



POLICY POSITION MEETING THE BASIC NEEDS OF TERRITORIANS

All people and communities should have access to the necessities of life. Incomes should be adequate to pay for basic needs such as food, medicine, housing, transport, and energy.

Recent analysis shows that while poverty rates are decreasing in most parts of the country, in remote Northern Territory, Indigenous poverty rates have escalated significantly – rising between 10-13 percentage points from 2016 to 2021.^[1] People in the Northern Territory experience significant cost of living pressures, especially in remote areas, which are disproportionately impacted by higher costs and a lack of access to services.

The impacts of poverty are not limited to the individual – the impacts are felt throughout the community, with damaging effects on health, social wellbeing and long-term security.

1 – SOCIAL SECURITY

The primary purpose of Australia’s social security system is to provide individuals with a ‘minimum adequate standard of living’. This includes adequate food, water and housing and the continuous improvement of living conditions. Ensuring the adequacy of social security payments to assist individuals in meeting this standard is of critical importance in supporting those experiencing poverty and disadvantage in our communities.

NTCOSS works closely with ACOSS to advocate at the Federal level for improvements to the social security system. Social security is designed to be a safety net for those in need – the system must be supportive, non-punitive, fair and fit for purpose.

NTCOSS recommends:

- Raise all working age income support payments to at least the pension rate.^[2]
- Substantially and immediately increase the Remote Area Allowance to better account for the disproportionately high cost of living in remote areas.
- Benchmark Commonwealth –Rent Assistance (CRA) to rents paid and lift the maximum threshold for CRA by 60%.
- End compulsory income management.^[3]

[1] Markham, Francis, (2024), The Poor Pay More: Why the Remote Area Allowance Needs Urgent Reform, Austaxpolicy: Tax and Transfer Policy Blog, 12 February 2024, Available from: <https://www.austaxpolicy.com/the-poor-pay-more-why-the-remote-area-allowance-needs-urgent-reform/>

[2] See [Raise the Rate](#) for more details

[3] See [NTCOSS Policy Briefing – Compulsory Income Management in the NT](#) for more details



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2 – HOUSING

Access to safe, affordable and secure housing is fundamental to everyone's wellbeing. In the NT, people are 12 times more likely to be homeless than elsewhere in Australia. The effect of homelessness is not evenly felt across the Territory – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people represent the vast majority (over 80%) of the NT's homelessness statistics.^[4] Overcrowding – the main driver for homelessness in the NT – is significantly more common in remote areas.

In town – with huge wait lists and a severe shortfall of social and affordable housing, many people on low incomes have no choice but to rent through the private market. More than half the NT's population rents, but the high price of private rentals can put people into significant financial stress, and the NT has some of the weakest protections for renters' rights in Australia.

NTCOSS supports the work of NT Shelter and Aboriginal Housing Northern Territory (AHNT), as the specialist housing peak bodies, to advocate for the housing needs of Territorians.

NTCOSS recommends:

- Complete the third tranche of amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act 1999 (NT) to ensure Territory renters have at least the same rights and protections as other jurisdictions, including:
 - Establish an independent Residential Tenancies Bond Board
 - Implement minimum standards in rental housing, including for energy efficiency^[5]
 - Increase protections against rent increases.
- Adopt a Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning policy so that 30% of Crown land released for residential use is mandated for social and affordable housing.
- Introduce a rental affordability scheme to replace the expiring National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS).

[4] Data as reported by [NT Shelter](#), drawn from the Estimating Homelessness: Census 2021

[5] See NTCOSS Policy Position: Energy Equity for Territorians for more detail



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3 – COST OF LIVING

In addition to sufficient income and appropriate safety nets for those without paid work, schemes to alleviate cost of living pressures and ensure access to basic needs are also important mechanisms for addressing poverty.

This includes concessions schemes, a targeted approach to reducing costs for those who need it, and appropriate public services and community services that support people living in poverty.

NTCOSS recommends:

- Reform the concession scheme to more effectively relieve cost of living pressures for Territorians, including:
 - Expand eligibility criteria to all Services Australia Health Care Card holders and other low-income groups currently excluded
 - Increase the NT Motor Vehicle Concessions to address deteriorated value and establish yearly indexation
 - Revise administrative arrangements so it's easier for eligible people to stay in the Scheme.
- Require private transport companies receiving government grants to provide transport services to have concession fare options that give a significant discount.