

# NTCOSS

Northern Territory Council of Social Service



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Office of Disability  
Social Inclusion  
Department of People, Sport and Culture  
NT Government

Via email: [OfficeofDisability.DPSC@nt.gov.au](mailto:OfficeofDisability.DPSC@nt.gov.au)

To the Office of Disability,

**RE: NT Disability Action Plan 2025-2029**

The Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) is the peak body for the Territory (NT) community and social services sector. NTCOSS membership is made up of community-managed, non-government, not for profit organisations which work in social and community service delivery, sector development and advocacy.

NTCOSS recently engaged with 65 people across 42 NTCOSS member organisations to understand the priorities of the sector of the coming year. These organisations ranged from small service providers to peak bodies and spanned an array of sectors and geographies. We present several of the recommendations below for consideration to support the outcomes listed in the *NT Disability Strategy Action Plan 2025-2029 Consultation Paper*.

In addition to these recommendations however are some considerations regarding the circumstances of the NT's social and community sector. The sector employs 13 000 employees across the NT, in regional, remote and very remote areas, servicing members of the NT community from birth to old age. This includes many vital services for people with disability. For instance, independent advocacy services, legal services, emergency relief and financial counselling, children and family services, and domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) services. The community sector has been struggling with underfunding for almost a decade, leading to reduced and disrupted service delivery and placing organisations under constant financial strain. When services are not adequately funded, people in crisis often miss out on the support they need. As such, grant funding for this sector must be adjusted to reflect the true cost of service delivery and to support the desired outcomes of this action plan.

As such NTCOSS recommends:

**Recommendation 1: Remove efficiency dividends for social service sector grant funding.**

The NTG’s 2025/26 decision to replace the 1% efficiency dividend with a two-thirds discount for frontline services was a welcome recognition that community services are under severe pressure. However, efficiency dividends are fundamentally incompatible with the nature of frontline work, where demand is rising and costs cannot simply be absorbed through “efficiencies.” To ensure funding keeps pace with real need, future grants should fully remove efficiency dividends.

**Outcome 1: People with disability have rights and choices which are protected and respected**

**Recommendation 2: Double the funding for disability and mental health advocacy services.**

Advocacy plays a critical role in ensuring that people with disability can navigate systems, access their rights, and hold government and services to account. Currently, demand for disability advocacy services in the NT far outstrips supply, leaving many people without the support they need. Further, there is no independent disability advocacy for students at NT schools, or independent mental health advocacy.

Well-resourced advocacy services help resolve issues early, preventing crises and reducing reliance on more costly interventions in health, justice and housing systems. This funding will help ensure specialist advocacy is available for people with complex needs.

**Outcome 3: People with disability can access the places, information and services they need**

**Recommendation 3: Ensure crisis accommodation and transitional housing is assessable to support victim-survivors with disability who are fleeing violence.<sup>1</sup>**

Women and girls with disabilities experience much higher rates of DFSV than men with disabilities and people without disabilities. A lack of capital funding for the DFSV sector has left shelters and transitional accommodation facilities in a state of disrepair. To ensure safe, appropriate, and sustainable service delivery, we urge a renewed NT-wide commitment to dedicated infrastructure funding for the development and maintenance of fit-for-purpose crisis and transitional accommodation.

The Katherine Women’s Crisis Centre (KWCC) and the Big Rivers sector have identified an urgent need for transitional housing to support victim-survivors and their families leaving violence. Katherine’s housing crisis, combined with public housing waitlists of more than five years (including priority cases), means victim-survivors have few safe, long-term accommodation options.

Furthermore, Dawn House has identified a critical need for infrastructure investments in crisis accommodation in Darwin. The current facilities are not culturally safe, nor are

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<sup>1</sup> As recommended in the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Recommendation 7.35).

they purpose-built to meet the needs of women and children escaping violence. Investments in infrastructure are essential to uphold safety, dignity, and culturally responsive care for those most in need.

NTG should also identify and invest in other place-based gaps in the NT, particularly in Big Rivers, East Arnhem and Barkly, ensuring Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) are resourced to design and deliver responses in their own communities.

**Outcome 4: People with disability have the skills and opportunities to participate in the economy and be financially secure**

**Recommendation 4: Fund NGOs to run school to work transition programs for people with disabilities.**

Longitudinal studies have shown that gaining an after-school job is a strong predictor of post-school employment.<sup>2</sup> People with disabilities however experience significant barriers to entering the workforce. Coordinated programs for students with disability to access support as they leave school will improve employment outcomes in the short term and independence in the long term. Pilot programs that have provided job-readiness support, structured volunteering or placement opportunities, one-to-one mentoring, and assistance with further education pathways (universities, TAFE and apprenticeships) have been proven ‘highly effective’ in the NT.<sup>3</sup> A lack of funding however limits the extent of success. Funding should be granted to support these programs to expand across the Territory.

**Recommendation 5: Introduce a Disability Employment Incentive Program through government procurement contracting.**

The NT Government should preference suppliers who employ people with disability when awarding contracts. This approach has been shown in other jurisdictions to drive cultural change, increase workplace inclusivity, and expand opportunities for people with disability across industries.

**Outcome 5: The health and wellbeing of people with disability is supported**

**Recommendation 6: Conduct consultations to understand the foundational supports that already exist in the NT for children aged zero to nine, and co-design how these foundational support services should be further rolled out across the NT to support implementation of Thriving Kids.**

Foundational supports are critical supports for people with psychosocial disabilities, developmental delays and those with fluctuating impairments.

Currently, there is no understanding of the supports that exist for children aged 0-9, and no strategy for how foundational supports will be rolled out going forward. Given the Territory’s unique demographics and service delivery challenges, a consultation and

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<sup>2</sup> Parmenter, 2011; Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012

<sup>3</sup> Menzies School of Health, Online at <https://youthworxnt.com.au/career-launchpad/>

co-design process is essential to ensure that any foundational supports system is accessible, culturally safe, and fit for purpose in both urban and remote contexts.

The consultation and co-design process should focus on the early years (aged 0 to 9), as early access to foundational support has the most significant impact on long term outcomes. NTG should:

- Engage with people with disability, ACCOs, service providers, and peak bodies to identify gaps and priorities.
- Develop a clear NT-specific framework for delivering foundational supports, aligned with national disability reforms.
- Ensure the process is inclusive of remote communities.
- Ensure people with lived experience are consulted and remunerated.
- Consider a phased funding model or seed grants to help ACCOs running foundational support services get started and become sustainable.

Yours sincerely,

Sally Sievers  
CEO, NT Council of Social Service