

NT budget a missed opportunity to support everyday Territorians

Leaders from across the Northern Territory social services sector say that today's NT Budget is a missed opportunity to provide meaningful relief to Territorians.

NTCOSS CEO Sally Sievers said that after a year of crisis and skyrocketing cost of living the government had the chance to deliver a budget that improved the quality of life in the NT and supported frontline services sustainably.

"The Treasurer and Chief Minister have said that this is a budget for everyday Territorians, that targets the root causes of crime."

"The everyday Territorian is struggling to find affordable housing, worried about a health system at breaking point and wanting to see families connecting with the supports that allow them to thrive."

"Frontline services on the ground across the NT provided fully costed and sustainable recommendations that would improve the Territory quality of life. The Government needs to listen to those who are working directly with Territorians, to understand the areas of greatest need."

Sector analysis on today's budget found key shortcomings in relation to housing, early supports for children and families, education, healthcare, mental health and Alcohol and other drugs, youth services, and addressing the domestic family and sexual violence crisis.

Key recommendations from [NTCOSS' Pre-Budget Submission](#) that have not made it into this year's budget include:

- Making the NT Concessions Scheme benefits easier to access for eligible Territorians, and extending eligibility to all Services Australia Health Care Card holders.
- Pilot a two-year Universal School Breakfast & Lunch Program across 15 primary schools to improve attendance and school outcomes.
- Investment in disability and mental health advocacy services.
- Funding for transitional housing to support victim-survivors fleeing violence.

NTCOSS Chair Jayne Lloyd OAM said: "By making modest investments that provide targeted relief we can actually help people meet their basic needs."

"Connecting kids with education, supporting people living with disability and helping those affected by domestic, family and sexual violence will benefit the whole Northern Territory."

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

Sector Quotes:

Justice:

“Government is absolutely right to speak about reducing the root causes of crime, but with its second budget we are not seeing this.

We are seeing rehabilitation investment in jail but nowhere near enough in the community. It’s about keeping kids in school, more youth engagement programs around the regions, like the Shak in Darwin, and investing in youth transitional housing models.

We are doing a little bit of these things but we need to do a lot more if we are serious about seeing kids and families thrive rather than making a pathway to jail.”

Craig Kelly, CEO, Anglicare

Housing:

“Investment in social housing reduces costs across justice, health and policing systems. In this Budget, we would have liked to see a real increase in investment in social housing, not incremental change, but a shift in supply that matches the scale of need. If you don’t invest in housing now, you will continue to invest in crime later. That’s not a social argument it’s a fiscal one.”

Annie Taylor, CEO, NT Shelter

Children and Families

“It is positive to see funding towards thriving kids and foundational supports, but Government needs to ensure that it is working alongside the sector on the ground to ensure these services are effectively targeted.”

Rachael Bowkers, CEO, Darwin Community Legal Services

Social Services

NTCOSS has also raised concerns that critical supports for a sustainable social services sector had been omitted from the 2026 budget.

The Northern Territory applies an efficiency dividend (known as the budget repair measure) that reduces organisation budgets each year in anticipation of efficiencies being found in operational costs. Ms Sievers said that this dividend puts undue pressure on organisations already running on razor-thin margins.

“Efficiency dividends on sector grant funding are a blunt tool that significantly hinder our members’ ability to help the growing number of Territorians in need.”

“At a time when we are already facing down crisis after crisis, is a missed opportunity for the NT Government to not remove efficiency dividends on the sector, in line with what the Federal Government has already done.”

“In real terms, our frontline services are running on less funding than 2018 levels. This NT Budget fails to address the need for higher funding or adjusted grant indexation, if our critical social services are expected to continue meeting the needs of disadvantaged Territorians.”

Sally Sievers, CEO, NTCOSS

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