

20 April 2026

Essential Territory frontline services impacted by fuel crisis.

- *Remote communities suffering the immediate impact of fuel crisis.*
- *New data has revealed that critical frontline services are being forced to reduce services due to rising costs.*
- *Communities already in desperate need following extreme weather conditions are being affected disproportionately.*
- *Sector wants to work with Federal and Territory governments to ensure essential services are still being delivered to all Territorians.*

Essential social services across the Northern Territory have raised issues over the burgeoning fuel crisis and its effect on the most disadvantaged and in-need Territorians already impacted from extreme weather emergencies.

The Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) is calling for Territory and Federal governments to provide urgent support to remote communities, after a recent survey found that almost all the sector noted increased financial strain on the people they support and many organisations were already reducing programs and services delivery due to rising fuel costs.

NTCOSS chief executive Sally Sievers said that the fuel shortage was already being felt disproportionately by those in remote communities.

“Our members and the people they work with are already feeling the bite of this crisis, with remote Territorians especially at risk.”

“Communities rely on diesel generators to access and run the necessities that we take for granted here in town. With prices skyrocketing, urgent relief is needed to prevent even further disadvantage to families already pushed to the limit.”

Ms Sievers raised concerns that remote communities were being doubly impacted, as fuel costs were also preventing some frontline organisations from providing their full range of services.

“Now more than ever the NT needs these critical services, and it’s extremely worrying that many organisations are being forced to downscale their work at a time so many people are in desperate need.”

“We understand government budgets are under pressure, but if our members are unable to deliver their critical services then we face far more expensive problems in the near future in terms of social, health and crime implications for Territorians unable to access help.”

Ms Sievers said that they are calling on all levels of government to ensure remote communities are in their contingency planning and adapt funding agreements so that organisations can manage assets appropriately.

“We stand with the Central Land Council in calling for the Federal Government to substantially increase the remote area allowance, providing much needed relief to remote Territorians.”

“By allowing more flexibility into grant agreements, Federal and Territory governments can help organisations better support our communities. This shift would allow funds and services to be appropriately managed, ultimately reducing the risk to community members.

“Any fuel rationing and allocation should consider these services absolutely essential and note that many have already been providing extra support through recent extreme weather events.”

NTCOSS had surveyed members from across major population centres and remote NT, servicing a broad range of areas including Aboriginal Services, Housing & homelessness, Domestic Family and Sexual violence, Youth services and many more:

- With all organisations already operating on extremely thin budgets, rising fuel costs pose great additional pressure on service delivery.
- Several organisations have already reduced the number of programs and services they deliver, and reduced remote community visits.
- Almost all respondents noted an increase in financial strain for clients – particularly those living in remote communities, often relying on diesel generators for power, water, food and health care.
- Many organisations were reporting that clients were unable to afford to access their services due to fuel costs and raised concerns for people fleeing violence or unsafe living conditions if they could not afford fuel.

Ian Byrne, Chief Executive of Lutheran Care said their organisation is under enormous strain to continue delivering services.

“Recent fuel price increases have had a direct impact on our service delivery, particularly given the remote and regional locations in which we operate. Increased transport costs have reduced the efficiency of outreach activities, including program delivery, staff travel, and logistics for food and resources.”

“In some instances, where fuel availability is a consistent challenge, we are reviewing and adjusting how we deliver services. Whether that be consolidating travel where possible, absorbing additional costs within already constrained budgets, or finding ways to manage these pressures while continuing to meet our commitments to the communities we support.”

“Fuel volatility also makes forward planning more difficult and places additional pressure on program sustainability.”

“We know that everyone is feeling the strain of rising costs, but for the communities we work with higher fuel prices means that people are losing access to essential supports.”

“We want to work with governments to ensure that we can continue delivering services to all those who need it.”

About NTCOSS:

The Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) is the peak body for the Northern Territory (NT) Community and Social Service sector and is a voice for people affected by social and economic disadvantage and inequality. NTCOSS membership is made up of community managed, nongovernment, not for profit organisations, which work in social and community service delivery, sector development and advocacy. We represent over 120 members across the NT, including Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs), and organisations based in regional and remote areas. NTCOSS’s vision is a fair, inclusive, and sustainable NT.

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