



NTCOSS Pre Budget Submission 2022 – 2023

December 2021

Foreword

Once again, this next budget comes at a challenging time during a period of rapid change in the Northern Territory (NT). Over the past year we have seen continued, exceptional levels of cooperation and coordination between our community, political leaders, government departments, community service providers and businesses in responding to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

A budget is a moral statement of priorities, with the potential to be an investment in hope, and the Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) calls on the Northern Territory Government (NT Government) to deliver a budget that puts people and community at the centre. This Pre-Budget Submission recommends investment initiatives to the NT Government for inclusion in the 2022-23 budget and in subsequent budgets.

NTCOSS acknowledges the work of the NT Government since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in stimulating the economy, but low-income households have missed out on these schemes, and most of the benefits have been seen in regional rather than remote areas. As the NT Government's priorities shift to economic recovery and stimulus, investing in the community and social services sector remains as important as ever.

NTCOSS commends the NT Government on several initiatives over the past year, including investing \$40,000 to provide free menstrual hygiene products in NT Government schools; committing 4.5 million funding for the implementation of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement; delivering five year funding for the NTCOSS Domestic Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV) policy project; committing \$7.5 million to support the delivery of services in a new Domestic Violence Crisis Facility in Palmerston; the recent announcement of a further investment of \$15 million towards infrastructure upgrades and refurbishments for remote women's safe houses and crisis accommodation services; and the recently announced partnership grants programs for specialist DFSV services and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) to partner together to improve responses for Aboriginal Territorians.

The initiatives outlined in this Pre-Budget Submission are designed to bring economic stimulus, while also investing in a sustainable, fair future for all Territorians. We must focus on building back stronger and more resilient, with a focus on people most at risk and on improving liveability in the NT.

This Pre-Budget Submission recommends initiatives that draw on good practices from around Australia and are aligned with the NT Government's Social Outcomes Framework. The recommended initiatives are clear, practical and evidence-based and will lead to better outcomes for all Territorians.



Deborah Di Natale

Chief Executive Officer, NTCOSS

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The voice of our sector

NTCOSS is an advocate for social justice, on behalf of people and communities in the NT who may be affected by poverty and disadvantage.

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 is the not-for-profit member-based peak body for the NT's community and social services sector (the community sector).

The community sector is made up of community managed, non-government, not for profit organisations which work in community service delivery, sector development and advocacy. NTCOSS represents 134 members, including peak bodies, ACCOs, large charities, small grassroots organisations and individual members.

NTCOSS consulted with its members and other community sector organisations this year to inform the preparation of this submission for the NT Government's 2022-23 Budget.

As with the rest of the world, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on all Territorians, hitting those who are experiencing the most vulnerability and risk the hardest. Our sector has reported significant increases in demand for support, and we saw a repeat of the responses in 2020, with community services rapidly stepping up crisis support and harm prevention, particularly in the latter part of 2021. The coordination of the community sector to address the impact of COVID-19 on our communities has been outstanding, with highly effective partnerships and collaboration established across the NT. Our sector is responsive and agile, and NTCOSS has worked hard alongside our members and the NT Government to advocate for the sector, and to help facilitate accurate and timely communication to keep our sector and communities informed and safe.

Not only does the community sector employ more than 10,300 people, but community services also play a vital role in creating social wellbeing for all 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, family, and community life.

Key Recommendations

Territorians are safe

- Increase funding for youth diversion programs – at a minimum each youth diversion program has a male and female worker
- Fully fund a youth peak body in the NT to support continued collaborative partnerships between governments, the non-government youth sector, and young people in the NT
- Invest in crisis accommodation and support services for young people experiencing and using domestic, family and sexual violence across the NT
- Reallocate funding from purchased home based care to funding early support for families and building capacity of foster and kinship carers
- Fully fund implementation of NT Government frameworks, action plans and service systems introduced as part of the domestic, family, and sexual violence reduction reform agenda
- Increase investment in initiatives that stop violence at the start, including programs with a primary prevention and early intervention focus across the spectrum of service delivery
- Invest in developing a strong, sustainable, and capable domestic, family, and sexual violence workforce
- Increase investment in community service providers to meet increased demand due to the ERO and indexation
- Invest in specialist services to respond to violence in our remote communities

Territorians are able to live a healthy life

- Fully fund a youth peak body in the NT or Youth Voice NT to facilitate tailored training and workforce development sessions for the NT Youth Sector

Territorians have appropriate and secure housing

- Fund the development and implementation of a plan to meet energy efficiency commitments to new and existing buildings
- Significantly increase investment in the maintenance of urban and remote public housing

The Territory has a natural and built environment that supports a high quality of life

- Fully fund the NT Government's Climate Change Response [Three-Year Action Plan](#)
- Invest in transitioning to the equitable and affordable generation, distribution, and retail of renewable energy across the NT

Territorians are financially secure and have material basics

- Invest in an energy and cost of living package for Territorians on low incomes and experiencing vulnerabilities
- Invest in a review to identify and address gaps in regional centre public transport

The Northern Territory Social Outcomes Framework

In recognition of the recently developed Northern Territory Social Outcomes Framework and the opportunity it provides to drive better outcomes by articulating shared goals for Territorians, this submission promotes initiatives under the following Domains¹:

Domain: Territorians are safe

Relevant Outcomes:

- NT children and young people have safe environments
- Territorians are safe from abuse and violence
- The justice system meets the needs of Territorians

Domain: Territorians are able to live a healthy life

Relevant Outcomes:

- Territorians have the best physical and mental health throughout their lives

Domain: Territorians have appropriate and secure housing

Relevant Outcomes:

- Territorians are living in the right home for the right time in the right location
- Housing costs do not put Territorians in financial stress

Domain: The Territory has a natural and built environment that supports a high quality of life

Relevant Outcomes:

- Territory communities are resilient to climate change
- NT infrastructure has no barriers to social inclusion

Domain: Territorians are financially secure and have material basics

Relevant Outcomes:

- All Territorians can participate in the money economy
- All Territorians have affordable and secure food, water, and energy

¹ Northern Territory Government, (2021), Northern Territory Social Outcomes Framework

Territorians are safe

The initiatives explained below will help to achieve the following outcomes, which fall under the domain of 'Territorians are safe':

- NT children and young people have safe environments
- Territorians are safe from abuse and violence
- The justice system meets the needs of Territorians

Increase funding for youth diversion programs – at a minimum each youth diversion program has a male and female worker

Despite the NT Government's key reform principle to improve youth justice and keep children out of detention, the over-imprisonment of Aboriginal children and young people remains one of most significant human rights issues in the NT. NTCOSS and advocates have made multiple policy recommendations to address this issue, which must be underpinned by evidenced and well-funded programmatic responses.

Across Australia, young people who participate in diversion programs have significantly better outcomes than those who go through detention. In the NT, 76% of young people returned to sentenced supervision within 12 months of being released from detention.² However, in many places diversion program providers are operating at capacity and are unable to appropriately meet the demand. There are examples of remote service providers receiving funding for one full time equivalent employee, to cover diversion for multiple communities (nine in one case study) across geographically large regions. Service providers report barriers in providing culturally appropriate and safe diversion support for young women, due to the lack of female support workers.

At a minimum, diversion programs should be funded to employ two diversion workers to better meet demand, and to have the capacity to employ one female and one male worker.

Further, it is recommended that the NT Government fund non-government diversion service providers to convene youth justice group conferencing to assist in addressing delays in the youth diversion process. Research shows that diversion responses and interventions are most effective for the child, including in affecting change, when held in a timely manner after the offence has been committed and it is still 'fresh' in the child's mind. Further, research suggests that interventions are more impactful when delivered in a culturally safe way, in an appropriate setting (e.g., on country) and when delivered by respected community leaders.³ Non-government, community-owned organisations with local connections and holistic approaches are well placed to convene conferences in this context.

Fully fund a youth peak body in the NT to support continued collaborative partnerships between governments, the non-government youth sector, and young people in the NT

The first phase of NTCOSS' Youth Voice NT project found that there is an opportunity and need for enhanced coordination and collaboration across the NT youth sector. Currently, the onus falls on youth service providers to coordinate networking opportunities; promote information sharing across

²AIHW, (2021), *Young people returning to sentenced youth justice supervision 2019-20*

³ Cunneen, Russell and Schwartz (2021), *Principles in diversion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people from the criminal jurisdiction*, *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, 33:2, 170-190

regions; and advocate on priorities within the NT youth sector.

While there are existing youth networks and youth coordinators in several regions across the NT, there is no peak body or group that brings together youth service providers and networks across the NT. This brokerage role is essential for sharing promising practices within the NT youth sector; creating a space for strategic thinking; undertaking policy and advocacy work and coordinating training and workforce development for the sector.

NTCOSS has a long history of attempting to fill this gap through existing funding from the NT Government, however much of NTCOSS' focus is, by necessity, on tertiary responses and reforms in youth justice and care and protection. Current funding levels are insufficient to privilege the targeted coordination, support, advocacy and representation that is required for the diverse NT youth sector.

In November 2020, NTCOSS successfully applied to the Commonwealth Government for funding through the Youth Advocacy Support Grants for the establishment of the Youth Voice NT project, to provide representation on behalf of the NT youth sector and young people to Government on issues affecting young people across the NT. This funding was awarded for a 12-month period and expired on 30 November 2021. NTCOSS has been informed that the Commonwealth Government will not continue the youth advocacy grants, and considers the funding of peak bodies/roles such as Youth Voice NT to be the responsibility of states and territories.

The Youth Voice NT project money enabled NTCOSS to employ a specialist project officer with extensive knowledge of Commonwealth and NT Government policy and processes; engage actively with members to participate meaningfully with policy areas beyond tertiary systems; elevate the voices of young people in feedback to youth services, the NT and Commonwealth Government; develop a youth-specific information clearinghouse on the new Youth Voice NT website; and represent the NT youth sector and young people at national forums.

At a minimum, NTCOSS recommends the NT Government provide ongoing funding for the Youth Voice NT project, under a 5-year contract as per Good Practice Guidelines for Funding non-government Organisations. This will enable streamlined consultation processes with the youth sector across the NT; increased support for youth sector development and capability; strategic engagement with the youth sector and the NT Government; representation of issues and opportunities relating to young Territorians at national forums and assist in changing the narrative around young Territorians.

Invest in crisis accommodation and support services (including social, emotional, legal representation and advice) for young people experiencing and using domestic, family and sexual violence

In the NTCOSS 2021-2022 Pre-Budget Submission, the lack of investment in the provision of services for young people experiencing and using DFSV, particularly in the crisis accommodation and service support area, was highlighted. The shortage of crisis accommodation available to young people experiencing DFSV, including young mothers and their children, is a major gap across the NT.

NTCOSS notes various Government commitments to supporting young people through other measures such as: \$300 000 per year to implement priority actions under the NT Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework 2020-2028 and Priority actions: 2020-2021 to meet various

outcomes, including that ‘children and young people who experience sexual violence are safe and supported to heal’, as well as funding one service in Central Australia and one in the Top End to provide homelessness support to young people. However, the lack of investment in DFSV specific crisis services is acute.

NTCOSS recommends identified funding for specialist providers and services to address this gap in provision. The need for such funding to be invested in multiple service regions is critical for increased access and program support for young people.

Reallocate funding from purchased home based care, which increased in 2021, to funding early support for families and building capacity of foster and kinship carers

As previously highlighted in NTCOSS’ 2021-22 Pre-Budget Submission, the largest proportion of funding for services directly relevant to the prevention of harm to children in the NT is allocated to statutory child protection services. Further, despite commitments to phasing out the financially unstable and unsuitable purchased home-based care for children in out-of-home care (OOHC) by December 2021, the NT Government has continued to spend a considerable, and increasing, amount of money on these services.

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap commits governments to work in partnership with Aboriginal people to achieve a target of reducing Aboriginal over-representation in OOHC by 45% in 2031. In order to achieve this target in the NT, it is critical that the NT Government increases investment in prevention and early family support programs, so that it matches the investment in child protection services.

NTCOSS commended the NT Government on the 2020 [election commitment](#) to transferring the purchase of private providers to family-based kinship and foster carers, into family support and early intervention services. Increased investment in family support programs will support children to grow up safe and cared for by family, in community and connected to culture.

Reinvesting the substantial funding from purchased home-based care to the ongoing recruitment and support for kinship and foster carers; embedding ACCO-led service delivery in the OOHC system; and investing in early family support is needed to ensure that Aboriginal children’s safety and wellbeing is at the heart of this system.

Fully fund implementation of NT Government frameworks, action plans and service systems introduced as part of the domestic, family, and sexual violence reduction reform agenda

NTCOSS acknowledges the breadth of work undertaken by the Government in DFSV reduction in our communities, notably; the introduction and implementation of the NT Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework 2020-2028 and introduction of the related action plans; introduction of the DFSV Workforce and Sector Development Plan; the introduction of the Gender Equality Statement of Commitment and drafting of the first related action plan; introduction of the Sexual Violence Prevention Framework and related first action plan; introduction and early implementation of the Risk Assessment Management Framework Training and Common Risk Assessment Tool; and the introduction of Information Sharing Entities.

Despite the broad reform agenda, the level of investment in the above frameworks and action plans is still minimal. In 2021-22, \$6.49 million was allocated for the final year of Action Plan 1 (matching earlier annual investment), including \$300 000 for the Sexual Violence Prevention Framework – Action Plan 1, with no funding allocated for the implementation of the Gender Equality Statement of Commitment – Action Plan 1.

While NTCOSS commends the Government’s commitment to a multifaceted and broad reform agenda, this must be matched with adequate funding and resourcing.

The recently released [NTCOSS Action Plan 2 NGO Consultation Report](#) includes priority and focus areas to be included in the development of the next Action Plan, including program and training recommendations to meet the needs of the diverse communities across the Territory. NTCOSS heard from a range of organisations from across the Territory and community sector about what they feel has worked well since the introduction of the Framework and the first Action Plan, along with concerns and priorities to be considered for any future Action Plans.

NTCOSS calls for the implementation of both the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction Framework 2018 – 2028 - Action Plan 2 and the Gender Equality Statement of Commitment – Action Plan 1 to be fully costed before delivery, and adequate and appropriate resourcing allocated to meet the outcomes of these plans. Both plans are pivotal to the success of reducing DFSV in our communities on a primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention level.

Investing in staff resourcing to the Office of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction within the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities, would assist the Government in implementing actions under the 10-year reduction Framework and creating a future where women and children are safe, respected, and free from violence. Specific investment in two additional staff positions to respectively lead the implementation of the Risk Assessment Management Framework and the Sexual Violence Prevention Framework is required to achieve the outcomes under these important policy reforms.

Ensuring adequate funding across the breadth of the reform process gives us the greatest chance to succeed in reducing the prevalence of violence in our communities.

Increase investment in initiatives that stop violence at the start, including programs with a primary prevention and early intervention focus across the spectrum of service delivery (including in schools).

Through commitment to the [National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 – Fourth Action Plan](#), primary prevention and early intervention is a key priority of governments and service providers across Australia. While the NT Government has committed to a broad reform agenda within the Framework, including increased provision of therapeutic supports and primary prevention programs, there is no specific allocation of funding for the increased implementation of such programs. Increased investment in this area, including delivery of programs in schools, is essential for successful implementation of the Framework.

NTCOSS recommends investment in primary prevention, early support initiatives and therapeutic supports, while maintaining crucial funding to crisis support services, to assist people impacted by DFSV.

The Safe, Respected and Free from Violence Prevention Grants were awarded with the aim to support localised projects, activities, actions, and pilot programs that seek to challenge and change social and cultural attitudes, values and structures that underpin DFSV. Increasing investment in these programs (through long term program funding allocations) as the primary prevention funding stream for non-government organisations in the Territory, would result in increased primary prevention and early support program provision; allow services to implement specific and considered initiatives; and enable the evaluation and monitoring of service provision, resulting in enhanced program outcomes.

Invest in developing a strong, sustainable and capable domestic, family and sexual violence workforce

The comprehensive DFSV Workforce Sector Development Plan (WSDP) has the support of the specialist service sector, however, ensuring the appropriate resources and funding are put in place for effective implementation is crucial. To ensure successful implementation, it is necessary to identify the actual cost of developing the Plan in its entirety, and how this will be resourced. It is essential that this does not come at the detriment of service providers and their current resources and ability to maintain programs.

NTCOSS acknowledges the Government's commitment of \$1 million to the implementation of the WSDP. While it is positive that funding has been announced for the implementation of this important work, NTCOSS recommends that the Government identify the actual cost of the entire implementation of the WSDP and related initiatives, including a best practice independent DFSV resource centre that will meet the needs of all workers, and increase investment accordingly.

Increase investment in community service providers to meet increased demand, due to the Equal Remuneration Order and ongoing indexation

Funding certainty is essential for our sector to continue to deliver services now and into the future in the NT. NTCOSS welcomed the NT Government's commitment to moving to five-year contracts, and recommends that this be fully rolled out across all NT Government-funded services, to ensure the sustainability and security of our sector.

With the Federal Government's commitment to continue funding for Equal Remuneration Order (ERO) supplementation in most services funded only through the Department of Social Services, there are many vital community service providers, including domestic violence and alcohol and other drug services, that have been left out of this commitment. This is already having a significant impact on many of our service providers reliant on Federal Government funding. NTCOSS calls on the NT Government to lobby the Federal Government to maintain ERO funding, to ensure services can meet pay increases for staff in the community sector.

It is also essential that the NT Government meet the increasing staffing costs for our sector as a result of the Fair Work Ombudsman Annual Wage Review.

NTCOSS also recommends that NT Government funding contracts meet the real and increasing costs of service delivery relating to indexation, with annual increases to reflect these costs.

Invest in the delivery of specialist services (including social, emotional, legal representation and advice) to respond to violence in our remote communities

Challenges in addressing rates of DFSV in the NT are impacted by geographical factors. Effective service responses to support victims and perpetrators of DFSV in remote areas are a unique and complex challenge. While there is funding allocated to safe houses and for non-government organisations to provide DFSV reduction services in some remote communities, there is an undersupply of preventative and specialist service responses.

NTCOSS recommends that the NT Government increase investment to enhance the provision of preventative services in remote communities and greater investment in remote DFSV service delivery models, to ensure service continuity and capacity to meet the therapeutic needs of clients.

Territorians are able to live a healthy life

The initiative explained below will help to achieve the following outcome, which falls under the domain of 'Territorians are able to live a healthy life':

- Territorians have the best physical and mental health throughout their lives

Fully fund a youth peak body in the NT or Youth Voice NT to facilitate tailored training and workforce development sessions for the NT Youth Sector

Youth service providers identified the need for greater access to culturally appropriate mental health first aid training and suicide prevention training across the NT. Young people have highlighted the need for increased investment in peer support and mentoring programs designed specifically for, and with, young people to support their social and emotional wellbeing. It is recommended that the NT Government invest in the development and delivery of culturally appropriate resources, including in first languages for young people from diverse backgrounds on mental health and suicide.

NTCOSS recommends investing in the development and provision of locally relevant respectful relationships training for young people, to be delivered in both formal education settings and through social service providers. There is a lack of investment in the provision of services for young people experiencing and using DFSV and for primary prevention and early intervention programs in the NT. It is critical to ensure that the NT Government invests in culturally appropriate programs, which are locally designed and supported; specifically tailored for young Territorians and their families; and implemented in collaboration with both the specialist DFSV and youth sectors. By supporting young people to address behaviours and access early support, positive benefits will be experienced in education, care and protection and other social determinants of health.

Territorians have appropriate and secure housing

The initiatives explained below will help to achieve the following outcomes, which fall under the domain of ‘Territorians have appropriate and secure housing’:

- Territorians are living in the right home for the right time in the right location
- Housing costs do not put Territorians in financial stress

Fund the development and implementation of a plan to meet energy efficiency commitments to new and existing buildings

Housing must be fit for purpose, including appropriate thermal comfort. Improved energy efficiency standards for all dwellings will reduce energy bills, improve health and wellbeing of residents, create jobs, reduce the NT’s carbon emissions, reduce demand for energy, and improve equity across the whole of the NT.

The NT Government can support people to make their homes more comfortable and healthy in extreme weather. This is critical to protecting the health and wellbeing of people experiencing vulnerabilities, which is becoming increasingly important as temperatures continue to rise due to climate change.

It is recommended that the NT Government fund the development and implementation of a plan to meet commitments made through the Federal Government’s [Trajectory For Low Energy Buildings](#) and the Addendum to the [Trajectory for Low Energy Buildings – Existing Buildings](#).

In the immediate future, NTCOSS recommends that the NT Government allocate funding for the development of a detailed plan for achieving low energy buildings in the NT, and provide funding for community services and housing organisations to fully engage with this process.

Significantly increase investment in the maintenance of urban and remote public housing

As identified in the Federal Government’s [Remote Housing Review](#), ‘houses deteriorate quickly without ongoing maintenance and repairs’⁴. ‘Planned cyclic maintenance, with a focus on health related hardware’ and functionality of housing is essential to increasing the longevity of housing and improving health and wellbeing outcomes for people living in public housing⁵. The current per-dwelling budget for repairs and maintenance on public housing in the NT is at roughly 50% of the equivalent per-dwelling budget for housing in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, which have similar social and environmental circumstances as in the NT.

It is recommended that the NT Government doubles investment in the maintenance of urban and remote public housing, so that housing meets health and building standards, which will have the added benefit of improving local employment opportunities in remote areas.

⁴ p2 Commonwealth of Australia, 2017, *Remote Housing Review: A review of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing and the Remote Housing Strategy (2008-2018)*, accessed at https://parliament.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/706683/TP-5-1.pdf

⁵ *ibid*

The Territory has a natural and built environment that supports a high quality of life

The initiatives explained below will help to achieve the following outcomes, which fall under the domain of ‘the Territory has a natural and built environment that supports a high quality of life’:

- Territory communities are resilient to climate change
- NT infrastructure has no barriers to social inclusion

Fully fund the NT Government’s Climate Change Response [Three-Year Action Plan](#)

Climate change is one of the most significant issues facing people, communities, economies, and our planet. People experiencing disadvantage and poverty are the most vulnerable to its impacts, and to a poorly managed transition to clean energy. The NT is already experiencing the impacts of higher temperatures, sea level rise and more frequent and/or intense weather events. These impacts threaten people’s homes, country, culture, livelihoods, health, quality of life, and employment, and increase risks and burdens for future generations.

The establishment and appropriate funding of regional community response mechanisms to develop local plans to address climate change and plan adaptation strategies is required, to ensure no one is left behind in the transition to a low carbon future.

NTCOSS calls on the NT Government to fully fund its Climate Change Response Three-Year Action Plan. Specifically, to provide funding to meet Priority 2.5 of the 3 Year Action Plan: Support Territorians to respond and adapt to the impacts of climate change. This includes prioritising the identification of risks to human health associated with climate change, with funding provided to a community health organisation(s) to work on this action. It is also recommended that the NT Government work with the sector to develop climate change risk adaptation and response frameworks, and fund services to work with communities to develop adaptation plans, policy, and mechanisms to build resilience, and to achieve equity.

If managed well, the transition to a cleaner economy is an opportunity to create a stronger, more just, equitable and sustainable Territory. NTCOSS urges the NT Government to make a commitment to immediate action to address climate change, with equity at the centre of emissions reduction, mitigation, and adaptation planning.

Invest in transitioning to the equitable and affordable generation, distribution, and retail of renewable energy across the NT

The NT has unlimited solar resources and NTCOSS calls on the NT Government to develop and implement a plan to expand generation of and access to renewable energy across the NT, including developing local and regional renewable energy plans. Households on low incomes are often locked out of the clean energy market across Australia, including in the NT.

It is recommended that the NT Government invest in a program to install rooftop solar photovoltaic (PV) panels on social and public housing dwellings. People on low incomes will significantly benefit from the installation of PV systems, with significant savings on energy bills which can then be spent on other essential needs, and an increase in thermal comfort. It is recommended that the NT take

inspiration from examples of successful models in other jurisdictions that are delivering positive social, economic and environmental impacts, including [South Australia's virtual power plant](#); [New South Wales' Solar for Low Income Households Trial](#); and [Western Australia's Smart Energy for Social Housing trial](#).

Territorians are financially secure and have material basics

The initiatives explained below will help to achieve the following outcomes, which fall under the domain of 'Territorians are financially secure and have material basics':

- All Territorians can participate in the money economy
- All Territorians have affordable and secure food, water and energy

Invest in an energy and cost of living package for Territorians on low incomes and experiencing vulnerabilities

In the NT, many households living in poverty experience energy insecurity, leading to people falling behind on the payment of their utility bills or using up pre-paid electricity credit; restricting energy consumption; relying on poor quality and inefficient appliances; or the inability to meet other essential living costs due to prioritising energy bills. For households on low incomes, energy poverty can lead to negative health, social and economic outcomes.

State and territory governments have made [in-principle commitments](#) to ensure that rental accommodation meets minimum energy efficiency requirements. Investing in energy efficiency initiatives for low-income households will create jobs, stimulate our economy, lower emissions, and help Territorians to have a higher quality of life.

As in previous Pre-Budget submissions, NTCOSS urges the NT Government to invest in extending the NT concession scheme to all Commonwealth Health Care Card holders and increasing the availability of energy payment vouchers. As part of an energy and cost of living package, this will assist households on low incomes and those living in poverty to meet cost of living pressures, and will address the adequacy and equity of concessions in the NT.

NTCOSS recommends the inclusion in the energy and cost of living package, of a funding program to assist households on low incomes, including those in social housing and private rentals, to achieve better energy efficiency. This program will include the installation of energy efficient appliances and fittings, modifying the building and its surrounds where possible.

The NT has the highest proportion of renting households in Australia, with approximately 43% of people in the private rental market, or in public housing, or community and social housing provided by a range of housing services. Anecdotal evidence, including reports from financial counsellors and housing support workers, suggests that many renters in the NT live in houses and units that have low to extremely low energy performance, leading to greater energy costs for heating and cooling.

This package will include investment in low income housing, including social housing, to ensure health hardware can achieve safety and the [9 healthy living practices](#). Repairs and maintenance, renovations and rebuilding of social housing should ensure social housing continues to be fit for purpose for its lifetime.

Building more efficient homes, including upgrading existing infrastructure, is critical to building resilience to climate change impacts, cutting bills for people experiencing vulnerabilities, and creating healthier housing.

Invest in a review to identify and address gaps in regional centre public transport

NTCOSS recommends the investment in a review of regional centre public transport, to facilitate an informed response to transport issues in the NT. It is recommended that this review explores best practice approaches, and considers accessibility, affordability, equity, and carbon emissions to improve transport options for Territorians in regional and remote areas.

Transport options, especially in regional and remote NT, are limited and expensive, and the cost of fuel in remote areas of the NT is exorbitant. Affordable and accessible transport services are essential for households experiencing vulnerabilities to access essential services, seek and hold employment, and to access affordable, fresh, and nutritious food.

Improving public transport and regional and remote transport networks across the NT would significantly ease cost of living pressures and improve food security across the NT, particularly for residents on low incomes. NTCOSS commends the Government on the election commitment to review current available funding for regional and remote transport services and calls on the NT Government to establish a consultation and planning process that allows local engagement and leads to the development of local, regional and NT transport plans based on principles of access and equity.

References

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