



Pre-Budget Submission

2026-2027

About NTCOSS

Northern Territory Council of Social Service (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 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.

What we do

NTCOSS leads initiatives in the community service sector and acts as an independent voice. The social and community sector employs more than 13,000 employees across the NT. By drawing on the expertise of our members, we develop and advocate for socially and economically smart public policy.

Acknowledgements

NTCOSS acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live and work. We pay our respects to the Larrakia people of Garramilla (Darwin), the Arrernte people of Mparntwe (Alice Springs), and the Jawoyn, Dagoman and Wardaman peoples of Katherine, upon whose lands NTCOSS workplaces are located. We extend our respect to Elders past, present across the Northern Territory and Australia. We honour their enduring connection to land, waters, culture and community, and we recognise that sovereignty has never been ceded.

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Executive Summary

The Northern Territory Government (NTG)'s 2026-27 budget comes after another year of social and economic challenges in the NT.

The rising cost of living is placing immense strain on Territorians. More people are experiencing financial distress; and going without meals, power and safe places to sleep. This increases illness and disease, worsens education outcomes and decreases economic participation. Without targeted investment, there will be increasing demand in the most expensive parts of government: emergency health, corrections, and child protection.

Now is the time for smart, long-term responses from government to address the root causes of poverty and economic exclusion.

In developing this submission, **we 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.

This submission presents actionable, cost-effective solutions, from immediate wins to structural reforms that will stabilise the community services workforce, reduce service gaps and unmet demand, strengthen community safety and resilience and stimulate local economies, particularly in remote and regional areas.

NTCOSS also endorses the recommendations made by NT Shelter and Darwin Community Legal Centre in their Pre-Budget Submissions.

Funded in full, these measures will not only improve quality of life for Territorians but also reduce long-term government expenditure.

NTCOSS welcomes the opportunity to provide this pre-budget submission and looks forward to an ongoing collaborative relationship to support better outcomes for all Territorians.

Yours sincerely,

Sally Sievers
Chief Executive Officer

Summary of Recommendations

Building a sustainable community and social services sector

- 1** Remove efficiency dividends for social service sector grant funding.
- 2** Uplift grant funding over three years to restore funding to 2018 levels in real terms.
- 3** Adjust the grant indexation formula to reflect sector specific cost pressures.
- 4** Fund the development of an independent, credible set of definitions and data on indirect and operational costs for non-government organisations, including specific reference to costs in remote and very remote areas.
- 5** Fund an NTCOSS Workforce Development Officer to support the implementation of the NTG's Workforce Development Strategy in the social service sector.

Supporting people to meet basic needs

- 6** Streamline NT Concessions Scheme processes to make it easier for eligible people to stay in the scheme and to access the scheme's benefits.
- 7** Extend eligibility of the NT Concessions Scheme to all Services Australia Health Care Card holders.
- 8** Lift the Motor Vehicle Concession to a minimum of \$221.70 per 12-month period and establish ongoing indexation.
- 9** Fund ACCOs to deliver free menstrual products in town camps and public housing alongside culturally safe education on menstrual hygiene.

- 10** Provide free birth certificates for all newborns, and free replacements when required.
- 11** Require private transport companies receiving NTG grants to have concession fares that give a significant discount.
- 12** In partnership with existing providers, pilot a two-year Universal School Breakfast and Lunch Program across 15 primary schools, measuring the impact on school attendance, behaviour and educational outcomes.

Investing in young Territorians

- 13** Work with the federal government to deliver well-resourced youth hubs across the Territory.
- 14** Adequately fund Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) to ensure a comprehensive approach to RRE is accessible for all schools across the Northern Territory, including through ongoing and long-term investment.
- 15** Fund NGOs to run school to work transition programs for people with disabilities.

Investing in reliable energy and climate solutions

- 16** Resource the Utilities Commission to adopt mandatory reporting of household electricity disconnections for all licenced retailers, applying to all payment types in the NT.
- 17** Adopt an Energy Hardship definition and associated metrics for post-pay and prepayment customers including obligations for retailers to pro-actively identify and respond to customers in financial hardship.
- 18** Introduce mandatory grace periods preventing disconnections and the accrual of energy debt during extreme weather events.

- 19** Remove supply charges for prepaid electricity customers, ending the penalty of higher electricity costs for prepaid households.
- 20** Co-develop a Disaster Resilience Plan for each region.

Responding to domestic, family and sexual violence

- 21** Fund a consultation process with specialist DFSV services, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), multicultural community, people with lived experience, and technical advisers to determine the best model for a DFSV peak in the NT.
- 22** Fund the development of accessible, transitional housing stock to support victim-survivors fleeing violence.
- 23** Fund the development of Risk Assessment and Management Framework (RAMF) Tools and Guides

Investing in Territorians with disabilities

- 24** Introduce a Disability Employment Incentive Program through government procurement contracting.
- 25** Double the funding for disability and mental health advocacy services.
- 26** Fund consultation to understand the Thriving Kids foundational supports that already exist in the NT for children aged 0-9, and co-design how these foundational support services should be further rolled out across the NT.

1 Building a Sustainable Social and Community Service Sector

The NT community services sector employs 13,200 Territorians (9.7% of the workforce)^[1]. Yet the sector faces **unsustainable funding**^[2] and severe workforce shortages. **Without urgent investment, service gaps will widen**, costing the government more in the long run in crisis response in healthcare, corrections, homelessness, and unemployment.

[1] Gilchrist, Perks, Emery, [Value of the Sector Report](#), 2025

[2] 46% of services generate a loss and a further 30% achieve an unsustainable profit level below 0.9%, (Value of the Sector Report, 2024)

Building a sustainable sector

1.1 Adjust grant funding to reflect the true cost of service delivery

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 early support they need. This results in higher demand on expensive acute and emergency systems, hospitals, police, courts, corrections and child protection. Grant funding must be adjusted to reflect the true cost of service delivery.

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

The NTG's application of a two-thirds discount to the 1% efficiency dividend for certain frontline services is 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.

Recommendation 2: Uplift grant funding over 3 years to restore funding to 2018 levels in real terms.

Industry funding needs to be urgently restored to 2018 levels to ensure front line services can properly respond to the needs of the growing number of vulnerable Territorians. Grant indexation has not kept pace with wage growth. Between 2018 and 2025 award wages increased by 34.7% whilst industry grant funding only increased by 7.2%. This is due to government-style efficiency dividends applied to non-government organisations. Additional, non-controllable cost increases from the Superannuation Guarantee Charge, insurance premiums and other costs of doing business threaten the financial viability of charities. In 2023, almost half of non-for-profit social service providers operated at a loss^[5]. Returning real term funding to 2018 levels is essential to ensure frontline services can support people seeking critical programs.

[5] Gilchrist, Perks, Emery, *Value of the Sector Report*, 2025

Building a sustainable sector

Recommendation 3: Adjust the grant indexation formula to reflect sector specific cost pressures.

Current grant indexation (CPI + WPI) fails to reflect sector-specific cost pressures such as SCHADS Award increases and superannuation changes. Working with the sector to develop a new indexation formula, such as the one below, will protect service viability and provide certainty for long-term workforce and financial planning.

$$\mathbf{NFA = PVA + (NWC+OAI) \times 75\% + (CPI \times 25\%)}$$

NFA = New grant funding amount

PVA = Previous funding amount

NWC = National Wage Case Decision (% increase)

OAI = Other Award Increase determinations e.g. Gender Undervaluation Review

CPI = CPI increase for the previous 12 months

Recommendation 4: Fund the development of an independent, credible set of definitions and data on indirect and operational costs that both funders and not-for-profits can use. There must be specific reference to costs in remote and very remote areas.

Estimated cost: \$130,911

In the interim: Incorporate a minimum of 30% untied operational funding in all NTG grants.

Estimated cost: Budget neutral

Grants typically incorporate 10–20% for indirect, operational costs. However, on average, operational costs account for 33% of spending^[3]. Such parameters force organisations to underinvest in IT, training, and quality systems. Research highlights that enabling larger proportions of grant funding to be untied increases efficiency, allowing services to adapt to local and emerging needs.

Building a sustainable sector

1.2 Invest in workforce development

The social and community services sector accounts for nearly one in ten jobs in the Territory^[4]. As identified in the *Workforce Development in the Northern Territory- Consultation paper* nonprofits, community-based organisations and charitable foundations are a critical part of Territory's economy and have a significant role in supporting training and job readiness for jobseekers^[5].

Despite this, the sector itself faces significant barriers in attracting and retaining staff. This is true in both regional and remote settings. A recent NTCOSS sector members survey found that over 70% of organisations in the sector had vacant positions, with a third of vacancies taking three or more months to fill.

Recommendation 5: Fund an NTCOSS workforce development officer to implement the *NTG's Workforce Strategy* for the social services sector.

Estimated cost: \$198,026 is 1st year (\$1,054,992 for five years)

The *NTG Workforce Development Strategy* will provide tangible actions to support workforce development in the NT through ways such as improving access to training that provides pathways to jobs, upskilling existing staff, reducing barriers to economic participation and tapping into local workforces.

An NTCOSS Workforce Development Officer would support the implementation of the Strategy across the social service sector by assessing workforce needs, identifying development opportunities, and supporting our members to identify and implement workforce attraction and retention initiatives. The role could include coordinating with training providers to ensure courses are accessible and fit-for-purpose, facilitating place-based cultural awareness and trauma-transformative training, and establishing communities of practice to help staff develop skills—such as digital literacy—so they can effectively embed innovation and new technologies in their work.

This would support workforce development and retention across the social services sector, enabling better outcomes for staff and the communities they support.

[4] Gilchrist, Perks, Emery, *Value of the Sector Report*, 2025

[5] *Workforce Development in the Northern Territory*.

2 Supporting people to meet basic needs

The NT has the highest rates of poverty in Australia. Indigenous poverty in remote NT rose by 10–13 percentage points from 2016–2021, while it fell in most other jurisdictions^[7]. High living costs, limited access to goods and services and inadequate safety nets mean **many Territorians struggle to meet basic needs**. These pressures drive long-term disadvantage and increase costs to government through **higher demand on crisis systems**.

Investment in targeted concessions, food security, transport, and financial relief programs is far more cost-effective than responding once people reach crisis point.

[7] Dr Francis Markham, 'The poor pay more: Why the Remote Area Allowance needs urgent attention', 12 February 2024

2 Supporting people to meet basic needs

2.1 Expand and streamline the NT concessions systems

NTCOSS's recent Cost of Living [factsheets](#) highlight the immense financial pressure felt by Territorians who are on low incomes and those living remotely. Current concessions do not reach many low-income households and payments have eroded in value. Administrative complexity also excludes eligible people from accessing the scheme. The following recommendations should be adopted to enable Territorians to afford essential goods and services.

Recommendation 6: Streamline the NT Concession Scheme processes to make it easier for eligible people to stay in the scheme and to access the scheme's benefits.

Currently **only 63% of eligible people are on the concession** scheme^[8], with an NTG **target of just 65%** eligible people accessing the scheme. **This target should be increased to 90%**. Acknowledging the work that has already been done to improve administrative processes – including online renewal options – difficulties in accessing and staying in the scheme are still regularly reported across the sector. Further streamlining the process will help achieve higher rates of eligible people accessing the scheme.

The following administrative processes should be amended:

- Data-sharing should be automated with housing and energy providers so that concessions are automatically applied.
- Reapplication processes should be simplified for holders who will not see a change to their situation (like those on Disability Support Pensions or Aged Pensions).
- If an approved applicant has already provided proof of ID or Aboriginality, they should not be required to complete the process again.

[8] NTG Budget Paper 3, 2025-26

Supporting people to meet basic needs

Recommendation 7: Extend eligibility of the NT Concession Scheme to include all Services Australia Health Care Card holders.

Studies have shown that investing in concessional support for low-income individuals yields substantial long-term financial and social benefits as it helps prevent people from falling into crisis and strengthens social and economic participation ^[9].

Updating the NT Concession Scheme is a cost-effective way to provide direct support to Territorians who are impacted by cost of living rises the most. Currently, while people receiving income support payments such as the Aged Pension, Disability Support Pension and Parenting Payments are eligible for the NT Concessions Scheme, people receiving Jobseeker and Youth Allowance payments are not, despite these payments being significantly lower.

NTCOSS reiterates its call for the NTG to extend the NT Concession Scheme to all Services Australia Health Care Card holders. This will assist households on low incomes and those living in poverty to meet essential costs. By linking with the Health Care Card, the administrative burden on the NTG is reduced as Services Australia has already completed eligibility assessments.

Recommendation 8: Lift the Motor Vehicle Registration concession to a minimum of \$230 per 12-month period and establish ongoing indexation.

Estimated cost: Additional \$585,000 per annum ^[10]

The motor vehicle registration (MVR) concession under the Concession Scheme hasn't changed since 2009 and is a set amount of \$154 per 12-month period. While registration costs are currently frozen, the value of this concession has diminished significantly. Ten years ago, it represented 23.5% of the registration cost for a small vehicle, as of June 2025 it is only 19.2%. Lifting the concession and establishing ongoing indexation will provide immediate relief for families in need.

[9] AIHW, 2025, University of Sydney 2024, AIFS, 2017

[10] Note: ABS data (Census, 2021) shows that 55% of adults in the NT do not own a car. The cost calculation for this recommendation assumes that car ownership is normally distributed amongst people on and off the concession scheme. The estimated cost is therefore calculated based on the additional amount (\$76 per year) for 45% of people currently on the scheme.

Supporting people to meet basic needs

2.2 Support vulnerable populations to access essential services

Access to essential services at every stage of life is critical to ensuring people in the NT can live safe, healthy, and fulfilling lives. Investment in access to food, housing, transport, health and education is essential. Without these basics, people cannot engage fully in school, secure employment, participate in community life, or age with dignity.

Recommendation 9: Fund Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOS) to deliver free menstrual products in NT Town Camps and public housing alongside culturally safe education on menstrual hygiene.

Estimated cost: \$540,000

Recent data from Share the Dignity's 2024 "Big Bloody Survey"^[11] revealed that two thirds of respondents in the NT reported struggling to afford menstrual products. This has severe impacts on health, dignity, education and work.

Several ACCOs already receive free menstrual products from other organisations. By funding these organisations to coordinate delivery, set up access points and facilitate workshops with women and girls, the benefits of their provision will be amplified, reducing gender-based barriers to social participation.

Recommendation 10: Provide free birth certificates for all newborns, and free replacements when required.

Estimated cost: \$200,312 per annum

Birth certificates are a basic identity document required to access healthcare, education, income support, and other essential services. Many NT families however cannot afford the fee and struggle with the logistics of applying. This catalyses disadvantage from the very start of life.^[12]

[11] [Bloody Big Survey Report, 2024](#)

[12] [UNICEF, Certify Hopes, 2024](#)

Supporting people to meet basic needs

NTCOSS acknowledges the work already being done by the Pathfinders National Aboriginal Birth Certificate Program to support Aboriginal people to apply for Birth Certificates later in life. Coupling this program with free birth certificates at birth will ensure that every child in the NT begins life with the same baseline access to services. In the long term, this will strengthen engagement in education, health, and community participation.

Recommendation 11: Require private transport companies receiving NTG grants to have concession fare options that give a significant discount.

Transport disadvantage is a major driver of inequality in the Northern Territory. Travel from remote communities to town centres is often necessary to access basic goods and services.

Despite this, one in three remote NT households do not own a private vehicle^[13] and there are no public transport options between remote communities and town centres. Private transport options such as “bush bus” fares can exceed \$400 return, and there are no concession fare options.

Ensuring that businesses accessing government grants provide accessible options for low-income passengers will enable better access to services, and allow people to return home more easily, reducing homelessness in town centres and improving social outcomes.

Recommendation 12: In partnership with existing providers, pilot a two-year Universal school breakfast and lunch program across 15 primary schools, measuring the impact on school attendance, behaviour and educational outcomes.

Estimated cost: \$912,000 over two years

Food insecurity is a significant challenge in the NT, and has long term impacts on health, education and broader social outcomes. In 2024, food insecurity was experienced by around 40% of Territorians. Emergency relief charities noted a significant demand increases across their services from 2023, with Foodbank reporting a 34% increase and St Vincent de Paul experiencing a 25% spike in emergency relief payment requests.^[14]

[13] Census, 2021

[14] NTCOSS, Cost of living report, 2025

Supporting people to meet basic needs

Existing school lunch programs in the NT are ad hoc, have a high administrative burden and often leave children without food, or schools digging into other buckets of funding to feed students. Free school food programs are a cost-effective way of addressing social inequality.

Research found that “When taking into account the costs and benefits [of Universal Free Lunch Programs] over a long period of time, the discounted benefits were four times higher than the discounted costs, indicating major societal gains from the program”.^[15] Studies have also linked the Universal Lunch programs to improvements in academic performance,^[16] higher earning, increased attendance and reductions in suspensions,^[17] reductions of student misbehaviour^[18] and reduced rates of obesity.^[19] The Tasmanian trial proved so successful it has been extended.

The NT should pilot a similar program, assessing impact on educational outcomes.

[15]: [Lundborg, P. \(Lund University\), Dan-Olof Rooth \(Stockholm University\), Jesper Alex-Petersen \(Lund University\)](#),

[16] [Ruffni, K, 2022 Universal Access to Free School Meals and Student Achievement | Journal of Human Resources](#)

[17] [Thurston Domina, Leah Clark, Vitaly Radsky, Renuka Bhaskar, 2024 There Is Such a Thing as a Free Lunch: School Meals, Stigma, and Student Discipline,](#)

[18] [Altindag, D, Baek, D, Lee, H and Merkle, J, 2020, Free lunch for all? The impact of universal school lunch on student misbehavior,](#) accessed

[19] [Lacoli, A, Jones-Smith, J 2024, Free school meals for all may reduce childhood obesity, while easing financial and logistical burdens for families and schools](#)

3 Investing in Young Territorians

The NT has the highest rates of young people not in education, training or work (more than triple the national average),^[20] youth incarceration (46.5 per 10,000),^[21a] suicide (3.5 times the national rate),^[21b] and school non-completion (23% not finishing Year 10)^[22]. **Early intervention and well-designed youth services save money by reducing crime, improving health, and boosting education and employment outcomes.**



[20] Census, 2021
[21a], [21b] AIHW, 2025
[22] Census, 2021

Investing in young Territorians

3.1 Deliver well-resourced youth hubs

Recommendation 13: Work with the federal government to deliver well-resourced youth hubs across the Territory.

Youth hubs play a vital role in improving education, health, and justice outcomes for young people in the NT. Current funding from the Federal Government (NIAA) is inadequate and unevenly distributed, leaving many young people without access to the support they need.

Investing properly in youth hubs delivers proven returns. A study by Nous found that every \$1 invested generates more than \$4.50 in social and economic benefits, including reduced crime, lower drug and alcohol use, improved health and self-esteem, stronger engagement with education and training, and increased school attendance and literacy.^[23]

The NTG should commit to working with the Commonwealth to ensure youth hubs are funded at a level that meets demand and delivers these outcomes consistently across the Territory.

Whilst each youth hubs should be designed with the local community in mind, table 1.1 on the following page offers some best practice guidelines for adequately resourcing youth hubs.

[23] Nous, 2017, [The impact of youth programs in remote central Australia a Social Return on Investment](#)

Investing in young Territorians



Table 1.1 Best practice resourcing for Youth Hubs

| | | Town Centres | Remote ^[24] |
|-------|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Staff | Composition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be both male and female youth workers. • Youth hubs should employ local Aboriginal staff as a core part of their workforce to ensure strong cultural connections. • Organisations should be funded to support Aboriginal Youth Trainees working in youth centres and undertake their Certificate IV in youth work. | |
| | Capacity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hubs should have a minimum ratio of 10 young people to one staff member at any session. • More staff are needed for offsite activities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities of less than 100 young people need to be funded for at least: a team leader, a full-time youth worker and a part time case manager and 2 FTE local staff members. • Communities with over 100 young people need a male and a female youth worker, a full time case worker and 3 FTE local staff members. • Each activity needs to have at least one local staff member present. • Bush trips should have a youth to staff ratio of no more than 8:1 |
| | Training | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All staff should participate in a formal training on working with young people from a trauma transformative practice lens. • All staff should be given opportunities to seek expertise when needed. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other mandatory training should include: Mandatory Reporting Training, Fire Safety, 4 Wheel Drive, First Aid and Cultural Awareness Training • Other recommended training should include: Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training, Client Case Note Training, Referral processes, Volatile substance use. |

[24] Extracted from thy Caylus Optimal Model Report

Investing in young Territorians



| | | Town Centres | Remote |
|-------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Space | Location | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The hubs should be in accessible locations and should be chosen in consultation with young people. | |
| | Set up | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The hub should be a purpose built, or a youth adapted space that is fit for purpose. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The hub should be multi-purpose space, containing a large open space for indoor sports and games and other activities, a kitchen, storeroom and extra smaller spaces for smaller group activities. There should be an office space and office equipment including a minimum of a computer, phone and access to printer and copier. |
| Services | Service access | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employees from other services should have a physical presence in the hubs, enabling young people to access support. ACCOs need to be prioritised. This creates wrap around support for young people. | |
| | Case management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Case managers should have a regular physical presence in the hubs. There should be a smooth referral system to case managers. | |
| Programming | Diversity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There should be an array of activity options. | |
| | Appropriate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programming should be age and gender appropriate Programming should reflect what young people have deemed suitable. | |
| | Skill development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programs should include opportunities for young people to access training and employment. | |
| Amenities | Basic amenities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meals should be provided. Purpose built spaces should have kitchen facilities so activities can be centred around food preparation. All centres should have WIFI | |
| | Transport | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hubs should have options to help young people get home safely | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth Hubs should have 2-3 4WDs |
| Other | Security | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When required, youth hubs should be funded to hire security. | |

Investing in young Territorians

3.2 Invest in the NT-wide implementation of Respectful Relationships Education

Recommendation 14: Adequately fund Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) to ensure a comprehensive approach to RRE is accessible for all schools across the Northern Territory, including through ongoing and long-term investment.

Prevention activity that targets children and young people can stop violence before it starts. The NT Government is currently developing a small-scale trial of a whole-of-school RRE approach in 8 schools across the NT, led by the Department of Education and Training.

The Government should increase investment for the implementation and evaluation of RRE across NT schools to ensure the development of an NT evidence-base that can effectively sustain this work.^[25]

3.3 Support young people to access employment

Recommendation 15: Fund NGOs to run school to work transition programs for people with disabilities.

Estimated cost: \$8,000 per person per annum

Longitudinal studies have shown that gaining an after-school job is a strong predictor of post-school employment.^[26] People with disabilities however experience significant barriers to entering the workforce.

[25] See Our Watch's [Respectful relationships education: A blueprint for preventing gender-based violence through education systems](#)

[26] Lamb, S. & Huo, S. (2024) [The costs of failing to be inclusive: an analysis based on education in Australia](#)

Investing in young Territorians

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.^[27] A lack of funding however limits the extent of success. Funding should be granted to support these programs to expand across the Territory.

[27] Menzies School of Health at <https://youthworxnt.com.au/career-launchpad/>

4 Invest in reliable energy and climate solutions

Access to reliable and affordable energy is a basic need. Yet **many households** in the NT, particularly in remote communities and those using pre-payment meters in urban contexts, **cannot afford the power they need for safe, healthy, and comfortable living.** The convergence of poverty, extreme heat, poor housing, overcrowding and chronic disease has reached critical levels and requires immediate action.

This will worsen with climate change (as identified in the 2025 National Climate Risk Assessment).^[28] Investing upfront in **stronger regulation, fairer protections, energy efficiency, renewable energy access and disaster planning avoids more spending** more in emergency relief and **crisis response in the future.**

[28] Australian Climate Service, 2025, Australia's National Climate Risk Assessment. Available online: <https://www.acs.gov.au/pages/national-climate-risk-assessment>

Invest in reliable energy and climate solutions

4.1 Strengthen energy regulation and governance

Recommendation 16: Resource the Utilities Commission to adopt mandatory reporting of household electricity disconnections for all licenced retailers and applying to all payment types in the NT.

Estimated cost: \$320,000 per annum

The NT lacks the regulatory frameworks necessary to properly monitor and address energy insecurity for all households. Despite the vast majority of remote communities being equipped with smart meters, and the smart meter roll out set to be complete by 2029, there is a significant regulatory inconsistency. While public disconnection reporting is required in the major networks of Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs, there are no equivalent reporting requirements for licensed retailers operating outside of these major networks.

This means that remote First Nations communities are currently overlooked in public reporting on retail energy performance indicators. The lack of transparency obscures the true scale of energy poverty in the NT and prevents effective targeting of hardship assistance. It also limits transparency and accountability for licensed retailers.

The Utilities Commission should adopt Territory-wide disconnection reporting to support the NT to meet its commitments under the First Nations Clean Energy Strategy and contribute to data for understanding progress towards Target 9B of the Nations Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Investing in reliable energy and climate solutions

4.2 Increase protections for pre-payment customers

Prepayment customers in the NT, particularly in remote Aboriginal communities, are among the most vulnerable energy users in Australia. Many households face disproportionately high electricity costs due to prepaid tariffs which penalise households consuming energy above a certain threshold. Despite this, prepayment customers have fewer consumer protections than postpaid customers.^[29] This leads to higher rates of power disconnections.*

The health and social consequences of power disconnections are severe. Without power, residents cannot access refrigeration, fans, medical devices, and safe spaces during periods of extreme heat. Although preventable by policy intervention, service disconnections lead to higher rates of hospitalisation, worsen chronic health conditions, and create additional costs across the Territory's health and social service systems.

⚡ Disconnection data*

91% of remote Aboriginal households using pre-payment meters in 28 communities were **cut off from power at least once** in 2018/19, with 74% being disconnected more than 10 times in the same period.^[30]

Latest public reporting by the Utilities Commission of the Northern Territory shows that **prepayment households** in Darwin, Katherine Tennant Creek and Alice Springs each experienced an **average of 55 self-disconnections per year** in 2023-24, with the average duration being 8.4 hours before households were reconnected to power.^[31]

[29] Riley, B., Klerck, M., Markham, F., Longden, T., Napaltjari-Davis, V., Quilty, S., & Frank-Jupurrurla, J. (2025). The prepay "poverty premium: Perspective on Australia's Northern Territory prepayment tariff. Energy Research & Social Science

[30] Longden, T., Quilty, S., Riley, B. et al. 2022, [Energy insecurity during temperature extremes in remote Australia](#).

[32] Utilities Commission of the Northern Territory, [Northern Territory Electricity Retail Review 2023-24](#).

Investing in reliable energy and climate solutions

Recommendation 17: Adopt an Energy Hardship definition and associated metrics for post-pay and prepayment customers including obligations for retailers to pro-actively identify and respond to customers in financial hardship.

In the interim, remove any exemptions for licensed retailers from having their own hardship policies.^[32]

Currently, there is no NT-specific definition of energy hardship and no consistent framework for measuring and addressing it^[33]. This lack of clarity allows people experiencing difficulty with energy affordability, particularly those on prepayment meters, to fall through the cracks. NT energy retailers generally treat hardship as a reactive process, responding only once a household has already accrued significant energy debt. In the case of prepayment households there is a lack of accessible adequate supports to assist households before they run out of credit and are disconnected from energy supply.

The NTG should set obligations for retailers to proactively monitor indicators of hardship such as frequent emergency credit use, patterns of repeated self-disconnection, or households identified through concession or income support data, to enable interventions that pre-empt harm and prevent a crisis point being reached.



NT Code^[33]

The Northern Territory Electricity Retail Supply Code specifies that the retailer's hardship policy must contain "processes to identify prepayment meter customers experiencing payment difficulties due to hardship, including identification by the retailer and self-identification by a prepayment meter customer". But there is no metric for pro-active identification by the retailer.

Also, the next clause (13.1.8) states that "the retailer may seek an exemption from the Commission from some or all of the requirements of clause 13.1.7 in relation to those prepayment meter customers".

[32] UCNT has provided Power and Water Corporation an exemption from complying with the hardship policy requirements around the provision of proactive hardship supports to remote prepayment customers until March 2026. Retailer exemptions should be removed as a Territory wide definition is developed.

Investing in reliable energy and climate solutions

Recommendation 18: Introduce mandatory grace periods preventing disconnections and the accrual of energy debt during extreme weather.

Estimated cost: \$351,516 per annum

Data reveals that most disconnections occur when temperatures are above 40 degrees in dry climates and 36 in tropical climates.^[34] This is due to the significant amount of power needed to regulate temperatures in poorly performing and overcrowded homes. Unplanned disconnections are particularly dangerous in extreme heat.^[35]

The NT should introduce mandatory grace periods during extreme weather to ensure that households are not cut off from essential energy access when they need it most.

Recommendation 19: Remove supply charges for prepaid electricity customers, ending the penalty of higher electricity costs per kilowatt hour for prepaid households.

Households using prepaid meters in the NT pay more for electricity per Kilowatt hour than postpaid customers. This is due to the 3c per kilowatt hour supply charge applied to prepaid customers. Given the size and energy inefficiency of most pre-payment customers' homes, the overwhelming majority of pre-payment customers pay more for bills than they would if they had post payment rates. This pushes those who are least able to afford higher costs into further energy stress. In remote Aboriginal communities in South Australia, a discounted prepayment tariff of 10 cents/kWh applies. This tariff has been committed to by the State Government for the next 20 years.

NTCOSS calls for the NTG **at minimum** to remove the supply charge for prepaid customers.

[34]: Original Power, 2025, The Right to Power - Keeping First Nations' communities connected on prepayment

[35] Original Power, 2025, The Right to Power - Keeping First Nations' communities connected on prepayment

Investing in reliable energy and climate solutions

4.3 Co-develop and implement a Disaster Resilience Plan

Recommendation 20: Co-develop a Disaster Resilience Plan for each region with local community members and the energy sector.

NT communities face escalating risks from heat, cyclones, and flooding, yet there is no coordinated adaptation strategy. Without a whole-of-government climate adaptation plan to coordinate housing, health, infrastructure, and emergency management, communities will be less resilient to disasters and changes in the climate, costing more in future emergency relief.

Research from the productivity commission found that every \$1 invested in adaptation saves \$2–\$10 in avoided disaster recovery costs. Even modest NT investment could reduce long-term recovery costs by tens of millions annually. [36]

Developing regional plans and strategies now will reduce the Territory Government's exposure to emergency response needs later. These plans should:

- Map climate risks to vulnerable populations and services, especially road access and food security to identify and mitigate potential disruptions before they occur.
- Prioritise adaptation funding for remote and disadvantaged communities to ensure those likely to be at risk are supported early.
- Integrate Aboriginal knowledge and community-led resilience strategies that support longer term adaptation outcomes.
- Work together with communities to develop local place-based adaptation and community resilience plans.
- Align infrastructure and housing investment with climate projections to avoid costly retrofits and ensure future ready development in the Territory.
- Develop a plan to improve energy performance of buildings in the NT, including increasing the minimum energy efficiency requirements for residential dwellings and retrofitting existing social and rental housing in the NT. This will ensure housing is resilient, household energy costs are lower, and demand on the energy grid is reduced.

5 Responding to Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence

Domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) continues to cause devastating harm across the Northern Territory. Addressing it requires commitment to funding adequate crisis response, but also investment in society wide prevention, early intervention and better data, and services for users of violence. **Targeted investment in these areas will reduce violence in the long term create safer communities and deliver cost savings by reducing reliance on crisis and justice systems.**^[37]

Responding to domestic, family and sexual violence

5.1 Consult on the establishment of a DFSV peak body

Recommendation 21: Fund a consultation process with specialist DFSV services, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), multicultural community, people with lived experience, and technical advisers to determine the best model for a DFSV peak in the NT.

Estimated cost: \$387,921 one off funding

Service providers across the NT consistently highlight the benefits of a coordinated voice to government. The current model of two funded DFSV policy positions, across two organisations, is not sufficient to provide the breadth of activity required to benefit children and families, the broader community and the social and community sector. A peak body would lead sector development, strengthen workforce capability, and advocate for system reforms. Effective peaks in other states have improved coordination between government and services, enhanced policy design, and attracted additional investment.

5.2 Fill region and place-based service gaps

Recommendation 22: Provide capital funding for the development of accessible crisis accommodation and transitional housing stock to support victim-survivors fleeing violence.^[39]

Estimated Cost: \$15 million one off funding

A lack of capital funding for the 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.

[39] As recommended in the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Recommendation 7.35).

Responding to domestic, family and sexual violence

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.

KWCC is well placed to lead this development, with land already secured for the construction of new transitional dwellings. These homes will provide a safe, stable environment for women and children to begin healing and rebuilding their lives.

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 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 ACCOs are resourced to design and deliver responses in their own communities.

5.4 Fund sector collaboration

Recommendation 23: Fund the development of Risk Assessment and Management Framework (RAMF) Tools and Guides.

Estimated cost: \$400,000 one off funding.*

Currently all implementing NT government agencies, social and community sector organisations, ACCOs and beyond are developing their own RAMF implementation tools.

The development of publicly available RAMF tools and guidelines would significantly strengthen RAMF implementation by ensuring cross-sector alignment and collaboration, best practice resource development, a reduction in duplication and increased efficiency.

*Cost includes 2xFTE for 1 year with a travel budget

5 Responding to domestic, family and sexual violence

Suggested tools for development:

- RAMF implementation readiness assessment
- Board and executive briefing package
- RAMF implementation project management guide, including suggested project plans
- A guide to culturally safe and secure implementation of RAMF in remote areas
- A tool for mapping employee roles against RAMF responsibilities
- A guide to undertake a systematic audit of internal activities, referral pathways internally and externally, client journeys, structures and systems
- A guide for improving the prevention of vicarious trauma in workforces responding to DFSV
- Template DFSV policies and procedures (all to align with the RAMF, NT Health Clinical Guidelines, and PART), and to include a template DFSV staff leave policy and procedure



6 Investing in Territorians with disabilities

Everyone should have the opportunity to participate fully in community life. Yet people with disability in the NT continue to face significant and avoidable barriers to doing so.

NTCOSS advocates for **practical, long-term solutions that enable Territorians with disability to live safe, healthy, and connected lives**. This includes increasing the supply of **accessible housing, supporting meaningful pathways into employment, and ensuring the adequate provision of disability services**—particularly foundational supports and services in remote communities.

Investing in Territorians with disabilities



6.1 Support people with disabilities to access the workforce

NTCOSS commends the government's commitment to an 8% public service disability employment target by 2027, but stronger, more tangible action is needed to create meaningful pathways into work. Governments should help support young people with disabilities to transition from school to employment, whilst also incentivising businesses to adopt inclusive workplace policies and practices.

Recommendation 24: Introduce a Disability Employment Incentive Program through government procurement contracting.

Estimated cost: Low – only administrative

The NTG 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.



6.2 Adequately fund disability advocacy services

Recommendation 25: Double the funding for disability and mental health advocacy services.

Estimated costs: \$600,000 per annum (Bringing total funding for services to \$120,000 per annum)

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.

Investing in Territorians with disabilities

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.

6.3 Conduct extensive consultation on foundational support service delivery

Recommendation 26: Fund consultations to understand the Thriving Kids – 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.

Estimated cost: \$531,521 one off funding

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, 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 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 Thriving Kids – 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 Thriving Kids – foundational support services get started and become sustainable.



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