnerability to the ambiguity of some laws and the lack of safeguards in other areas necessitates this action further.

The NTG has commenced a review of tenancy laws and NTCOSS believes this review should include scope to end to evictions without good reason, protect victims of DFSV living in rental accommodation, establish an Independent Authority to hold all bonds, create legislative underpinning for reasonable rents and minimum standards of housing and provide regulation of fees and charges (such as break lease fees) so that they are not unreasonable and unfair.

¹⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016 <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/2049.0>

¹¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Household Characteristics, 2015-16 <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/6530.0Main%20Features62015-16?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=6530.0&issue=2015-16&num=&view=>

¹² NT Shelter, Joint Statement: Making Renting Fair, Safe and Certain, 2019 <https://ntshelter.org.au/document/joint-statement-make-renting-fair-safe-and-certain/>

ACTIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

The NTG should ensure that the review into to residential tenancy legislation includes broad consultation to ensure that changes make it safer, fairer and more secure to rent in the NT.

8. NT Human Rights Act

ISSUE

All Northern Territorians would benefit from having their human rights enshrined in legislation.

Other jurisdictions have introduced Human Rights Acts, with Queensland passing its Act in February 2019 and the Australian Capital Territory and Victoria (Charter of Rights) passing theirs in previous years.

Currently, the *Human Rights (Parliamentary Scrutiny) Act 2011 (Cth)* is the only instrument that guides legislation and public authorities to act with regard to Territorians' Human Rights.

An NT Human Rights Act would provide protection for vulnerable and disadvantaged Northern Territorians, and would safeguard the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who experience disproportionately high levels of disempowerment, disadvantage and discrimination.

A Human Rights Act that includes protection of cultural rights would be consistent with the NTG's commitment to the AJA.

Enshrining human right in NT would demonstrate the NTG's commitment to protecting, promoting, respecting and fulfilling the human rights of Northern Territorians, and strengthen our democracy.

ACTIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

Commit to the development of an NT Human Rights Act and resource the consultation and implementation.

9. Increasing the revenue base

ISSUE

Own-source revenue raising is a critical part of the NTG's Budget. The NT has a limited capacity to raise its own income, and as a result it is essential that any own-source revenue raising reforms are not detrimental to social and economic wellbeing in the NT. The NT taxation and revenue raising system must be both effective and fair. It should not place undue burden nor have undue impact on low income and disadvantaged Northern Territorians.

An area in relation to the revenue base that is overdue for reform is the treatment of online gambling in the NT. Online wagering is now the most common form of better in the NT and there is an opportunity for the NT to modernise its approach to reflect the changed gambling environment.

NTCOSS recommends lifting or removing the cap on wagering tax, which is currently set at only 500,000 revenue units. This is equivalent to \$605,000 in 2019/20 revenue units. Removing the cap would mean that high earning online wagering providers would pay a fairer share of tax.

In addition to online gambling reform, NTCOSS advocates for stamp duties to be replaced with a broad-based land tax to more equitably distribute the tax burden regarding properties in the NT.

ACTIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

NTCOSS recommends urgent reform to the tax treatment of online gambling in the NT as per our previous submissions. NTCOSS has made three previous submissions in relation to the treatment of online gambling including a [submission to the NT Revenue Review 2018](#), in our [2019-20 Pre-Budget Submission](#) and as part of our [NT Budget Repair Submission](#). Current conditions mean this is the ideal opportunity to discuss and implement the recommendations contained in these submissions.

NTCOSS recommends that the NT remove the cap on wagering tax that currently exists in the NT.

NTCOSS supports the replacement of stamp duties with a broad-based land tax that includes the following features:

- Ease of payment (monthly or quarterly billing)
- Protection for low income earners through adequate concessions and provisions for deferred payment and/or reverse mortgaging
- Fair transition arrangements that do not leave householders out of pocket
- Progressive exemption from land taxes for land used for charitable purposes
- Exemptions for Aboriginal-owned land
- Protection for community housing providers.

NTCOSS acknowledges that any transition from stamp duty to an annual land tax with options to pay quarterly may have an initial one-off negative effect on NT revenue but most proposals involve a longer term transition which would limit the impact. For instance, the transition in the ACT is being implemented over a 20 year period, while other options for the NTG to explore could include making land tax only apply to future sales of certain properties (i.e. no change to existing properties) or as a voluntary opt-in (with any property sold stamp duty free being made permanently land taxable). These proposals may still have a short-term budget impact, but it is more limited than for instance if all stamp duties are lost to the budget in one year.