



Pre-Budget Submission

2027-2028

About NTCOSS

The 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 that work in social and community service delivery, sector development and advocacy. NTCOSS represents over 120 members, including peak bodies, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), large charities, small grassroots organisations and individual members.

What we do

NTCOSS leads initiatives in the community services sector and acts as an independent voice. The social and community sector employs more than 13,000 employees across the NT.^[1] By drawing on the expertise of our members, we develop and advocate for socially and economically smart public policy. We also support sector development and capacity building and sector stewardship.

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 and present across the NT and Australia. We honour their enduring connection to land, waters, culture and community, and we recognise that sovereignty has never been ceded.

[1] Centre for Public Value at the University of Western Australia, 2025, Value of the Sector Report, available online at ntcoss.org.au/publications/2025-value-of-the-sector-report/

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Foreword

The NT Government's 2027–28 Budget comes at a critical time for Territorians. Rising costs of living and the impacts of extreme weather are placing additional pressure on households, communities and essential services, with the greatest impact felt by those on the lowest incomes. NTCOSS' vision is of a fair, inclusive and sustainable NT and the Budget provides an important opportunity to advance this vision and deliver practical action, in alignment with the NT Government's three core priorities: restoring the Territory lifestyle, reducing crime and rebuilding the economy.

This submission draws on the expertise of our members to present actionable and achievable measures, ranging from immediate wins to longer-term structural reforms. Funded in full, these measures will improve quality of life for Territorians, reduce long-term government expenditure, and directly support the NT Government's reform agenda.

The NT's social and community sector is central to achieving these priorities. The sector has strong community links, significant expertise, and is evidenced as value for money service provision due to the outcomes it achieves and the community benefits.^[2] Through delivering place-based, people-centred programs, the sector supports Territorians to be safe, healthy, connected and able to participate in their communities and the economy.

Yours sincerely,



Claire Pirrett
Interim Chief Executive Officer
25 September 2026

[2] See Appendix A

Summary of Recommendations

Improving affordability in the Territory

Recommendation 1: Require private transport companies receiving NT Government grants to have concession fare options that give a significant discount.

Recommendation 2: Provide free birth certificates for all newborns.

Recommendation 3: Fund ACCOs to deliver free menstrual products in NT Town Camps and public housing alongside culturally safe education on menstrual hygiene.

Recommendation 4: 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.

Recommendation 5: Fund an Online Casino Games education and awareness program to frontline workers and community members to help prevent and respond to online gambling scams.

Recommendation 6: Expand No Interest Loans access.

Recommendation 7: Lift the Motor Vehicle Registration concession to a minimum of \$240 per 12-month period and establish ongoing indexation.

Recommendation 8: 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.

Recommendation 9: Extend eligibility of the NT Concession Scheme to include all Services Australia Health Care Card holders.

Investing in young Territorians

Recommendation 10: Work with the Australian Government to deliver well-resourced youth hubs across the Territory.

Recommendation 11: Establish a Youth Peak for the NT.

Investing in reliable energy and climate adaptation

Recommendation 12: In collaboration with the Australian Government, introduce mandatory grace periods preventing disconnections and the accrual of energy debt during heat triggers and extreme weather.

Recommendation 13: Develop and adopt an Energy Hardship definition and associated metrics for post- and pre-payment customers including obligations for retailers to pro-actively identify and respond to customers in financial hardship.

Recommendation 14: Remove supply charges for prepaid electricity customers.

Recommendation 15: 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.

Recommendation 16: Co-develop a Disaster Resilience Plan for each region with local community members and the energy sector.

Responding to domestic, family and sexual violence

Recommendation 17: Provide capital funding for the development of accessible crisis accommodation and transitional housing stock to support victim-survivors fleeing violence.

Recommendation 18: Fund multicultural services to develop and deliver Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence prevention and early intervention initiatives for refugee and migrant communities in Darwin and Alice Springs.

Investing in Territorians with disabilities

Recommendation 19: Introduce a Disability Employment Incentive Program through government procurement contracting.

Recommendation 20: Fund NGOs to run school to work transition programs for people with disabilities.

Recommendation 21: Double the funding of \$70 000 for disability and mental health advocacy services.

Recommendation 22: Fund community-based psychosocial support services for Territorians with psychosocial disabilities who are ineligible for, or under-served by, the NDIS.

Building a sustainable community and social services sector

Recommendation 23: Provide five years of ongoing funding for NTCommunity Directory, including additional investment to improve functionality and accessibility.

Recommendation 24: Uplift grant funding over 3 years to restore funding to 2018 levels in real terms. In year one: Increase nominal grant funding to reflect SCHADS wage increases, ensuring real funding for service delivery is not decreased.

Recommendation 25: Adjust the grant indexation formula to reflect sector specific cost pressures.

Recommendation 26: Fund specialised targeted support for migrant and refugee communities, including humanitarian entrants/refugees to re-enter the workforce, as recommended by the Workforce Australia Inquiry into employment services.

Improving affordability in the Territory

1.1 Improve access to essential services

NT Government priority alignment – Restoring the Territory Lifestyle – Priority 3: Deliver better infrastructure for an active Territory; Restoring the Territory Lifestyle – Priority 4: Improve affordability in the Territory (Initiative 4.2: Providing targeted cost of living relief to households; Initiative 4.3: Removing barriers to kids getting involved in school and sport); Restoring the Territory Lifestyle – Priority 5: Help Territorians be happier and healthier (Initiative 5.2: Providing Territory kids and youth the foundations for lifelong achievement); Reducing Crime – Priority 4: Address the root causes of crime (Initiative 4.2: Increasing economic participation and community connection)

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

Recommendation 1: Require private transport companies receiving NT Government grants to have concession fare options that give a significant discount.

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

However, one in three remote households do not own a private vehicle^[3] 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 fares.^[4]

Ensuring that transport businesses accessing government grants provide accessible options for low-income passengers will enable increased mobility in and out of remote areas and better access to goods and services in regional centres.

This directly aligns with the NT’s strategic initiative to restore the Territory lifestyle; create networks of comfortable, accessible, and safe active transport options, which link with essential community facilities and services.

[3] NTCOSS analysis using ABS Census data, 2021

[4] See [Bus Timetables - Centre Bush Bus](#)

Improving affordability in the Territory

Recommendation 2: Provide free birth certificates for all newborns.

Estimated cost: \$247 752 per year^[5]

Birth certificates are a basic identity document required to access healthcare, education, income support, and other essential services. However, many NT families cannot afford the fee and struggle with the logistics of applying. This catalyses disadvantage from the very start of life.^[6]

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 the provision of free birth certificates at birth will ensure that every child in the NT begins life with the same baseline access to services.

This aligns with Closing the Gap Target 4–Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children thrive in their early years. Removing this administrative barrier will support the objectives of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap by improving access to essential services and education and reducing inequities from the earliest stages of life.^[7]

Recommendation 3: Fund ACCOs to deliver free menstrual products in NT Town Camps and public housing alongside culturally safe education on menstrual hygiene.

Estimated cost: \$563 700 per year^[8]

Share the Dignity's 2024 "Big Bloody Survey"^[9] revealed that two thirds of respondents in the NT were 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.

[5] This is calculated based on the number of new births and the cost of birth certificates.

[6] UNICEF, 2024, Children without birth certificates missing early education, [Available online](#)

[7] Australian Government, Closing the Gap Targets, Accessed Online <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/targets>, 2026

[8] This figure has been adjusted for CPI and SCHADS award wage increases from our 2026–27 Submission.

[9] Share the Dignity, 2024, [Bloody Big Survey Report, available online.](#)

Improving affordability in the Territory

This relates to the target of Closing the Gap Priority Reform 2^[10] – Increase the amount of government funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and services going through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations. This would help achieve the outcome of a strong and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector delivering high-quality services to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country.

Recommendation 4: In partnership with existing providers, pilot a two-year Universal school breakfast and lunch program across 15^[11] primary schools, measuring the impact on school attendance, behaviour and educational outcomes.

Estimated cost: \$952 000^[12]

Food insecurity has long term impacts on health, education and broader social outcomes. Being adequately nourished is essential for full participation in school, life and the community.

Food insecurity is a significant challenge in the NT. In June 2026, Foodbank SA and NT reported that more than 50 per cent of Territorian households had experienced food insecurity in the previous year with Foodbank providing food relief to more than 20,000 Territorians each month.^[13]

Despite this, the NT does not have a universal school meals program. The existing school meals programs are delivered on an ad hoc basis, with many remote communities across the NT using Community Development funding from royalties to pay the guardian contribution for free school meals. Foodbank similarly runs programs across several schools in urban areas. Not all schools however have access to this, leaving 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 and improving school attendance and performance.

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

[10] Australian Government, Closing the Gap Targets, Accessed Online <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/targets>, 2026

[11] This number was chosen as it aligns with the proportion of schools piloted in the Tasmanian trial

[12] This was calculated based of the Tasmanian model. Remoteness and inflation was taken into account when adjusting costs.

[13] Foodbank, 2026 via Chamber of Commerce, and [Foodbank Women of Influence Luncheon](#) | [Government House Adelaide](#)

Improving affordability in the Territory

from the program".^[14] Studies have also linked the Universal Lunch programs to improvements in academic performance,^[15] higher earning, increased attendance and reductions in suspensions,^[16] reductions of student misbehaviour^[17] and reduced rates of obesity.^[18]

The Tasmanian pilot demonstrates that universal school meals can be implemented at scale in an Australian jurisdiction, while international evidence provides a strong basis for expecting improvements in educational, behavioural and health outcomes.^[19]

A comparable NT pilot would provide a practical opportunity to assess impacts on educational outcomes and build an evidence base for future investment.

This aligns with the NT Government strategic initiatives to; Strengthen the early childhood system, including quality health, care and education services and; Improve access to high quality secondary and tertiary education systems, and inclusive education and supports.

[14] Lundborg, P & Rooth, D & Alex-Petersen, J, 2022. "Long-Term Effects of Childhood Nutrition: Evidence from a School Lunch Reform," The Review of Economic Studies, Review of Economic Studies Ltd, vol. 89(2), pages 876–908.

[15] Ruffni, K, 2022, Universal Access to Free School Meals and Student Achievement, Journal of Human Resources

[16] Thurston D, Cet al, 2024 There Is Such a Thing as a Free Lunch: School Meals, Stigma, and Student Discipline, via <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831223122226>

[17] Altindag, D, Baek, D, Lee, H and Merkle, J, 2020, Free lunch for all? The impact of universal school lunch on student misbehavior via <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2019.101945>

[18] 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

[19] Jose, J, et al., 2024, Project Evaluation final report, via <https://doi.org/10.25959/27042826>

Improving affordability in the Territory

1.2 Prevent financial harm from online scams

NT Government priority alignment — Reducing Crime – Priority 1: Create a safer community. Restoring the Territory Lifestyle – Priority 5: Help Territorians be happier and healthier.

Recommendation 5: Fund an Online Casino Games education and awareness program to help frontline workers and community members identify, respond to and prevent online gambling scams.

Estimated cost: \$440 000 per year^[20]

Online Casino Games – often referred to as ‘scambling’ or ‘ding ding’ – are an emerging online scam where people are lured into fake gambling websites or apps that appear legitimate but are designed to steal money. Online Casino Games are disproportionately targeting remote Aboriginal communities.

In 2024, Catholic Care NT conducted 433 interviews across 4 NT communities (Wadeye, Wurrimiyanga, Alice Springs and Ltyentye Apurte) where all participants reported that online casino games were causing great harm to their communities.^[21] Scamwatch reviewed 806 scambling reports in 2025 with losses totalling \$1.6 million, First Nations people accounted for over 45 per cent of those losses.^[22]

While there is work underway at a national level to address online casino scams, including a fusion cell by the National Anti-Scam Centre, there is an urgent need to reduce the harm being felt by Territorians today. Frontline workers, particularly financial counsellors, need practical training to recognise online casino games, respond safely to disclosures, provide support to clients.

A funded education and awareness program must be ongoing to remain responsive to this emerging space, and should include targeted resources for community members, plain-language warning signs, culturally safe messaging,

[20] Gambling and My Community, Catholic Care NT (unpublished): Briefing for NTCOSS Members: Online Casino Games 17 June 2026; and Gambling And My Community Final Report And Evaluation.

[21] Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (8 July 2026). Media release: New taskforce to tackle ‘scambling’ as fake online casinos target First Nations Australians. Available at: [\[28\] This funding estimate is based on 2 FTE educators, with a travel budget sufficient for a minimum 4 remote trips per year.](#)

[32] Gambling and My Community, Catholic Care NT (unpublished): Briefing for NTCOSS Members: Online Casino Games 17 June 2026; and Gambling And My Community Final Report And Evaluation.

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and training for frontline services. This would help prevent people from being drawn into fake gambling websites, reduce stigma around reporting, and ensure people who have been scammed can access support earlier.



Case Study: Catholic Care NT's Gambling and My Community

From June 2024 to June 2026, Catholic Care NT was funded to run the Gambling and My Community project, a program designed alongside communities to tackle the harm caused by gambling.

Over the course of the project, Gambling and My Community recruited and trained 7 local gambling harm educators, co-designed 51 health education resources, and delivered 184 health promotion activities to 6,166 community members.

The Project showed promising signs of positive signs of increasing community awareness of Online Casino Games. Results from community education show that 96 per cent report increased knowledge. From staff education sessions: 100 per cent report increased knowledge and 93 per cent are now more confident support clients with gambling related harm.

[23]

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1.3 Expand access to financial supports that strengthen household resilience and economic participation

NT Government priority alignment – *Rebuilding the Economy – Priority 4: Unlock regional growth (Initiative 4.3: Working with Aboriginal communities and the Australian Government to create economic resilience and provide sustained employment opportunities in remote communities)*

Recommendation 6: Expand No Interest Loans (NILs) access.

Estimated cost: \$1.3 million per year

NILs are a cost effective ways of supporting communities to access basic goods. It enables people to purchase white goods, medical aids, vehicle repairs, and pay education-related costs without falling into debt cycles caused by predatory lending or rent-to-buy schemes.

In the 2025–2026 financial year alone, NILs issued 1167 loans totalling \$1 853 856, at an average of \$1 589 per loan, directly impacting 2874 people. Of applications approved, 75 per cent were women, and 46 per cent were people affected by domestic violence – reaching those most exposed to financial hardship and high-cost credit.

NTCOSS recommends expanding NILs with the following initiatives:

Initiative 1: Integrate the existing NT Government Private Rental Bond Assistance function into the NT NILs program (cost: administrative only).

The NT private rental market remains extremely tight, with vacancy rates near record lows and only a small fraction of advertised rentals affordable to low-income households. In this environment, timely access to bond and rent-in-advance assistance is critical to securing an available property.

NT NILs delivered 169 rental bond loans in financial year 2025–26, demonstrating existing capability to deliver this function. Leveraging the established NILs

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Infrastructure, community provider network and referral pathways would create a single community-based access point for housing establishment assistance, helping low-income households secure and sustain private rental housing while improving access to support across the Territory.

Initiative 2: Fund dedicated financial counselling and capability capacity within NILs provider organisations (cost: \$683 314 per year).^[24]

As cost-of-living pressures intensify, NILs providers across the Territory report a growing number of people presenting in acute financial distress. Many of these people need financial counselling before a no-interest loan is safe or appropriate to be issued.

By funding further dedicated financial counsellors within the NILs outreach program, more people will eventually be able to access loan capital in an appropriate manner. This investment would therefore deliver greater return on the Australian Government's recent investment in NT financial inclusion.

Initiative 3: Energy efficiency and climate resilience co-contribution scheme (cost: \$600 000 per year).^[25]

Establish a co-contribution scheme delivered alongside NILs to help low-income households access durable, energy-efficient, climate-appropriate appliances such as fridges, freezers, air conditioners and washing machines. This would lower ongoing power bills, ease pressure on the concession budget, reduce demand on the energy network during extreme heat, and stimulate local retail activity.

[24] Based off Good Sheppard Costings

[25] Based off Good Sheppard Costings

Improving affordability in the Territory

1.4 Expand and streamline the NT concessions systems

NT Government priority alignment – NT Government priority alignment – Restoring the Territory Lifestyle – Priority 4: Improve affordability in the Territory (Initiative 4.2: Providing targeted cost of living relief to households)

NTCOSS's recent Cost of Living factsheets highlight the immense financial pressure felt by Territorians who are on low incomes and those living remotely. ^[26] **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 7: Lift the Motor Vehicle Registration concession to a minimum of \$240 per 12-month period and establish ongoing indexation.

Estimated cost: Additional \$640 000 per year^[27]

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. In 2009, it represented 28.5 per cent of the registration cost for a small vehicle, as of June 2026 it is 19.05 per cent. Lifting the concession and establishing ongoing indexation will provide immediate relief for families in need.

Recommendation 8: 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.

Increase the target of eligible people on the concession scheme to 90 per cent

[26] Available at <https://ntoss.org.au/cost-of-living-reports/>

[27] Note: ABS data (Census, 2021) shows that 55 per cent of adults in the NT do not own a car. The estimated cost is calculated based on the additional amount (\$86 per year) for 45 per cent of people currently on the scheme, assuming there is slightly lower car ownership amongst those on the concession scheme than in the general population.

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In 2025–26, 61 per cent of eligible Territorians are on the concession scheme,^[28] with an NT Government target of 65 per cent eligible people accessing the scheme. The proportion of people applying concessions to their energy bills is even smaller with only 6 per cent to 15 per cent of households receiving a concessions payment on energy bills in Remote Aboriginal Communities and town camps.^[29]

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).

This aligns with strategic initiatives identified in the NT Government's Restoring the Territory Lifestyle strategy to make life easier for Territorians by improving the efficiency of government service delivery, including through digital solutions, and to promote the NT Concession and Senior Recognition Schemes to increase access and uptake of supports.

Recommendation 9: 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.^[30]

[28] Northern Territory Government, 2026, Budget Paper 3 2026–27, p.249; NTG Budget Paper 3, 2025–26, p.247, available online at [2026-27 Budget - Agency Budget Statements \(Budget Paper No. 3\)](#) [37] Original Power and the prepay research team, 2025, The Right to Power – Keeping First Nations communities on prepayment connected. Available online at [8] [NTG Budget Paper 3, 2025-26](#)

[29] Original Power and the prepay research team, 2025, The Right to Power – Keeping First Nations communities on prepayment connected. Available online at [8] NTG Budget Paper 3, 2025–26

[30] AIHW, 2025, Australia's welfare 2025 in brief, Australia's welfare 2025: in brief

Improving affordability in the Territory

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 NT Government 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 NT Government is reduced as Services Australia has already completed eligibility assessments.

Investing in Young Territorians

2.1 Deliver well-resourced youth hubs

NT Government priority alignment— *Restoring the Territory Lifestyle – Priority 5: Help Territorians be happier and healthier (Initiative 5.2: Providing Territory kids and youth the foundations for lifelong achievement); Reducing Crime – Priority 1: Create a safer community (Initiative 1.1: Addressing anti-social behaviour in known locations and hotspots)*

Recommendation 10: Work with the Australian 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 Australian 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.^[31]

A coordinated commitment from the NT and Australian governments would help 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, see **Appendix B** for best practice guidelines for adequately resourcing youth hubs .

This recommendation aligns to the NT Government strategic initiative; Invest in dedicated youth development programs and services.

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

Investing in Young Territorians

2.2 Fund a Youth Peak

NT Government priority alignment – Restoring the Territory Lifestyle – Priority 5: Help Territorians be happier and healthier (Initiative 5.2: Providing Territory kids and youth the foundations for lifelong achievement); Rebuilding the Economy – Priority 2: Build a bigger, better workforce (Initiative 2.1: Developing and coordinating vocational pathways to support Territorians to be job-ready)

Recommendation 11: Establish a Youth Peak for the NT.

Estimated cost: \$440 739^[32] for one year

The youth services sector have identified the need for a Youth Peak to improve coordination of the sector, and outcomes for young people.

The youth services sector brings strong local knowledge, community relationships and a shared commitment to young people's leadership. More than 120 youth programs^[31] are delivered by community organisations across urban, regional, remote and very remote communities. These programs provide a broad range of support, including early intervention, outreach, mentoring, employment support, leadership development and crisis response. These programs support young people to remain connected to education and employment, while preventing more complex social issues that increase demand on health, justice and child protection systems.

A dedicated youth peak body would build on these strengths by providing a coordinated mechanism for government, the sector and young people to work together. This would strengthen collaboration between organisations and government, support shared learnings and workforce development, provide the government with a clear and coordinated point of engagement, provide meaningful opportunities for young people's voices to be amplified and stronger mechanisms for young people, including multicultural young people, to influence decisions that affect their lives. Improving the impact of the youth sector, would in turn improve outcomes for young people.

[31] This includes funding for two full-time staff, travel and operational costs

[32] As reported on [NTcommunity](#), as of September 2026

Investing in Young Territorians

NTCOSS recommends that a Youth Peak for the NT be established under these three guidelines.

1. An NT youth peak body is formed under the auspice of a suitable organisation
2. The Youth Peak receives an initial one-year funding agreement of \$440 739
3. The Youth Peak establishes mechanisms to ensure priority is given to the following strategic and operational areas:
 - Establishing a model in the first 12 months of operation to ensure opportunities for young people to advise and inform policy development and decision making at organisational, Territory and National level.
 - Provision of support, connection and collaboration in the youth services sector and the NT and Australian governments.
 - The production and communication of positive, youth-led content that challenges harmful attitudes and beliefs about young people

Invest in reliable energy and climate adaptation

3.1 Improve access to reliable energy

NT Government priority alignment — — *Restoring the Territory Lifestyle – Priority 4: Improve affordability in the Territory; Restoring the Territory Lifestyle – Priority 5: Help Territorians be happier and healthier*

Prepayment customers in the NT face disproportionately high electricity costs in the NT. This is due to the 3c per kilowatt hour supply charge applied, which penalises households consuming energy above a certain threshold. Research from the NT found that higher consuming energy households paid a premium of around \$57–\$253 a year in energy bills. This leads to higher rates of power disconnections. Despite this, prepayment customers have fewer consumer protections than postpaid customers.^{[33][34]} Research by Original Power found that remote NT households experience an average of 41–59 disconnections a year. Public reporting by the Utilities Commission of the Northern Territory shows that prepayment households in Darwin, Katherine Tennant Creek and Alice Springs experienced an average disconnection duration of 8.4 hours before households were reconnected to power.^{[35][36]}

The health and social consequences of disconnection are severe. Without power, residents cannot access refrigeration, fans, medical devices, and safe spaces during periods of extreme temperatures. 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.

Recommendation 12: In collaboration with the Australian Government, introduce mandatory grace periods preventing disconnections and the accrual of energy debt during heat triggers and extreme weather.

[33] 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*

[34] Ibid, 92–105.

[35] Original Power and the prepay research team, 2025, *The Right to Power – Keeping First Nations communities on prepayment connected*. Available online at [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

[36] Utilities Commission of the Northern Territory. *Northern Territory Electricity Retail Review 2023–24*.

https://utilicom.nt.gov.au/_resources/documents/reports-and-publications/2025/NT-Electricity-Retail-Review-2023-24.pdf

Invest in reliable energy and climate adaptation

Data reveals that most unplanned energy disconnections occur when temperatures are above 40 degrees in dry climates and 36 in tropical climates.^[37] Research from the NT found that unplanned disconnections increase mortality.^[38] Across the country, those living in hotter climate zones were 2.3 to 4.6 more times likely to die during extreme heat than those living in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and surrounds.^[39] This is most acute for people with health comorbidities.^[40]

Mandatory grace periods that prevent people's energy from being disconnected during heat waves would help prevent involuntary disconnections, protect access to essential energy when households need it most, reduce pressure on the health system and save lives.

Recommendation 13: Develop and adopt an Energy Hardship definition and associated metrics for post- pre-payment 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.

Currently, there is no NT-specific definition of energy hardship and no consistent framework for measuring and addressing it.^[41] This lack of clarity makes it difficult for energy retailers, Government and regulators to provide targeted assistance to those who need it. As a consequence, people who are struggling to afford power, particularly those on prepayment meters often 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 adequate supports to assist households before they run out of credit and are disconnected from energy supply.



NT Code^[41]

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".

UCNT has provided Power and Water Corporation an exemption from complying with the hardship policy requirements around provision of proactive hardship supports to remote prepayment customers until March 2027.

[37] Research is currently being undertaken to quantify the threshold in humid climates.

[38] Quilty, S., Jupurrurla, N. F., Lal, A., Matthews, V., Gasparrini, A., Hope, P., Brearley, M. & Ebi, K. L. (2023). The relative value of sociocultural and infrastructural adaptations to heat in a very hot climate in northern Australia: a case time series of heat-associated mortality. *The Lancet Planetary Health*, 7(8), e684–e693. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196\(23\)00138-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(23)00138-9)

[39] Longden, T. (2019) The impact of temperature on mortality across different climate zones. *Climatic Change* 157, 221–242.

<https://rdcu.be/eJYar> - compares the hot humid summer, warm humid summer, and hot dry summer, mild winter climate zones with the warm summer, cold winter climate zone.

[40] Faurie, C., Varghese, B. M., Liu, J., & Bi, P. (2022). Association between high temperature and heatwaves with heat related illnesses: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Science of the Total Environment*, 852, 158332. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2022.158332>

Invest in reliable energy and climate adaptation

Obligations for retailers to proactively monitor indicators of hardship such as frequent emergency credit use, patterns of repeated self-disconnection, and/or households identified through concession or income support data would enable interventions that pre-empt harm and prevent crisis.

Recommendation 14: Remove supply charges for prepaid electricity customers.

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, which adds a premium of up to \$253 per year to electricity bills for remote NT households.^[42]

Given the size and energy inefficiency of most pre-payment customers' homes, the 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.



Case Study: Remote South Australia

In remote Aboriginal communities in South Australia, a discounted prepayment tariff of 10 cents/kWh applies. This correlated to a reduction in involuntary disconnections. Households in remote South Australian Aboriginal communities averaged 14 disconnections a year, less than a quarter of the NT average, due to the lower tariff and have an automatic application of concession payments and other wrap around supports. This tariff has been committed to by the State Government for the next 20 years.

Recommendation 15: 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: \$334 250 per year^[43]

[42] Based on a median daily electricity use of 24 kWh for 3,300 prepaid households across 28 remote NT communities (Table 3). See 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, Table 3.

[43] This has been adjusted for CPI and wage increases from NTCOSS' 2026-27 Pre-Budget Submission

Invest in reliable energy and climate adaptation

The NT does not have a regulatory framework that consistently monitors and address energy insecurity.

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 Aboriginal 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 Closing the Gap Target 9B -Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households will receive essential services that meet or exceed relevant standards.^[44]

[44] NIAA, Closing the Gap Targets. Accessed Online via <https://www.niaa.gov.au/2023-commonwealth-closing-gap-implementation-plan/delivering-outcomes-and-targets/outcome-9-aboriginal-and-torres-strait>, Accessed September 2026

Invest in reliable energy and climate adaptation



3.2 Co-develop and implement Disaster Resilience Plans

NT Government priority alignment — *Restoring the Territory Lifestyle – Priority 4: Improve affordability in the Territory*

Recommendation 16: 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. Earlier this year we saw entire communities cut off from services, amenities and basic goods, and evacuated to Darwin for extended periods on account of flooding and cyclones.

The severity and frequency of disasters will increase in the years ahead. A climate adaptation strategy that coordinates housing, health, infrastructure, and emergency management would mitigate the risk posed by these natural disasters.

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.^[45]

Developing regional plans and strategies now will reduce the NT 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.
- Develop extreme heat plans for every community.
- Work together with communities to develop local place-based adaptation and community resilience plans, including integrating Aboriginal knowledge.
- 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.

[46] Productivity Commission, 2022 referencing World Recourses Institute Accessed via <https://www.wri.org/news/release-wri-study-finds-climate-adaptation-investments-yield-massive-returns>

Responding to domestic, family and sexual violence

4.1 Fill regional and place-based service gaps

NT Government priority alignment — *Reducing Crime – Priority 1: Create a safer community (Initiative 1.3: Delivering public amenity infrastructure that provides for a safe and secure community)*

Recommendation 17: Provide capital funding for the development of accessible crisis accommodation and transitional housing stock to support victim-survivors fleeing violence.^[47]

Estimated Cost: \$15 million

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.

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 6–8 years (including priority cases),^[48] 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.

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

[48] NTG, 2026, [Social housing wait times](#) | [NT.GOV.AU](#) Accessed Online

Responding to domestic, family and sexual violence

4.2 Invest in a dedicated DFSV service response for multicultural communities

NT Government priority alignment — *Reducing Crime – Priority 1: Create a safer community (Initiative 1.3: Delivering public amenity infrastructure that provides for a safe and secure community) – Restoring the Territory Lifestyle – Priority 3: Deliver better infrastructure for an active Territory (Initiative 3.2 Deliver fit-for-purpose facilities and infrastructure across the Territory for use by multicultural and community groups.*

Recommendation 18: Fund multicultural services to develop and deliver DFSV prevention and early intervention initiatives for refugee and migrant communities in Darwin and Alice Springs.

Migrant and refugee families may face additional barriers to disclosing violence or seeking support, including unfamiliarity with Australian systems, trauma, social isolation, financial dependence, concerns about immigration or visa status, and language barriers. Services that are not culturally responsive or available in a person's preferred language can reduce trust and engagement, delay help-seeking, and result in support that does not meet individual needs. Culturally adapted, in-language services improve engagement and responses for victim-survivors and people who use violence.^[49]

NTCOSS recommends funding organisations already working with the NT's multicultural and refugee communities to deliver culturally and linguistically responsive DFSV primary prevention and response initiatives in partnership with specialist DFSV services.

This should include;

- Funding the development and delivery of multilingual Men's Behavioural Change Programs (MBCPs)^[50]
- Providing flexible funding to multicultural, migrant and refugee support organisations for tailored interventions at prevention and early intervention levels.
- Funding multicultural organisations engagement with faith-based communities and faith-community leaders in behaviour change work.
- Expansion of one-on-one case management models for migrant and refugee men to compliment participation in MBCPs.
- Funding culturally supportive healing response for women and children victim survivors led by multicultural and refugee organisations.

[49] ANROWS, 2026, [What makes men's behaviour change programs more accessible and responsive? Insights from migrant and refugee experiences](#)

[50] Relationships Australia's [Culturally Appropriate Men's Behaviour Change](#) is one example of a successful multilingual MBCP for reference

Investing in Territorians with disabilities



5.1 Support people with disabilities to access the workforce

NT Government priority alignment — *Rebuilding the Economy – Priority 2: Build a bigger, better workforce (Initiative 2.1: Developing and coordinating vocational pathways to support Territorians to be job-ready); Restoring the Territory Lifestyle – Priority 5: Help Territorians be happier and healthier (Initiative 5.3: Securing access to disability, aged care and mental health services across urban, regional and remote areas)*

NTCOSS commends the government's commitment to an 8 per cent public service disability employment target by 2027.^[51] Further commitments by the government could help create additional meaningful pathways into work.

Recommendation 19: Introduce a Disability Employment Incentive Program through government procurement contracting.

Estimated cost: Low – only administrative

Procurement policies that preference suppliers who employ people with disability when awarding contracts has been shown in other jurisdictions to drive cultural change, increase workplace inclusivity, and expand opportunities for people with disability across industries.^[52]

Recommendation 20: Fund NGOs to run school to work transition programs for people with disabilities.

Estimated cost: \$8 351 per person^[53]

Longitudinal studies have shown that gaining an after-school job is a strong predictor of post-school employment.^[54] 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

[51] NTG, 2022, [disabilitygateway.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2026-03/Australia%27s Disability Strategy Implementation Report PDF Web Final.pdf](https://disabilitygateway.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2026-03/Australia%27s%20Disability%20Strategy%20Implementation%20Report%20PDF%20Web%20Final.pdf)

[52] United Nations, 2026, [UN Procurement: Advancing Inclusion with Disability-Inclusive Suppliers](#) | UN Procurement

[53] This has been adjusted for CPI and Award Wage increases from NTCOSS 2026 27 Pre Budget Submission

[54] Lamb, S. & Huo, S. (2024) The costs of failing to be inclusive: an analysis based on education in Australia, In P. Downs, G. Li, L. Van Pragg, S. Lamb (Eds.) The Routledge international handbook of equity and inclusion in education, Routledge: London.

Investing in Territorians with disabilities

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.^[55] A lack of funding however limits the extent of success. Funding should be granted to support these programs to expand across the Territory.

5.2 Adequately fund disability advocacy services

NT Government priority alignment – *Restoring the Territory Lifestyle – Priority 5: Help Territorians be happier and healthier (Initiative 5.3: Securing access to disability, aged care and mental health services across urban, regional and remote areas)*

Recommendation 21: Double the funding of \$70 000 for disability and mental health advocacy services.

Estimated cost: \$140 000 per year total funding^[56]

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.

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.

[55] Menzies School of Health, Career Launch Pad, Accessed Online Via <https://youthworxnt.com.au/career-launchpad/>

[56] This figure is based off the latest data available on advocacy services through the 2023 Parliamentary Inquiry

Investing in Territorians with disabilities



5.3 Adequately fund psychosocial support for people with disabilities

NT Government priority alignment — *Restoring the Territory Lifestyle – Priority 5: Help Territorians be happier and healthier (Initiative 5.3: Securing access to disability, aged care and mental health services across urban, regional and remote areas)*

Recommendation 22: Fund community-based psychosocial support services for Territorians with psychosocial disabilities who are ineligible for, or underserved by, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Estimated cost: \$7 000 per person

Psychosocial supports are a core component of an effective mental health service system. They help people achieve meaningful participation in their lives and communities, prevent the escalation of mental health challenges, reduce the need for acute or intensive services, and strengthen the effectiveness of clinical and other supports. Yet demand for substantially exceeds available supply, with over 90 per cent of the hours of psychosocial support required not being available in the NT.^[57]

The 'Analysis of unmet need for psychosocial supports outside of the National Disability Insurance Scheme Report' found that over 8000 Territorians with a psychosocial disability are unable to access or retain support.^[58] This is particularly significant in remote and regional areas where thin markets limit provider availability, workforce and cultural safety.

The Australian Government's proposed Foundational Supports program is intended to fill this gap, but its scope, timeline and rollout in the NT remain unclear, leaving many Territorians without any psychosocial support in the meantime.

Without dedicated NT Government investment, people with psychosocial disability face escalating crisis presentations to emergency departments, increased contact with police and the justice system, homelessness and hospitalisation.

[57] Department of Health and Aged Care, 2024, Analysis of unmet need for psychosocial supports outside of the National Disability Insurance Scheme Report, Available online.

[58] Ibid..

Investing in Territorians with disabilities

These outcomes cost government substantially more than community-based psychosocial support, and undermine the goal of safe, stable and connected lives that this submission argues for throughout.

NTCOSS recommends the NT Government directly fund community-managed, recovery-oriented psychosocial support services as an interim and ongoing measure, ensuring no Territorian with psychosocial disability is left without support while national reforms are finalised.

Building a Sustainable Social and Community Service Sector

6.1 Fund NTCommunity Directory

NT Government priority alignment – *Restoring the Territory Lifestyle – Priority 4: Improve affordability in the Territory (Initiative: Make life easier for Territorians by improving the efficiency of government service delivery, including through digital solutions)*

Recommendation 23: Provide five years of ongoing funding for NTCommunity Directory, including additional investment to improve functionality and accessibility.

Estimated cost: \$160 000 per year^[59]

NTCommunity^[60] is the NT's central directory of community services and programs. As of August 2026, it lists 1 074 services delivered by 431 organisations across 814 locations, providing a one-stop shop for Territorians, community workers and service providers seeking information and referrals. In 2025/26, the website received more than 277 300 views, demonstrating its value as an essential service-navigation tool.

Renewed funding would ensure the directory remains current, accurate and accessible, allowing people to continue finding the supports they need and enabling workers to connect clients with appropriate local services.

Additional investment on top of the \$160 000 would also enable improvements such as a map function, making it easier for users to locate nearby services and improving the usability of the directory.

[59] The estimated cost accounts for staff time, IT infrastructure and administrative costs.

[60] Available at <https://www.ntcommunity.org.au/>

Building a Sustainable Social and Community Service Sector

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

NT Government priority alignment – Reducing Crime – Priority 4: Address the root causes of crime (Initiative 4.1: Investing in essential health, education, housing and homelessness services)

Rebuilding the Economy – Priority 2: Build a bigger, better workforce

As a result of the Fair Work Commission's recent determination^[61], Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services (SCHADS) Award wages will increase in October 2027 in addition to the Commission's yearly minimum wage review. Many organisations will be under increased financial pressure as wages will likely absorb a larger proportion of grant funding. In the COSS Network Survey, only 5 per cent of organisations across Australia indicated they could absorb substantial new wage costs within existing funding.

This will force organisations to draw on reserves, reduce staffing or limit services, undermining the intended benefits of the Award changes for both workers and the communities they support.

When services are not adequately funded, service delivery is disrupted and people in crisis 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.

Recommendation 24: Uplift grant funding over 3 years to restore funding to 2018 levels in real terms.

In year one: Increase nominal grant funding to reflect SCHADS wage increases, ensuring real funding for service delivery is not decreased.

Grant indexation has not kept pace with wages growth for nearly a decade. Between 2018 and 2025 award wages increased by 34.7 per cent whilst industry grant funding only increased by 7.2 per cent. This is due to indexation formulas not reflecting sector specific costs such as SCHADS Award wage rises, government-style efficiency dividends applied to non-government organisations, non-controllable cost increases from the Superannuation Guarantee Charge,

[61] Fair Work Commission, 2026, Determination Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award 2010, Accessed Via <https://www.fwc.gov.au/documents/awardsandorders/pdf/pr814259.pdf>

Building a Sustainable Social and Community Service Sector

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.^[62] Returning real term funding to 2018 levels is essential to ensure frontline services can support people seeking critical programs.

In June 2026, the Fair Work Commission announced further incoming changes to Award classifications on the basis of gender undervaluation. The COSS networks have been working on preliminary costings to understand how these changes will impact the cost of service delivery in the NT. NTCOSS is seeking partnership with NTG impacted agencies to further understand this impact. NTCOSS recommends that in 2027/28 the NTG reflect the expected cost increases in grant funding to ensure that service delivery is not adversely impacted.

Recommendation 25: 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.

Furthermore, whilst the NT Government's application of a two-thirds discount to the efficiency dividend for certain frontline services is a welcome recognition that community services are under severe pressure, efficiency dividends are fundamentally incompatible with the nature of frontline work as costs cannot simply be absorbed through "efficiencies." The increase of the efficiency dividend to 1.5 per cent from 1 per cent last year has placed further pressure on the sector. To ensure funding keeps pace with real need, future grants for frontline services should fully remove efficiency dividends.

NTCOSS recommends adopting a formula like the one below (which adjusts previous funding amounts to account for the National Wage Case Decision, increases to other Awards, and CPI increases), to ensure the changes to SCHADS award wages are reflected in the social service sector's grant funding.

[62] Centre for Public Value at the University of Western Australia, 2025, Value of the Sector Report, available online at ntcoss.org.au/publications/2025-value-of-the-sector-report/

Building a Sustainable Social and Community Service Sector

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

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

6.3 Invest in workforce development

NT Government priority alignment — *Rebuilding the Economy – Priority 2: Building a bigger and better workforce – 2:3 Expanding new skilled migration pathways with a focus on retention through improved coordination and stronger advocacy with the Australian Government.*

The social and community services sector accounts for nearly one in ten jobs in the Territory. 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.

People from migrant and refugee backgrounds make an important contribution to the Territory’s workforce and economy, but their employment outcomes vary significantly depending on their migration pathway. Recent research from the ACOSS and UNSW-led Poverty and Inequality Partnership found that humanitarian entrants experience significantly higher rates of poverty and lower employment in their early years in Australia, despite employment participation increasing substantially over time.^[63]

Around 60 per cent of people entering Australia on humanitarian visas were living in poverty in their first year, while people from refugee backgrounds also experience substantially higher rates of near-poverty than children of skilled or family migrants.^[64]

[63] ACOSS and UNSW, 2026, [New report tracks economic outcomes for migrants in Australia – Poverty and Inequality](#)

[64] Ibid, pg. 11

Building a Sustainable Social and Community Service Sector

Recommendation 26: Fund specialised targeted support for migrant and refugee communities, including humanitarian entrants/refugees to re-enter the workforce, as recommended by the Workforce Australia Inquiry into employment services.^[65]

The Inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services identified that people from culturally and linguistically diverse and refugee backgrounds can face distinct barriers to employment, including limited English proficiency, lack of Australian work experience and professional networks, racism and discrimination, and difficulties having overseas qualifications and skills recognised.^[66] The Inquiry recommended targeted employment support that responds to these barriers.

In the NT, targeted support could help migrant and refugee communities translate existing skills and qualifications into local employment, build Australian work experience and professional networks, navigate recognition and licensing requirements, and connect with employers experiencing workforce shortages. Support should be delivered through organisations with appropriate cultural and community expertise and should recognise the different circumstances of humanitarian entrants, refugees, family migrants and other migrant groups.

Funding should also support cultural competency training for staff and leaders, particularly in industries employing many newly arrived migrants or workers on visas tied to government grants. Training should clarify employers' responsibilities to prevent discrimination in workplaces and the broader community.

[65] [The first 10 years: Employment, incomes and poverty among migrants and refugees in Australia](#)

[66] Parliament of Australia, 2023, [Rebuilding Employment Services](#) – Parliament of Australia

Appendix

Appendix A:

Investing in the future of the NT: why the social service sector delivers better outcomes for NT communities and the government

The social service sector is integral to the delivery of high impact programs and services in the Territory. These programs are long term investments that make communities safer and more liveable for everyone.

The Productivity Commission's inquiry into the Contribution for the Sector found that Non-For-Profits (NFPs) have an advantage in the delivery of social services on account of

- Having stronger links with the local communities they serve and an understanding of local needs and service gaps.^[67]
- Being better able to engage people who may be reluctant or unable to access government services directly.^[68]
- Having specialised and complementary knowledge and experience.^[69]
- Being able to more flexibly respond to individual needs and the complexity of people's lives.^[5]
- Being able to leverage volunteers, networks and other community resources.^[70]

The Australian Government's Evaluation of the Pathways to Community Control program also specifically identifies that outcomes for Indigenous clients can be better when services are delivered by Indigenous organisations.^[71] For Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) bring cultural knowledge, community authority and relationships that are fundamental to effective service delivery.^[72]

The value for money when delivering programs, therefore, should be understood as the outcomes and community benefit generated by public investment, not simply the lowest unit cost of service delivery.

This is reiterated in the Sector Development Blueprint,^[73] which found that the NFP sector's contributions extend beyond what is measurable in monetary terms to benefit people, places, the environment, and the economy. Attempts to quantify aspects of these broader benefits point to an additional value add of at least \$12.7 billion; however, the true value is anticipated to be much larger.^[74]

Achieving the best outcomes for public investment requires governments to recognise and fund the true cost of service delivery and the organisational infrastructure needed to sustain services over time.

[67] Productivity Commission, 2010, Contribution of the Non-for-Profit Sector, page 15-18, available online at [Contribution of the Not-for-Profit Sector - Research Report](#)

[68] Ibid, referencing General Social Survey; 14% of respondents indicated that they found the services of government and business providers difficult to access, while only 1% identified the same problem with NFPs. 17% of respondents indicated that they had difficulties communicating with government service providers. The comparable figure for NFPs was two per cent. 12 per cent of respondents identified community, charity or religious organisations as a source of support in time of crisis. In comparison, 5 per cent nominated local council or other government services as a potential source.

[69] Ibid, page 83 [70] Ibid, page 345 [71] Ibid, page 387

[72] Australian Government Department of Health, 2022, Evaluation of the Pathways to Community Control program, available online at [Evaluation of the Pathways to Community Control program](#)

[73] Ibid.

[74] Department of Social Service, 2024, [Not for Profit Sector Development Blueprint](#), available online.

[74] Commonwealth of Australia, 2023, National cultural policy—Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place. Commonwealth of Australia.

Appendix B:

Table 1.1 Best practice resourcing for Youth Hubs

		Town Centres	Remote ^[75]
Staff	Composition	• 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	• Hubs should have a minimum ratio of 10 young people to one staff member at any session. • More staff are needed for offsite activities.	• 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	• 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.	
		• Other training should include: Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training, Client Case Note Training, Mandatory Reporting Training, First Aid, Cultural Awareness Training, Safeguarding Children Training, Inclusive Practice and more.	• 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.

[75] Extracted from thy Caylus Optimal Model Report Available Online Via <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/50061cbb84ae216bb5cb9339/t/668ccf978a0d4574b02f3ab2/1720504224745/Youth+Services++Baseline+Model+July+2024+Central+Australia.pdf>

Appendix B (Continued)

		Town Centres	Remote
Space	Location	The hubs should be in accessible locations and should be chosen in consultation with young people.	
	Set up	The hub should be a purpose built, or a youth adapted space that is fit for purpose.	- 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	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	- Case managers should have a regular physical presence in the hubs. - There should be a smooth referral system to case managers.	
Programming	Diversity	There should be an array of activity options.	
	Appropriate	- Programming should be age and gender appropriate - Programming should reflect what young people have deemed suitable.	
	Skill development	Programs should include opportunities for young people to access training and employment.	
Amenities	Basic amenities	- 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	Hubs should have options to help young people get home safely	Youth Hubs should have 2-3 4WDs
Other	Security	When required, youth hubs should be funded to hire security.	

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